

*THE JOURNEY OF PATRICK
MCNAMEE, POSTMAN
BY JIM HAMILTON*

Sometime in the early 1870s a young man called Patrick McNamee, who had been brought up in the rural emptiness of Co Tyrone, decided to move to Belfast.

Patrick, born around 1850, lived in a small hamlet called Ballintrain between Carrickmore and Sixmilecross and although we cannot be sure why he moved to the city, it was almost certainly to seek employment.

It is impossible to say what Patrick's expectations were but he did well, finding employment as a postman in the General Post Office and working diligently there until he retired in 1901.

Patrick's father, James, was a farmer and in 1860, according to the Griffith Valuation, he was leasing two parcels of land totaling nine acres from the Earl of Belmore, a typically small rural holding. By 1863, James appears to have passed away and only his wife Mary's name appears on the subsequent valuation records in Public Records Office of Northern Ireland.

Like many in the county, the McNamee's were Roman Catholics, their parish being Termonmaguich. Being a Roman Catholic would have been important for Patrick not just for reasons of faith but because it would determine the type of area he would move to, the people he would meet and even the newspapers that he would read.

Moving from home would have been a big step for the young lad but he wasn't unusual; for much of the 19th century, thousands of people moved from rural counties to find jobs in the city.

The big draw, particularly for women, was the linen industry; Belfast was a leader in the manufacture of linen with the world's largest spinning mills and weaving factories.

The city had been predominantly Presbyterian but the influx of so many Roman Catholics, the growth of the Orange Order and the catalyst of the Home Rule controversy, led to sporadic outbreaks of sectarian conflict throughout the century.

Patrick probably made the journey to Belfast by rail perhaps from Cookstown station, opened in 1856. He may already have known people living in Belfast but the district he chose to settle in, colloquially called 'the Pound', was already known as the main Catholic working class area in the city.

As shown on his marriage certificate, Patrick's first address was 9 Ardmoulin Street, although he may have lodged here, as the name in the street directory is a Mrs Halliday. The Post Office Appointment Book for 1874 shows that Patrick had been appointed as a letter carrier.

By this time the Pound was becoming more a cohesive community with its own church – St Peter’s - school and religious organisations, rather than a population drawn together simply by ethnic solidarity.

St Peter’s was opened in October 1866 with Catholics coming from all over Ulster. The building of the church and the elaborate opening ceremony – twelve bishops and two cardinals were present and the collection amounted to £2200 - was a visible sign of the growing confidence of the Pound’s Catholic community.

Patrick was probably a parishioner of St Peter’s and it did not take him long to meet his future wife Ann Jane McCrudden who lived nearby in Lady Street; it is likely that she also was a migrant as her deceased father is described as a farmer on the marriage certificate.

A glimpse of Lady Street is provided by Paddy Devlin, a Minister in the first Northern Ireland Executive, who was born there in the 1920’s and described it as: “a cobble-stoned, terraced street of small houses...water came from a single cold tap in a stone sink, and an outside toilet.”

The house was typical of many in the area. Workers lived close to their mill or factory leading many owners to build whole streets of such houses although Belfast’s working-class housing was still superior to that in other Irish cities.

Patrick and Ann Jane were married in St Peter’s in June 1877; both were twenty-six years of age.

Ann Jane worked as a weaver probably in one of the many local factories; she may have begun working there at thirteen or fourteen years of age and after 1874 was probably working fifty-six hours per week.

Weaving was regarded as more desirable than the preparing and spinning trades where the fine flax dust produced – known as pouce - was bad for the lungs. Weavers thought themselves superior to spinners but still suffered from chest complaints caused by the stooping condition necessary to carry out their work.

Ann Jane would probably have been glad of Patrick’s steady income, as weavers unlike spinners, were only paid for the work they produced.

Just eleven months after their marriage, in May 1878, their first child, Mary Ann, was born and over the next eight years, they had four more children: Ellen Josephine (known as Nellie) in 1880, Charles (b.1882), James (b.1884) and Jane (b.1886).

By 1880, Patrick and Mary and their growing family had moved to Cullingtree Road, one of the main streets in this tight-knit community, which would be their address until around 1907 when they moved to a bigger house further up the Falls Road, the main road into Belfast from the west.

It is very unlikely that Patrick would have been involved in the sectarian disturbances between the Pound and the nearby Protestant area but he would have supported Nationalist candidates in municipal elections; his name appears in a list of subscribers

of the Catholic Association. This was a voter organization founded in 1896 which dominated municipal politics in West Belfast for a decade.

