

The peopling of the United States of America, with special reference to the Kennedy family.

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Introduction.

On April 16th, 1637 Patrick Kennedy was granted 600 acres of land on the Elizabeth River in Norfolk county, Virginia.¹ The creek bordering the plot became known as Kennedy Creek. Patrick was probably the first Kennedy to own land in the American colonies. Almost three centuries later, the 1924 US Immigration Act ‘ended mass migration to America’² but the year still saw over 700 Kennedy individuals arriving at Ellis Island. During the intervening near three centuries huge numbers of Irish emigrated to the colonies/United States, most notably in the Great Migration in the eighteenth century and the Famine migration of the mid-nineteenth century. In simplistic terms historians tell us that the former group, the Ulster Irish or ‘Scotch-Irish’, farmed the frontier³ whilst the latter, mostly Catholic Irish, flocked to the cities⁴. This essay will examine aspects of these migrations utilising where possible data from the Kennedys who conveniently (or inconveniently) have a dual origin in Ireland and Scotland and typify both groups; concentrating in particular in the readily available 1880 Federal census.

Seventeenth century.

The fate of Patrick Kennedy illustrates how difficult survival was in the early days of the colonies. Not only was disease rife but lack of female cohorts reduced the prospects for having descendants. It is better to use evidence of a more settled population such as birth registers rather than rely on shipping or land purchase data. Fortunately many birth records go back well into the 17th century and these show that Kennedys were being born as early as 1678 in Plymouth, MA. The father of this first Kennedy birth was named Alexander, suggestive of an Ulster/Scottish origin; we will return to the issue of onomastic clues in the next century. Three years later James and Grace Kennedy were having children in Rowley, MA and Daniel Kennedy was marrying Hannah Cooke in Salem, MA. So the Kennedys had truly arrived in MA and (maybe more fleetingly) in VA. Although the main historical theme in MA was puritan settlement from eastern England⁵ caution is needed in claiming that names like Kelly and Kennedy are signs of immigration from a particular country. The reason for this is that these names had migrated into England before 1600, and at least

¹ Virginia State library Land Office Patents No. 1, 1623-43 (v. 1 & 2), p415 (Reel 1). Patrick paid dearly for his venture, dying two years later (TNA PROB 11/179 Will of Patrick Kenade Mariner).

² Ellis Island database and timeline online at <http://www.ellisland.org>; though the claim that mass immigration ended is arguably exaggerated.

³ Leyburn, James G. Scotch-Irish Settlements (*passim*); ch. 13 in *The Scotch-Irish, a Social History* (North Carolina, 1962)

⁴ Doyle, David Noel. *The Irish in North America 1776-1845*, p695 in: *a New History of Ireland (V) 1801-70* (Oxford UP, 1989).

⁵ Reynolds, David ‘America Empire of Liberty’ (London, 2010) p31; Silke, John J. ‘The Irish abroad 1534-1691’ in *New History of Ireland III* (New York, 2009) p600

in the London area were established there by the time of the Reformation. No assumption can reliably be made about country of origin or religion. Even nominal Catholics leaving Britain or Ireland are very unlikely to have carried on their religion due to lack of a priesthood in the New World (an issue not touched upon by Silke). This was not the situation further south in what was then Spanish Florida where the Catholic church of St. Augustine has the USA's oldest surviving church register going back into the late 16th century⁶. This part of the country rarely features in what largely remains an Anglo-centric history.

Eighteenth century.

Historians tell of how Irish immigration in the 18th century was dominated by people from the north of the country, a group that has come to be known in the USA as the 'Scotch-Irish'. This group are difficult to trace in the Old World but have given rise to much writing and indeed mythologizing in the New⁷. Their presence as a 'second Irish' in Ireland has made for much head-scratching when analysing early American records before the 1850 census added place of birth to its questions.

In the 1920s the Immigration Act based on ethnic quotas drew attention to the vexed question of what the original make up of the country had been. The ACLA took it upon themselves to analyse the 1790 census in an attempt to answer this question using onomastics. Their report, a work of enormous complexity, ran to several hundred pages⁸. The technique was to identify marker surnames sufficiently unique to each immigrant stock – which required them to tell the Scottish, Scotch-Irish and Irish from each other.

