

On Or About This Day In Phil's Archives

PHIL'S BLOG

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1/22/2022

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January 22, 1892. 130 Years ago.

Today I celebrate my GrandUncle Greg McGovern's baptism. Yep, I missed his birthday on January 19. But I am sure he won't mind (that's why I call this blog "on or about this day").

Greg was a younger brother to my grandmother Mary Ellen. Both of Greg and Mary Ellen's parents had the surname of McGovern, although not related. They were known as "Eliza McGoverns" in Ireland. This because so many McGoverns lived in the area, you were given a unique name to help distinguish what family you are part of. His Granddaughter once asked him, "Why [our family] had all McGovern surnames" and he said "Well, you could walk a mile and marry a McGovern, had to walk a few miles to get an O'Reilly."

I remember being at his home in the early 1970s, but I was young and don't remember the other occasions. Here is a photo from 1968 when Greg's younger sister Suzanne came to visit from Ireland. Greg is on the right side and I am in back.



Westchester, Illinois circa October 1968: Left to right: Suzanne McGovern McDonnell, Ann Fallon McGovern, Denis McDonnell, Susanne McManus Flanagan, Mayme Reilly McGovern, Francis McGovern, Phillip McGovern, Kay McGovern, Concetta Barrile McGovern, Greg McGovern, Emmett McGovern, Theresa McGovern, Robert McGovern

Greg was born January 19, 1892 in Cornalon, County Cavan. Cornalon is a small townland near the larger town, Swanlinbar. Greg was the third of nine children of James and Susan McGovern. A few days later on January 22, Greg was baptized in St Mary's Church in Kinawley Parish, Swanlinbar, County Cavan.

The McGoverns owned a farm and raised cattle, horses,

Author

I have been interested in preserving family history for many years. Hope you enjoy.

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15 years old.

Did you ever hear your older generation exaggerate how they walked through "ten feet of snow, barefoot" to get to school? Well Greg travelled such a route. Maybe not in the snow, but it was a long way to the Commas School. In his words, he said: *"It was very difficult to get to school. We had to go out the full end of our own farm, then cross the Cladagh River. And to cross this river, there was 24 stepping stones, which we had to step one stone to the other to get across. And then walk though the fields for a half a mile to reach another road which took us to the school, which was about another half mile away."* School was from 9am to 4pm and Greg and his siblings all attended this school.

In 1908, at age 16, Greg left Ireland to work in Scotland for "adventure" as he called it. He worked for the Calendonia Central Railroad and McCusker Wholesale Butter House. In 1911, his brother James had settled in Chicago and invited Greg by paying for Greg's ticket. By the middle of 1917, Greg was a naturalized citizen, working as a Clerk for the Penn Railroad, and was registered for the World War 1 Military Service Draft.

Within a few months, Greg had enlisted and was training at [Camp Grant in Rockford, Illinois](#). In the photo below, he is holding a French Horn. When Greg was asked, Did you learn a lot in the Army, he responded, "I was satisfied with the Army, and the Army done alright by me, I liked it." Greg, a non-commissioned officer held the rank of Sargent in Motorcycle Company 307, [Motor Transport Company \(MTC\)](#) and was Honorably Discharged at [Camp Hancock, Augusta Georgia](#) on January 14, 1919



In June 1919, Greg was married to Mary Agnes 'Mayme' Reilly. They lived on the west side of Chicago and ended up raising 7 children. Their second child, Eugene, died at age 4 of Scarlet Fever.