Patrick continued to work for the post office until 1901 when he retired due to ill health and began drawing a pension; he was 51 years old. His two sons had followed their father into the Post Office although not as postmen.

Charles is listed as a "learner" in the 1898 Appointment Book and by 1899 had progressed to "telegraphist". His name also appears in an 1898 newspaper advert of successful candidates for Hughes Civil Service Academy. James is listed in the 1901 Appointment Book as a "sorter & telegraphist."

The two younger girls, Ellen and Jane, worked as machinists in a local shirt factory.

In 1902, the oldest daughter, Mary Ann, married a publican called Michael McGeown. By 1911 they had one child, James Michael McGeown, shown in the census when the family were still living at 145 Falls Road.

It appears that Ann Jane was not working possibly due to ill-health but whatever the reason, in March 1917, at age 60, she died from cardiac illness.

Before the advent of the NHS, Patrick may have had to be looked after by his children and it may be significant that Ellen, who died aged 81 in 1962, never married. Perhaps she took on the task of caring for her father?

Mary Ann and her husband were ambitious, opening a confectioner and tobacconist shop on the Falls Road. She lived until 1940 and left an estate valued at £393.

Charles also appears to have done well. In 1913, he married Mary Agnes Cooper who lived on the more middle-class Cavehill Road.

Patrick's journey ended in August 1933, when he succumbed to senile decay, now an obsolete term for the progressive loss of mental capacity that leads to dementia and personal helplessness. There at the end as stated on the death certificate, was his unmarried daughter Ellen.

References:

Books

- Jonathan Bardon, *Belfast: An Illustrated History* (Dundonald: Blackstaff Press, 1982)
- Marianne Elliott, *The Catholics of Ulster: A History* (London: Allen Lane, 2000)
- Catherine Hirst, *Religion, Politics and Violence in Nineteenth Century Belfast* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2002)
- Betty Messenger- *Picking Up the Linen Threads: Life in Ulster's Mills* (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1988)
- Paddy Devlin, *Straight Left* (1993) quoted from *A Belfast Anthology*, ed. Patricia Craig (Belfast: Blackstaff Press, 1999)

Articles and other printed material

- St Louise's Comprehensive Belfast, *All Around the Loney-O* (July, 1978)
- Brown, Douglas HL, David R. Green, Kathleen McIlvenna, and Nicola Shelton. "The beating heart of the system: the health of postal workers in Victorian London." *Journal of Historical Geography* 68 (2020): 75-85. (<https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0305748820300335>)
- Armstrong, D. L. "Social and economic conditions in the Belfast linen industry, 1850-1900." *Irish Historical Studies* 7, no. 28 (1951): 235-269.
- Cullen, Frank. "The provision of working-and lower-middle-class housing in late nineteenth-century urban Ireland." *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy. Section C: Archaeology, Celtic Studies, History, Linguistics, Literature* (2011): 217-251.

Websites:

- British Newspaper Archive
- PRONI Valuation Revision Books:
<https://apps.proni.gov.uk/Val12B/ViewImage.aspx>