Perhaps inadvertently they considered and rejected the Kennedy surname twice over. It was first removed from the list of common Scottish surnames because they couldn't sort out all the American variant spellings 'of the form CANADA' and then removed from the Irish list as 'not distinctively Irish' (i.e. occurred a lot in Scotland too).⁹

As recently as the 1980s, immigration experts such as Kerby Miller and David Doyle have revisited this analysis and tinkered with the proportions of Scotch-Irish and Irish¹⁰. An onomastic approach could be attempted using just the one surname, this time using an examination of forenames. The important thing is to measure the accuracy of the benchmark onomastic data, ideally by retesting it against a second dataset in the manner described by Lauderdale and Kestenbaum in their study of Asian American surnames¹¹. Although time has not permitted this to be done yet, it is likely that the data will support the premise that most if not all the 230+ Kennedy families in 1790 are either Scottish or Scotch-Irish in origin.

⁶ Davis, Cyprian 'The history of Black Catholics in the United States' (New York, 1995) pp30-31

⁷ See for example Kennedy, Billy 'The Scots-Irish in Pennsylvania & Kentucky' (Belfast, 1998) for just one glowing tribute.

⁸ 'Report on the committee on linguistic and national stocks in the population of the US', American Historical Association Proceedings (1931), pp107-452

⁹ 'Report on the ... national stocks', p218 and p236 Table 28.

¹⁰ Miller, Kerby 'Emigrants and Exiles. Ireland and the Irish exodus to North America' (New York, 1985) p137; Doyle, David. 'Ireland, Irishmen and revolutionary America' (Dublin, 1981), pp59-75

¹¹ Lauderdale, Diane & Kestenbaum, Bert. 'Asian American ethnic identification by surname', Population Research and Policy Review 19: 288-290 (2000).

Nineteenth century.

This century was dominated by huge immigration from the south-western half of Ireland, most notably around the time of the potato famine and its aftermath. Much analysis has been carried out using data from both sides of the Atlantic to determine which regions were effected most badly. Two maps of Kennedy data can indicate where migrants came from. In map A below the overall distribution of the surname at the time of Griffiths Valuation¹² can be seen. The survey was carried out over a number of years from 1847 to 1864 – co. Tipperary was evaluated in 1851, coincidentally the peak year for overall emigration. The two main groups centred around Tipperary and the Ulster coast can clearly be seen. In map B are plotted the counties of origin of the lost relatives of Boston immigrants¹³. In this map it is clear that Tipperary and its offshoot branch from Dingle, co. Kerry dominate.

By 1880 the territory and population of the USA had swelled enormously. New York City now held the largest concentration of Kennedys in the world, having eclipsed Glasgow in the 1860s. The whole country had around 8000 Kennedy families¹⁴, present in every enumerated state or territory, including 2800 first generation Irish or 3500 going back to the previous generation (see map C). By comparison the figures for the Scottish branch are at least an order of magnitude smaller. The difficulty comes when trying to determine the ethnicity of the native lines, or how many of the ‘Irish’ were actually from Ulster (the ‘Scotch-Irish’ tag is usually reserved for 18th century immigrants). A repeat of the exercise carried out on the 1790 census could shed light on this question.

Although the historians emphasise how in this century the Irish moved largely to the cities leaving the Germans to take to the countryside¹⁵, the commonest Kennedy occupation in 1880 was farmer – almost 2500 of them plus another 250 farm laborers and a few composite farming occupations. Doyle however, in a meticulous study, has argued that many of the Irish living outside the big cities were still ‘urban’ by dwelling in minor concentrations such as mining communities or embryonic towns rather than literally in the countryside¹⁶. Insufficient time has prevented any further examination of this point with the Kennedy dataset.

