

# GENIE ALLERGY



**Journal of  
Coffs Harbour District Family History Society Inc.**



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<b>Acting Publicity Officer:</b>	Stan GORDON		

**MEMBERSHIP FEES:**

<b>Annual Membership Fees:</b>	Single .....	\$45.00
	Joint (2 persons at same address).....	\$65.00

**RESEARCH:**

**Library Hours:** Tuesday to Thursday 10.00am – 4.00pm (closed at 1.00pm on 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of month)  
Saturday: 10.00am – 4.00pm (except 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of the month)

**Library Fees:** Members - free on production of current membership card  
Visitors - \$14.00 per day or \$7.00 per half day or part thereof  
***Duty Monitors are available for advice and assistance***

**Library Rules:**

- \* Current membership cards are to be worn in the rooms.
- \* Attendance Book to be signed on arrival and departure.
- \* Bags to be left in area indicated by Monitor.
- \* Pencils only to be used in Library.
- \* Photocopies available through duty Monitor and will be charged according to price schedule.
- \* One microfiche only (do not remove plastic sleeve) to be removed from drawer.

**Correspondence Inquiries:** Research will be undertaken for an initial fee of \$30.00.  
For more information, email [coffsgenie@gmail.com](mailto:coffsgenie@gmail.com)

**Workshops:** are held on 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of each month or as otherwise advertised.

**RECIPROCAL RIGHTS** – Reciprocal rights are offered to members of all family history societies who visit our rooms to do research. Proof of current membership is required.

The Society does not hold itself responsible for statements made or opinions expressed by authors of the articles published in "Genie-Allergy". All care is taken to be accurate, however the Editor reserves the right to publish abridged articles/special features due to space constraints.

**Contact Persons:** President - Rosie Doherty....(02) 6652 4469 Secretary – Maureen Joyce..... (02) 6653 6098  
Vice President – Maggie Heffernon....0428 176 387 Treasurer – Jane Gow..... (02) 6658 3355



## And an exciting and successful year of research

### PRESIDENT'S REPORT

Welcome members to our first “Genie Allergy” for the new decade 2020. The years have flown and it does not seem like 20 years since we celebrated the beginning of the new Century in 2000 and witnessed and marvelled at the Olympic Games in Sydney.

It has been a very difficult time for many parts of Australia with the devastating bushfires that have damaged and burnt in many communities including the loss of homes, livelihoods, farms, stock, crops, businesses, personal effects and photographic memories, native animals and the tragic loss of people's lives. This area was not spared with bushfires near to homes and land of members in surrounding area. Some of our members were impacted but continue to assist in the ongoing care of injured or orphaned native animals and property repairs.

The Rooms re-opened on Tuesday, 14 January for research for members and visitors. I would particularly like to thank the Committee members and other Society member who assisted with the clean-up of the Research Room and the outside carport and surrounds. I am very thankful to the member who, on another clean-up day, thoroughly cleaned the areas we share with Coastal Works including the kitchen, eating room and toilets.

A special thank you to Committee member, Jim Holmes, who organised and planned our “Bring a Friend” day on Saturday, 19 January. It was a good day for people to see our resources, visit the rooms and talk to members and ask questions of DNA Special Interest Group Co-ordinator, Diane Smith. It was also a very pleasant social occasion for all who attended and an enjoyable friendly start to 2020. Well done Jim for your enthusiasm.

Our new badges will be available very soon. We are having a Special General Meeting on Saturday, 22 February, commencing at 1.30 pm in Community Village. It will take place prior to our February Workshop, which will be given by Sharon Brennan on “Blogging and Genealogy”. The Special Meeting is necessary as Committee has suggested a proposed change to the Constitution regarding the date for the Renewal of Membership Subscriptions. As we are an Incorporated Society we are bound to put this to all members. I do hope you can be present for this Special Meeting to record your vote.

Wishing you all successful researching in 2020.