Fact Sheet: Patrick McNamee

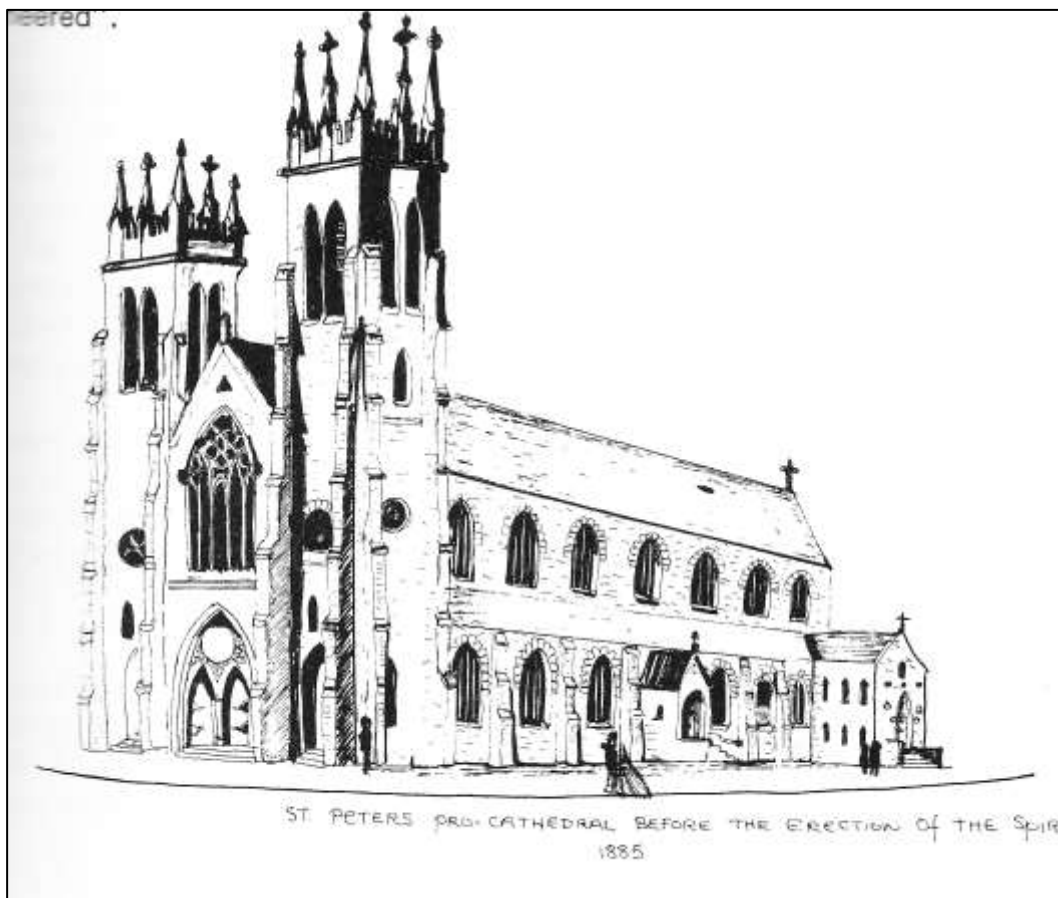
Pensioner Details
<i>Pensioner name:</i> Patrick McNamee
<i>Person ID:</i> IR1001
<i>Your name:</i> Jim Hamilton
<i>U3A group:</i> Northern Ireland
Part One: Birth and Family
1: When and where was your pensioner born?
Patrick McNamee was born about 1850. His parents lived in the townland of Ballintrain between Carrickmore and Sixmilecross in County Tyrone.
2: Who were your pensioners' parents? Record any details you can find out about them here (e.g. occupation, religious affiliation, whether they could read or write)
According to his marriage certificate, Patrick's father was James McNamee, a farmer, who had already passed away when his son was married in 1877. His mother's name was Mary. Griffiths Valuation records for 1860 show that James McNamee leased two parcels of land totalling just over nine acres from the Earl of Belmore, at a total annual valuation of £7. James and Mary were of the Roman Catholic faith and were members of a church in the parish of Termonmaguich.
3: Did your pensioner have any siblings? What were their names, and how old were they in relation to your pensioner? Use this space to record anything else you have found out about them (e.g. occupation)
I have not been able to identify any siblings of Patrick McNamee.
Part Two: Marriage and children
1: Did your pensioner marry? What was their spouse's name, and when and where did they marry them? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about their spouse (e.g. when/where they were born, their occupation)
Patrick McNamee married Ann Jane McCrudden, her name on the marriage certificate, on 3 June, 1877, in St Peter's Roman Catholic Chapel in the Divis Street area of Belfast (now the Cathedral church of the Down & Connor diocese). See below

Ann Jane was born in Belfast about 1851; her age is given as 26 on the marriage certificate. At the time of her wedding, she was living at 5 Lady Street in the Falls Road area; the 1877 Street Directory shows her living at the address. On the marriage certificate her occupation is given as weaver. Her father, who in 1877 had already passed away, was Patrick McCrudden, a farmer.

Working in the manufacture of linen was difficult and unhealthy but the weavers, such as Ann Jane, would have enjoyed cleaner conditions in their factories than in the mills where the linen was spun; the cleaner the conditions the higher the status – the weavers were regarded as the “aristocrats” of the linen trades. (See “Mill to Millenium” by Marion Green, Springfield Development Project [1996])

Ann Jane (or Jane according to the death certificate) died on 17 March 1917 at 155 Falls Road from cardiac disease. She was 60 years old and is described as a housekeeper on the certificate.

By the time of his marriage, Patrick’s father James, a farmer, had died. Patrick’s address on the marriage certificate is 9 Ardmoulin Street also in the Falls Road area. He may have been lodging here as the name shown in the street directory is a Mrs Halliday.