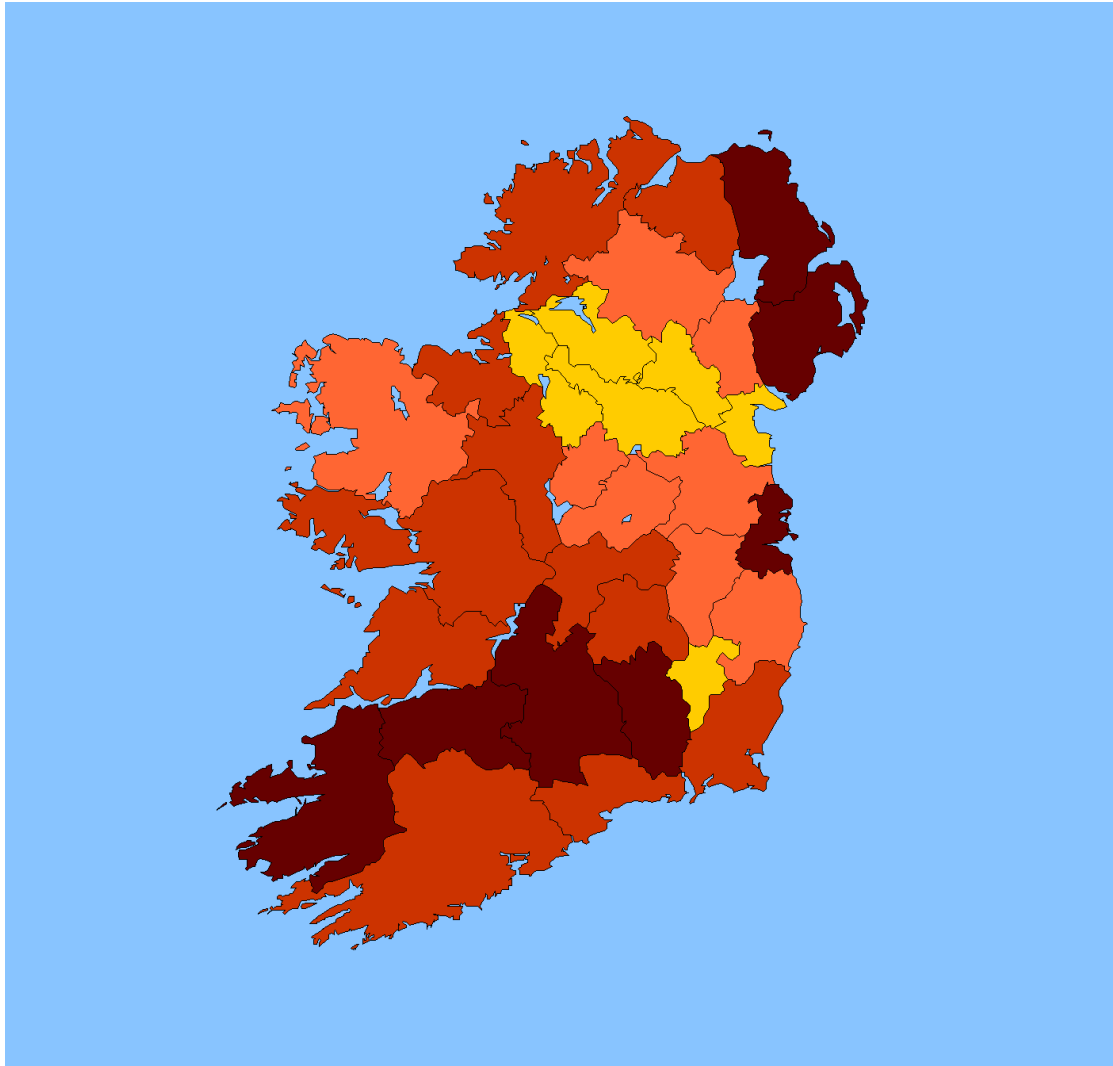
¹² Griffith, Sir Richard ‘Primary Valuation of Ireland 1847-1864’ viewed online at <http://askaboutireland.ie/griffith-valuation/index.xml>

¹³ ‘A database of Advertisements for Irish Immigrants published in the Boston Pilot 1831-1921’, viewed online at <http://infowanted.bc.edu/>. Maps produced by the author using Archer Software GenMap v2.