Rosie Doherty, President #396



**The tree of life for some has cast its shade – we must make sure their memories never fade.**

## WELCOME TO OUR NEW MEMBERS



A warm welcome to the following new members. We hope you will make yourselves at home and find us to be a friendly and helpful group. Don't be afraid to ask the Monitors on duty for help – they will do their best to steer you in the right direction with your research.

Alex WUNDERLICH # 1973	Susanne TAINISH #1974
Anna LUSSO # 1975	Pamela McLAUHLAN # 1976

### MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS, CONTACT DETAILS ETC.

Memberships will be due for renewal on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2020. This was decided upon at the last Committee meeting and will lessen the workload for Bev Salter, the Membership Secretary and for Sharon, the Newsletter Editor. Renewal forms will be sent out with the June Newsletter and from now on you will be issued with a **membership badge** replacing the current membership cards. Badges will display your name and membership number and if required prior to the renewal of your membership, they will be available for \$6.50 with a pin or \$7.50 with a magnet. If you are interested, please let Stan Gordon know. When renewing your Membership:

1. A completed membership form **MUST** be completed for all payments made. Be sure to complete Section 2 with your Membership type, how you would like to receive your quarterly journal, sign the form and show the method of payment. Note: The completed form is used to ensure our records are kept up to date and therefore it is vital we receive a form to cover all membership payments.
2. As of February 1<sup>st</sup> 2020, membership will be \$45 a single and \$65 a double.
3. Payment methods:
  - (a) Cash is payable only in person at our Research Room. (
  - (b) Cheque is payable in person at our Research Room or by mail to  
PO Box 2057, Coffs Harbour 2450.
  - (c) EFT/Direct Deposit: BSB, Account No., etc. as details on our membership form and you must quote your member number and/or name at the time of payment.
    - (i) Online through your financial institution; OR
    - (ii) In Person at a BCU branch (Bananacoast Credit Union).

Following payment by EFT/Direct Deposit, **IT IS ESSENTIAL** that a copy of the completed membership form be **emailed, mailed or delivered to our Research Room.**

**Renewed membership badges will be placed in the Badge Box on the Admin Desk in our Research Room for your collection if you haven't included a stamped addressed envelope with your renewal.**

## MONITOR REPORT

Looking forward to another year with a great bunch of monitors. Our Society can always do with more monitors especially as we have some monitors travelling throughout the year. If you are interested in volunteering a few hours a month, you will always be partnered with an experienced monitor, it is Society policy that two monitors are always on duty. Please contact me either at the Society rooms each Tuesday or phone me on 0428176387

Maggie Heffernon, Monitor Co-ordinator #1622

### **"Bring a Friend Day"**

**Saturday 18th January 2020 was our "Bring a Friend Day". While it rained outside, inside was quite eventful and approximately 30 people attended. Several new members were enrolled, one new member found a photo of herself in a school Year Book and a number of business books and records that her mother had donated to our society many years ago.**

**At the conclusion of the day we had achieved our aim of gaining more members and exhibiting our Library and Computers. Our members showed the society's friendship and willingness to assist our community to start researching their family history.**

Jim Holmes

## **WORKSHOPS**

The details of the coming workshops and seminars for 2020 have not been finalised as yet, but all will be revealed in the coming new year by email and by our publicity machine. Workshops will be held on the 4<sup>th</sup> Saturday of the month except for April (this workshop has been cancelled because of Anzac Day) and Seminars will be held in May and October. So far, we have:

**22 February 2020:** workshop "***Blogging & Genealogy***" - with Sharon Brennan

**28 March 2020:** workshop "***Council Update on Civic & Cultural Space & Myth Breaker***" - with Enzo Accadia from Coffs Harbour Library. Please be aware that Enzo is not a Councillor but an employee at the Library.