During the Great Depression, Greg worked for the Penn Railroad and later reminisced, *"I was only working 4 days a week in the Depression; but I was lucky because a lot of people didn't work any days...."*



Circa
1924:
Eugene
(1921-
1925),
Ann
(1923-
2020),
Rita
(1920-
1983)

In October 1972, Greg was interviewed by one of his grandsons and asked, what was the best improvement that man has made and Greg answered: *"I would say the electric was the best thing; because we didn't have any light to speak of before....the light-bulb, I could get along fine without the TV or the radio and it didn't bother me one bit...but, we did have a [crystal set](#). The electricity was a blessing for everybody, because it was awful, it was dark, no matter whose house you went to, it was more or less dark...."*



Front: Greg and Mayme McGovern Back: Kay, Jack, Ann, Jim, Rita, Greg

Mayme died in December 1972 and Greg passed in November 1975. When you read [Greg's Death Notice](#) ([click on this link](#)), it mentions his legacy, a grandfather of 24. Today his family has expanded well above and beyond this number of 24.

Thank you to Greg's grandchildren (and beyond) for providing me with many laughs and good times over the years, and a few details used in this post. Happy Birthday...er Baptism...to you Uncle Greg.

[10 Comments](#)

Greg

1/22/2022 02:53:28 pm

Hi Phil, Thanks for publishing. It is a terrific story. My grandfather was a lot of fun to be around. We always

looked forward to going 1034 N. Monitor. He was an incredible storyteller. I remembered him telling me he actually survived the Spanish flu. Luckily for us. He was in the Army in Georgia. He was terribly sick. He thought he was going to die. He took a bunch pills that he got from the medic and woke up 3 days later and made a full recovery. Greg

Reply

Maureen Bernardi

1/22/2022 03:28:53 pm

What a wonderful remembrance of a great man! Thank you for sharing more of his story with us. We spent many many happy times with our grandparents over the years and it's so great to have learned further details of his life. We are so lucky to have had such wonderful memories, and look forward to any other stories you may have to share in the future! Sincerely, Maureen Ross Bernardi

Reply

Catherine Hebel

1/22/2022 03:31:59 pm

Thank you for inviting us to read this blog. I'm one of the four great-grandchildren mentioned in the obit. I was 7 months old when he died, and was told one of the last babies he held. Sounds like he was a great story teller! Would love to hear more stories about the McGoverns!

Reply

Bob Ross 🐼

1/22/2022 04:55:32 pm

Well done!

Reply

Michael Glangevlin McGovern

1/22/2022 07:46:17 pm

Thank you for relating this great story. My paternal grandparents were both McGovern's from adjoining townlands in the Cavan village of Glangevlin. They began first grade together in the newly-opened Curratavey National School in Glangevlin. Also in this class was Grandma Margaret McGovern's first cousin Agnes McGovern, who became a Mercy nun named Sister Attracta. Agnes was from the Glangevlin townland of Legnagrow.

Reply

Nancy

1/22/2022 08:29:46 pm

That was Great!!!
Really enjoyed reading this Phil!!
Thank you for sharing!!

Reply

Mary Clare McGovern Clemens

1/22/2022 09:39:48 pm

Philip,
Your narrative brought back Grandpa's voice, he truly love to share stories as much as we loved hearing them. You only need to talk to his grandchildren to confirm he had us as a captive audience. I greatly appreciate your accurate historic knowledge which provided details, some of which I long forgot and others filling in gaps of his story. I have long admired your desire to find our family's history and willingness to

share it with all of us.

I recognized the quote from Grandpa and I'm tickled you shared it! Thanks again, love to all, Mary Clare

Reply

Rita Pacyna

1/24/2022 07:51:08 pm

Thank you Phil this was wonderful. I'm pretty sure I have picture and slides that were Aunt Kay's of some of the family in Ireland. We will have to get together maybe during the summer. Thank you again.

Reply

Karin Ellis

1/25/2022 09:40:16 pm

Thank you, Phil! I'm Greg Heffernan's daughter and this is so wonderful! Throughout the years, my dad has shared stories about his grandfather and he always tells them with a smile. He recently told my kids about how his grandfather was 'the barber' of the family and fondly remembers going to his grandparents for haircuts. Seeing / reading this really brings stories like that to life for me and mine - truly a gift!

Reply

Michael McCormack

2/2/2022 10:38:38 am

That is Great very you have a talent that can be appreciated by everyone, well written it.

Reply

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