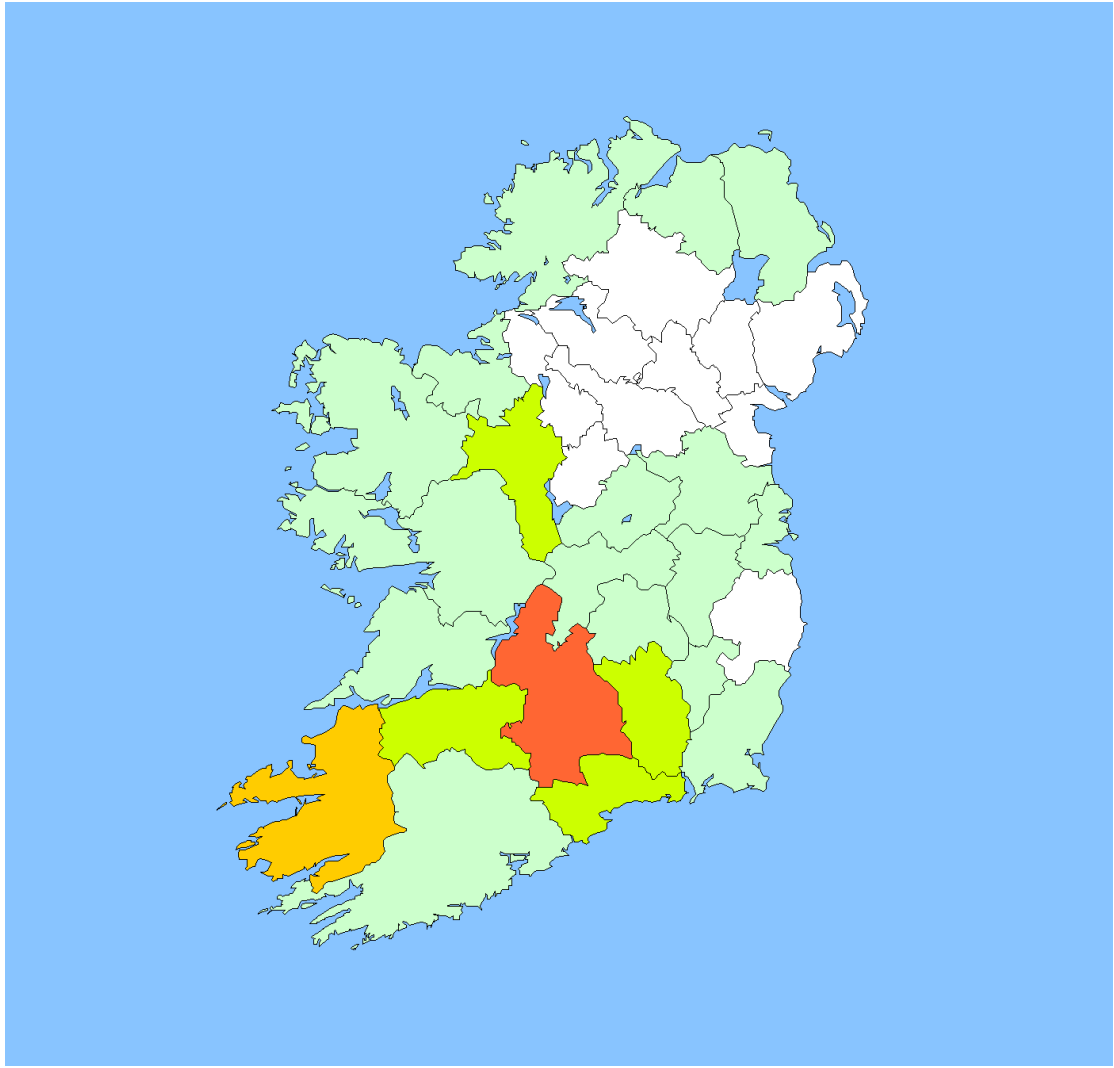
¹⁴ To make the data manageable most of the analysis was carried out at the household level and all figures should be taken to refer to the head of household only unless stated otherwise. There is a certain bias introduced by this method, occupations of single men and women are underrepresented.