This is the St Peter’s chapel that Patrick and his wife would have known. Built on land donated by the legendary Belfast baker “Barney” Hughes, the church was dedicated in October 1866. Admission to the dedication was by ticket only (10s to

the nave, 5s to the aisles). The sermon lasted for over an hour and the collection amounted to £2260. St Peter's famous spires were not erected until 1885. (Image and information from "All Around the Loney-O" published by St Louise's Comprehensive 1978)

2: Did your pensioner have any children? What were their names, and when they were born? Use this space to record any extra details you can find out about them (e.g. occupation, where they lived later in life)

The 1911 census shows that Patrick and Ann Jane had five children, three daughters and two sons.

Mary Ann McNamee Born- 20 May 1878 Died – 12 November 1940

At the time of the birth, the McNamee family were living at 37 Lady Street in the Falls area. Mary Ann was baptised in St Peter's on 20 May 1878.

On 9 March 1902, Mary Ann married Michael McGeown of 50 Elizabeth Street, described as "a vintner" on their marriage certificate. The marriage took place in St Peter's. By 1911, they had given birth to a son called James Michael McGeown who is recorded on the census return.

In the 1901 census, Michael McGeown is living in Elizabeth Street and although only 22, is described as a "share holder in a licensed premises"; presumably a "good catch" for the daughter of a post-man.

Between 1924 and 1932, Mary Ann opened a confectioner and tobacconist shop at 154 Falls Road. In the 1939 street directory, a "J McGeown" was listed as the owner, perhaps Michael's father, James. .

After her death, a notice from a firm of solicitors appeared in the Belfast Telegraph on 28 November, 1940, asking creditors to come forward. Her estate was valued at £393 14s 9p. Probate was granted to Daniel & Sarah McCann, in January 1941.

Ellen Josephine McNamee Born – 4 March 1880 Died - 8 February 1962.

Ellen (sometimes referred to as Ellen or Nellie) was baptised in St Peter's on 4 March 1880. She worked as a machinist in a shirt factory and appears never to have married.

Charles McNamee Born – 31 January 1882 Died - ?

Charles was born at the family home in Cullingtree Road. In the Postal Appointment Book for 1898 he is described as a "learner" but in the 1899 book and in the 1901 census record, he has progressed to "Sorting Clerk & Telegraphist". In 1911 he is described as a "Telegraphist" in the Post Office.

In 1913, Charles married Mary Agnes Cooper who lived at 127 Cavehill Road, Belfast. The marriage took place in the Holy Family Church (probably in Newington Avenue). Mary's father was in the Royal Navy.

James McNamee Born – 28 May 1884 Died - ?

James was also born at Cullingtree Road. The Postal Appointment Book and the 1901 census list him as a "Sorting Clerk & Telegraphist". Like his brother, he had progressed to a "Telegraphist" by 1911.

Jane McNamee Born – 12 October 1886 Died - ?

Like her sister Ellen, Jane worked as a machinist in a shirt factory.

All five children - but not their parents - could speak Irish according to the 1911 census record. Despite the revival of Gaelic culture in the latter years of the 19th century, in 1911, less than 2% of the population in what became Northern Ireland could speak Irish.



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Many of the McNamee family remained close to their birthplace in the maze of narrow streets around St Peter's and in a part of Belfast known colloquially as the "Pound Loney". This 1907 map of the area shows the church on Derby Street, Cullingtree Road, and Lady, Elizabeth and Ardmoulin Streets.

Although a much later photograph, [this image](#) illustrates the type of working class houses in the Cullingtree Road area – now of course redeveloped. This view is looking towards Cullingtree Road towards Albert Street.

Part Three: Work

1: What occupation was your pensioner recorded as doing in census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

Patrick worked for the Post Office from at least 1874 until he retired in 1901 through ill health.

1874 -- The earliest reference to his occupation is the Postal Appointment book for 1874, where he is described as a Letter Carrier. This is also his position on his 1877 marriage certificate.

1878 – He is still described as a Letter Carrier on the birth certificate of his first child, Mary Ann and on all his children’s birth certificates including the final child, Jane born in 1886, although he is called a “postman” in the 1884 street directory. .

1924 - street directory – P. McNamee – a pensioner

With the introduction of the Parcel Post in 1883, the job title of Letter Carrier was changed to Postman, the position he held until his retirement.

In the two census years, he is simply described as a Post Office Pensioner.

Patrick died from senile decay on 21 August 1933 at 155 Falls Road. He was 78 years old (although if he was born in 1850 this would have made him 83) and is described as a retired postman. His daughter Ellen was present at his death.