**April 2020** : month too busy with Easter and Anzac day - no workshop planned.

**23 May 2020:** Seminar "***A Journey of Discoveries and Connections***" with Joy & Allan Murrin

**27 June 2020:** Workshop - "***Irish Records and Immigration***" Rosie Doherty and Maggie Heffernan

As the coordinator of workshops and seminars, I'm appealing to any one of our members who has any interesting items to talk about and has the confidence to share these in a workshop in 2020; or if you have a strong yearning for a particular subject to be presented, please contact me, Annette Morrow on 0412 074 643, or by email [morrowmusic@bigpond.com](mailto:morrowmusic@bigpond.com). I look forward to hearing from many of you.

## **ARE YOU INTERESTED IN A COFFS HARBOUR & DISTRICT FAMILY HISTORY Inc. MEMBER'S INTEREST GROUP?**

If you are interested in the formation of a Group relating to another area of research (other than DNA), the Committee will be pleased to hear from you - email [coffsgenie@gmail.com](mailto:coffsgenie@gmail.com). Possible Groups could be of a country (e.g. Irish), a particular family history software program (e.g. Legacy or Brother's Keeper), Convicts, FamilySearch, etc. When the Society forms an Interest Group, a convenor or joint convenors will be appointed to the Group and each Group formed by popular demand would be for members only, meeting on a regular basis, time and place (possibly once a month), with the aim to help participants in that specific area of interest.

- If you are interested in an Irish Research Group, please contact Maggie on [mheff.1940@gmail.com](mailto:mheff.1940@gmail.com) or Rosie on [rdoherty1@bigpond.com](mailto:rdoherty1@bigpond.com)
- If you are interested in a My Brother's Keeper please contact Jim on [walledcity@live.com.au](mailto:walledcity@live.com.au)
- If you are interested in getting involved in the Cemetery Transcription project please contact Maureen on [mkphome@bigpond.com](mailto:mkphome@bigpond.com)

Or if there is any other area that may be of interest, please contact Rosie or Maureen.



### **DNA SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP**

**from Diane Smith - DNA Special Interest Group Convenor**

With DNA or Genetic Genealogy fast becoming the latest addition to helping with Family History research, our Society commenced a DNA support group in February 2019. We have had 20 plus members attending each month where they have learnt to understand and interpret their DNA results in a more comprehensive way. We have also heard many success stories from people connecting with previously unknown cousins who have helped them not only with their research but also sharing photos and family stories. Any Society member who has had their DNA tested or if you are interested in learning more about DNA, you are welcome to attend. There is a small charge of \$3 per person to cover costs of room hire and morning tea. Please bring your laptop, iPad or tablet so that you can access your results during the session. Our group provides a friendly and informal forum for learning about your DNA results. We meet at the Curran Centre in Gordon St Coffs Harbour from 10am–12 noon on the first Monday of each month. If you would like to know more, please contact Diane Smith Member (#1815) on [dilin.smith@gmail.com](mailto:dilin.smith@gmail.com) or Maggie Heffernan Member (#1622) on [mheff.1940@gmail.com](mailto:mheff.1940@gmail.com)

The group will recommence on Monday, February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2020 starting at 10.00am.



Do you need help with your research? Do you need guidance on where to look other than the Internet? Please ask one of our monitors when next you are in the rooms. All are very familiar with the contents of what we have and are only too willing to share it with you.

## SCANNING SERVICE FOR MEMBERS

The Society is offering this service to members who would like their old photos, slides or negatives digitised. **Stan Gordon** has offered to assist members by doing the scanning. He would prefer that members go to his home at Toormina and take their photos, negatives and slides as well as a USB drive so the scanned images can be saved to the USB. The cost of this service is 50 cents per image which will be added to our Society's funds. If you would like to take up Stan's offer, please phone him on **02 6658 7955** or email him at [stngordon@gmail.com](mailto:stngordon@gmail.com) to arrange a suitable time. If you have large documents, such as foolscap BDM certificates or newspaper pages up to A3 size, etc., you are able to scan them using the A3 Book Edge Scanner we have in our room. This Scanner is now installed on the WIN7 computer and the scanner unit is on a trolley under the bench ready to wheel out and use. The scanned images will be saved to the computer and then can be copied to your USB drive or you will be able to print them. As our Society's printer is an A4 one, the scanned images are reduced in size to fit but if you would like to have them printed as A3, you will be able to do this at a print Shop. Please ask the monitors on duty for assistance.