¹⁵ Reynolds, op. cit., p167

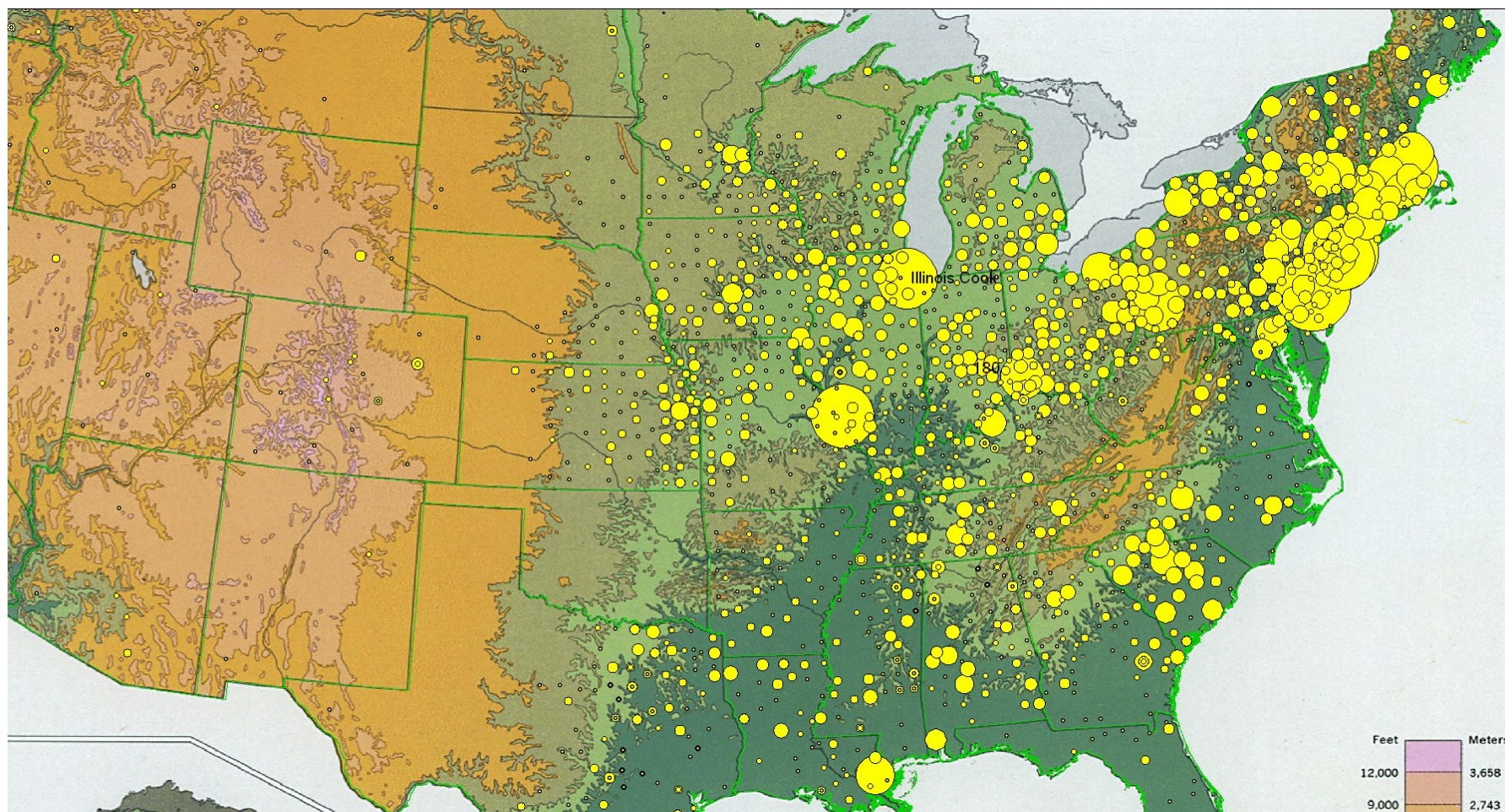
¹⁶ Doyle, David ‘The Irish as urban pioneers in the United States 1850-1870’, *Journal of American Ethnic History* Vol. 10 no 1-2 (1991) pp36-59



Map A. Kennedy surname distribution in Ireland 1847-1864 (Griffiths Valuation).



Map B. Origin of Irish Kennedys in Boston, 1831-1921.



Map C. Distribution of Kennedy families in the US, 1880. Map prepared by Howard Matheson using the author's data compiled from the 1880 Federal census.

By combining data on parents' place of birth, head's place of birth and residence along with intermediate locations where children were born, some complex migration paths can be studied, albeit still at a relatively large granularity. For example using this technique only 50 families are shown to have stopped off in England to have some children before continuing to the States, although at one stage Liverpool was the most used port for Irish sailing to the New World¹⁷ – this was the route taken by America's most famous Irish family, Patrick Kennedy of Dunganstown, co. Wexford and Boston. A similar small number had children en route in Canada.

Despite its relative crudeness, the above technique for plotting migration produces a dizzying 2000 different migration paths amongst the 8000 families.. By far the most common at 646 are those who were Irish natives who came direct to New York state. But in a measure of how 'stable' some states' population could be at the time, in fifth place come native residents of South Carolina (the reasons for this will be apparent later on). In contrast to happenings in industrial Scotland there is virtually no sign of people flocking to the biggest cities from out of state, at least to the eastern seaboard. Urbanization within state cannot be measured this way since place of birth was only recorded at the state level. The standout internal migration is from Pennsylvania into Ohio with 84 families – 50 heads born in Ohio plus another 34 born in Pennsylvania but then moved before the census.