2: What occupations were people living with your pensioner (e.g. spouse, children, boarders) doing in the census years? Please make sure to state clearly which year you are referring to

1901 – the McNamee family (Patrick and Mary and five children) lived at 120 Cullingtree Road, Belfast.

The following occupations are listed:

- Patrick – Post Office pensioner
- Jane -- Nothing listed
- Mary Ann -- Machinist
- Nellie (Ellen) -- Machinist
- Charles -- PO sorter & telegraphist
- James --PO sorter & telegraphist
- Jane -- Scholar

1911- the family had moved to 145 Falls Road

The following occupations are listed:

- Patrick- Post Office pensioner
- Jane - Nothing listed
- Mary Ann McGeown -- Nothing listed
- Nellie (Ellen)- Machinist in shirt factory
- Charles- Telegraphist Post Office

- James- Telegraphist Post Office
- Jane- Machinist in shirt factory
- James Michael McGeown- Scholar

Part Four: Anything Else

Please use this space to record anything else you have found out about your pensioner

Patrick does not appear to have taken another job after he retired. He is normally referred to as a "pensioner" although on Mary Ann's marriage certificate in 1902, one year after his retirement, he is described as a "gentleman".

Part Five: Your Sources

Please use this space to record the sources you have used

The following are the main sources used to trace Patrick McNamee:

<https://www.findmypast.co.uk/> - civil records and Irish newspapers

<https://www.irishgenealogy.ie/en/> - civil and church births, deaths and marriage records

<https://www.familysearch.org/en/> - general searches

<https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/> - GRONI for birth, marriage and deaths

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/search-archives-online/will-calendars> PRONI will calendars

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/services/search-proni-historical-maps-viewer> - Belfast 1907 map

<https://registers.nli.ie/> - Roman Catholic parish registers

<https://www.ancestry.co.uk/search/> - general searches/ Post Office records

<http://www.askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/> - land records

<http://oldbelfastdistricts.rushlightmagazine.com/loney.html> - photograph of Cullingtree Road

<http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/search/> - Irish census records

https://cain.ulster.ac.uk/proni/1988/proni_CENT-3-89A_1987-nd.pdf - Irish language

<https://www.lennonwylie.co.uk/> - street directories

Detailed sources for individuals

1901 census -

http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Antrim/Falls/Cullingtree_Road/951005/

1911 census -

http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1911/Antrim/Falls/Falls_Road/173268/

Patrick McNamee

Marriage certificate –

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1877/11132/8076276.pdf

Evidence of Patrick's birthplace - <https://registers.nli.ie/registers/vtls000633212-page/85/mode/1up>

Death certificate - <https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/search/death-refineSearchResults>

Ann Jane McNamee (nee McCrudden)

Death -

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/deaths_returns/deaths_1917/05225/4446380.pdf

Mary Ann McGeown (nee McNamee)

Birth -

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1878/02968/2087400.pdf

Baptism - <https://registers.nli.ie/registers/vtls000633215-page/123/mode/1up>

Marriage -

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1902/10260/5734407.pdf

Death - <https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/search/death/enhanced/321d8ac6-1e98-e311-b1aa-001b7899ebdc?search=d71581c0-6c2c-4742-887a-c3a809278813>

Newspaper creditor request -

<https://search.findmypast.co.uk/bna/viewarticle?id=bl%2f0002318%2f19401121%2f013&stringtohighlight=mary mcgeown>

Ellen Josephine McNamee

Baptism - <http://registers.nli.ie//registers/vtls000633216 - page/1/mode/1up>

Birth -

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1880/02888/2058354.pdf

Death - <https://geni.nidirect.gov.uk/search/death/enhanced/61f58181-cf95-e311-b1aa-001b7899ebdc?search=b37f92a2-b52f-4ca8-9a86-e5c0135e8d78>

Charles McNamee

Postal Appointment Book 1899 - British Postal Museum and Archive; Series: *POST* 58; Reference Number: 96

Birth -

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1882/02797/2026590.pdf

Marriage –

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/marriage_returns/marriages_1913/09887/5592028.pdf

James McNamee

Birth -

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1884/02694/1992232.pdf

Postal Appointment Book 1901 - British Postal Museum and Archive; Series: *POST* 58; Reference Number: 98

Jane McNamee

Birth -

https://civilrecords.irishgenealogy.ie/churchrecords/images/birth_returns/births_1886/02584/1955113.pdf

Michael McGeown (1901 census) –

http://www.census.nationalarchives.ie/pages/1901/Antrim/Falls/Elizabeth_Street/951237/