## EXCHANGE JOURNALS

As exchange journals are no longer being printed, they will now be available for viewing by members from the Admin desktop at our rooms. Monitors can access these and you can download them to a USB. If anybody would like particular journals emailed to them, please contact Lyn via email at [lynette.brotherton@gmail.com](mailto:lynette.brotherton@gmail.com)

## ARTICLES OF INTEREST FROM EXCHANGE JOURNALS

### Australian

#### Traces - Edition 8, 2019

Brisbane's Year of Disaster.....Pg 15

### New South Wales

#### Hawkesbury Family History Group - Hawkesbury Crier - Dec 2019

Shopping on the Hawkesbury River.....Pg 7-14

A voyage to NSW.....Pg 15-16

#### Moruya and District Historical Society - Journal - Volume 21 No.4 – December 2019

Laundry in the 1800s..... Pg 11

#### Richmond-Tweed Family History Society Inc. Ballina - The Cedar Log - No. 142 -December 2019

My First Family Member in Australia.....Pg 4-5

Lismore's Pioneers Old and New.....Pg 6-9

#### Wyong Family History Group – Tree of Life - Vol 36 No. 04 - November 2019

Mary Parker 1758 - 1824 .....Pg 14-17

George Herbert Cross Sleeper Cutter (Mentions Coffs, Bellingen, Repton & Bonville) .....Pg 17-18

### Queensland

#### Cooroy - Noosa Genealogical and Research Group – Missing Links – No.45 – November 2019

Queensland Bushrangers.....Pg 12-15

### Victoria

#### Genealogical Society of Victoria – Ancestor – Vol 34 Issue 8 – December 2019

A Guide to Researching Western Australian Records.....Pg 26-29

Australian Government Publications for Genealogists.....Pg 30-31

**Western Australia****Western Australian Genealogical Society – Vol 14 No. 8 – December 2019**

DNA Related Articles  
(5Articles).....Pg 242-248

**ACT****The Heraldry & Genealogy Society of Canberra - The Ancestral Searcher - Vol. 42 No. 4 – Dec 2019**

All at Sea .....Pg 153

**Northern Territory****Genealogical Society of the Northern Territory Inc – Progenitor - Vol 38 No. 3 – Sept 2019**

Research suggestions on Irish Convicts and immigrants.....Pg 9-16

**England****Family Tree Magazine UK – Vol 36 No 2 – Dec 2019**

Find your ancestors all over the globe.....Pg 16-21  
Top Secret Celebration – GCHQ 1919-2019 (Bletchley Park).....Pg 44-47

**Family Tree Magazine UK – Vol 36 No 3 - Xmas 2019**

Britain in the 1700s – 1800s.....Pg 10-16  
Trace your family back 300 years – Finding Georgian records.....Pg 18-23  
The Great Frost and Famine – 18 Century Climate Crisis.....Pg 42-48

**Family Tree Magazine UK – Vol 36 No 4 - Jan 2020**

20 top family history projects and tasks for 2020.....Pg 10-14  
Tracing Back to Tudor Times.....Pg 16-22  
Your DNA Workshop (New series each month with Karen Evans).....Pg 50-54

**Ireland****Irish Roots – Issue 112 – December 2019**

Dating Family Photographs.....Pg 16-17

**SHARE YOUR STORY**

if you have them as they always add interest.  
Please email it to Sharon on [shaz@ingersole.com](mailto:shaz@ingersole.com)

Do you have an interesting story or article to share?  
If you do, we would love to read it. Include photos