Signs of eastward migration, indeed anything other than westward, are extremely hard to find. A caveat here is that with only state of birth to go on, in some cases it is difficult to be precise about the direction. However the most frequent non-westward movements to be found are Kentucky to Indiana and Tennessee to Indiana at 11 and 10 families respectively. Indiana was admitted to the Union in 1816.

One person should be mentioned as the most migrant family on show. The family of Jesse Kennedy, a farmer with 7 children, can be mapped as living in South Carolina, Illinois, Missouri, Illinois (again) and Kansas before settling in Nebraska.

Several prominent Kennedy families can be spotted. Apart from mentioning the ancestors of President Kennedy, whose household is headed up by the widowed Bridget Murphy running a bakery, one family that is important to highlight is that of John Pendleton Kennedy¹⁸ and his brother Anthony. In fact John, who had been Naval Secretary, was deceased by 1880 but his widow Elizabeth Gray is easy to spot in Baltimore with no less than seven servants in her house. Her brother in law Senator Anthony Kennedy is also living in wealthy retirement in Baltimore with a governess, nurse, housemaid and cook. Anthony was a member of the so-called Know Nothings (later the American Party)¹⁹, a Protestant 'nativist' party which sprung up in opposition to the mass immigration of the Catholic Irish. The contrast in social achievement at this stage between John and Anthony on the one hand and the still menial levels obtained by Bridget Murphy and her son Patrick are striking – although the highly upwardly mobile Boston family would soon change that²⁰.

¹⁷ Miller, op. cit., p199; pp354-5

¹⁸ 'Kennedy, John Pendleton (1795-1870)', Biographical Directory of the United States Congress viewed online at <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=K000109>

¹⁹ 'Anthony Kennedy (1810-1892)', Biographical Directory of the United States Congress viewed online at <http://bioguide.congress.gov/scripts/biodisplay.pl?index=K000103>

²⁰ For a highly regarded if unflattering account, see especially Dallek, Robert 'Privileged Youth', ch. 2 in 'John F. Kennedy An unfinished life' (London, 2003).

Although the analysis has concentrated on male heads of household, it is possible to pick up some limited data on cohort names by inspecting resident in-laws. This yields a modest dataset of 300 cohort names, acquired variously in country of origin, transit country or the United States. Further breakdown would be needed to make any analysis really worthwhile, however even this small a list shows Kelly (the 2nd most common Irish surname) and Ryan (most common surname in co. Tipperary) in the lead along with Smith, Gallagher and Hamilton (the latter a very common Ulster and lowland Scottish surname). The author's research elsewhere using Irish church registers indicate that overall, Ryan is the commonest cohort name for Kennedy. This is to be expected with them both being Tipperary names. It would be extremely interesting to see whether Irish Kennedys were picking spouses in the New World from within their own community; and to see how many were marrying in the Catholic church whose services were far more available than in the 17th century.

It should be pointed out that not all bearing the Kennedy surname originated in Ireland and Scotland. Many African slaves on gaining freedom ended up using the name – 570 blacks and 91 mulattos. By far the 'blackest' Kennedy state in 1880 was South Carolina where over half the Kennedys were black. This partly but not fully explains the rather stationary nature of South Carolina's population. They were almost all in the most menial types of work, notably farm laborers; the only white collar job they had was preaching the Gospel. The question of the mechanisms by which slaves acquired Western surnames is complex and more research is still needed. Gutman²¹ claimed the name often came from the first not last owner but more recently scholars like Dr. Iman Laversuch²² have cast doubt on this theory.

Conclusion

By the time of the 1880 census, some 64,000 Kennedys in 8000 families were living in the United States. Analysis of this census data shows that almost half of these families were headed by Irishmen or the sons of Irishmen. At the same time, a tentative look at the 1790 census indicates a dominant Ulster/lowland Scotland element. Further work with intermediate census returns and other records would be needed to determine the cross-over period when the southern Irish took over. A complete understanding is prevented by the omission of religious and ethnic information such as was recorded in the Canadian 1880 census, and the year of immigration which was a question first asked in the US in 1900. Other broad conclusions of earlier historians in the field of immigration are tentatively supported by the data.

²¹ Gutman, Herbert. *Black family in slavery and freedom* (1976), pp250-3.

²² Dr. Iman Laversuch, *American Names Society*, pers. comm.; see also 'Surnames adopted by fugitive slaves', *Names* 59/4 (2011) pp196-8