## WRITING A NON-BORING FAMILY HISTORY - Hazel Jones

Family History has now surpassed Stamp Collecting as the most popular hobby internationally. You can now turn your hobby into a fascinating writing. Most family historians didn't set out to write a book and initially enjoyed collecting letters, facts, memorabilia etc to preserve their family's past. There could be personal satisfaction in assembling these facts into a format that others may like to read. There are practical ways to present your intriguing history, quirky anecdotes and data so that his/her story isn't just a list of births, marriages and deaths. Tips to bring your family story to life:

- **Consider your prospective reader** – who are they? Are they family and friends? Are they special interest groups? Locals etc. Your great family saga will interest others only if it isn't chronologically boring.
- **Feature the conflict** - was there a major conflict during this period? Unless there is a conflict (not necessarily violent), there is no drama. Conflicts can be between individuals or within individuals and society. All three do exist and just need to be acknowledged. eg. religious and political conflict, pioneers during natural disaster.
- **Identify a theme** - What is your book about? It is more than just a story of a family. Were they visionaries or was it a rebellious family? Or were they always associated with industry, occupation or business eg. Pioneering German immigrants in the vineyards of South Australia who struggles with the climate, the country, their beliefs.
- **Characterise** – think about which character grabbed your interest first and why. This character was probably spirited and came into conflict with existing expectations. List his physical details and personality traits – make them live in your mind and they will live for the reader also.
- **Structure** - avoid providing a boring collection of lists. Have themes, geographies, places or personalities eg. the Old Country, the voyage out, new beginnings. Use anecdotes or mini stories to start chapters rather than stating who was born on which date. Start with the most interesting, bury the boring bits in the middle and then another of interest at the end.
- **Craft the length** - make chapters approximately the same length and choose catchy titles. Add illustrations and photographs. Most histories are self-published so cost will be a consideration.
- **Personalise** – include everyday details, embarrassing moments and even conflicting versions of family events. Collect anecdotes and use them to introduce action. Use dialogue even if you have to invent what you think they may have said!
- **Check** – Arrange for someone to check your manuscript. The reader who knows little about the subject will be able to say whether it is a good read or not whereas someone more knowledgeable can check the facts. Be aware you may get criticism as well as praise.
- **Design** – think about print size and font. Don't try to save money by having smaller print on fewer pages.
- **Title** – choose an intriguing title. Use a common family phrases and avoid boring titles like "The Jones Family".

Hazel Jones runs a workshop called "Writing a non-Boring Family History" based on her book of the same name. She also runs the Public Records Office of Victoria "Complete Your Book in a Year" course. Visit her at [www.hazeledwards.com](http://www.hazeledwards.com) if you are interested or want to know more.



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## THE LIGHTHOUSE KEEPER'S DAUGHTER



Stationed in the town of Albany, Western Australia, in November 1914, soldiers waited to go to war and turned to the girl on nearby Breaksea Island to send their messages home.

In the days before some 30,000 soldiers sailed from Australian shores to fight in WW1, many kept their eyes focused on a tiny rugged island of the West Australian town of Albany. Their lived Fay Catherine HOWE, a Lighthouse Keeper's daughter who became well known among the confined Anzacs. Adept in the art of signal communications, 15 year old Fay relayed messages via semaphore flags or Morse code to the troops from their loved ones as the men waited to set sail. She would then send their replies in Morse code via telegraph and undersea cables back to Albany where they were transferred from office to office and printed as telegrams. In doing so, she inadvertently became a cherished symbol of home, the last glimpse for many and although they never met or even spoke, her efforts inspired an untold number of soldiers to write her postcards from the front.

One hundred years ago this November, 36 troop ships departed Albany's King George Sound bound for Egypt and Europe. Australia's first and single largest convoy carried teens and twenty somethings who had travelled from every corner of the country to amass in Albany only three months after war was declared.

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Leaving by dawn's gentle glow, it took four hours for the massive fleet – two thirds Australian and one third New Zealander – to clear out of the isolated natural harbour. Many of the newly enlisted men were clutching wildflowers given to them by locals as they headed into the Southern Ocean and although their stories are familiar, that of the little girl on Breaksea Island, her impact on the Anzacs is not.

They had no name just an address and they sent beautiful, embossed cards says Fay's only living child, 83 year old Don Watson. "Mum used to keep them in her sideboard drawer, bundles of them, dozens and dozens.....on them were the stories of the soldiers' lives and tales from the battle field. Of course a lot of them never came back. She must have written back to them but how many she wrote, I don't know". With the postcards lost after Fay's death in 1986, Don's memories of his mother and her few shared stories are all that exist now.

Fay was born at her parent's home at the base of Cape Leeuwin Lighthouse on 4<sup>th</sup> August 1899, the youngest child with one brother and two sisters. The eldest three children remained in Albany and the family moved to Breaksea Island in 1906 Mr & Mrs Howe taught Fay to read write do arithmetic crochet sew cook together with signalling with flags semaphore Morse code and telegraphy. She became very proficient in all aspects life and was a very capable and confident young person. In 1913 when Fay was thirteen her sister Ada gave birth to a child but died in childbirth (or from a lung disease soon after) The baby Stanley was taken out to the island for Mrs. Howe to rear. Her father was the Lighthouse Keeper and when her mother died in 1914 Fay took on the role of looking after him and the baby. Life on the island was rugged; if the weather was bad,

they had to make do because the supply boat wouldn't come until the following month. Fay would collect nettles, shoot rabbits and mutton birds for food and she was known as a 'crack shot'. Other than two donkeys, pigs and a dog there were few companions hence her enthusiasm for communicating with the Anzacs.

Fay married Assistant Lighthouse Keeper James Watson in 1916 and moved to Perth where they raised a family of two girls and one son, Don. Don says she didn't talk much about her connection to the troops but he has a deep sense of pride in her wartime role.

After James died in January 1946 money was very short Fay turned her skills to dressmaking then managed to obtain a position as Wardress at Fremantle Women's Prison Fay passed away in mid 1968 just short of her 68th Birthday At the time of her death Fay left behind three married children and nine grandchildren.

# THE LOST CHILDREN OF TUAM

*Ireland wanted to forget, but the dead don't always stay buried.*



## **TUAM, Ireland. Behold a child.**

“A slight girl all of 6, she left the modest family farm, where her father minds the livestock and her mother keeps a painful secret and walks out to the main road. Off she goes to primary school, off to the Sisters of Mercy. Her auburn hair in ringlets, this child named Catherine is bound for Tuam, the ancient County Galway town whose name derives from a Latin term for “burial mound.” It is the seat of a Roman Catholic archdiocese, a proud distinction announced by the cathedral that for generations has loomed over factory and field. Two miles into this long-ago Irish morning, the young girl passes through a gantlet of grey formed by high walls along the Dublin Road that seem to thwart sunshine. To her right runs the Parkmore racecourse, where hard-earned shillings are won or lost by a nose. And to her left, the mother and baby home, with glass shards embedded atop its stony enclosure. Behind this forbidding divide, nuns keep watch over unmarried mothers and their children. Sinners and their illegitimate spawn, it is said. The fallen. But young Catherine knows only that the children who live within seem to be a different species altogether: sallow, sickly - segregated. “Home babies,” they’re called.

The girl’s long walk ends at the Mercy school, where tardiness might earn you a smarting whack on the hand. The children from the home are always late to school — by design, it seems, to keep them from mingling with “legitimate” students. Their oversize hobnail boots beat a frantic rhythm as they hustle to their likely slap at the schoolhouse door. A sensitive child, familiar with the sting of playground taunts, Catherine nevertheless decides to repeat a prank she saw a classmate pull on one of these children. She balls up an empty candy wrapper and presents it to a home baby as if it still contains a sweet, then watches as the little girl’s anticipation melts to sad confusion. Everyone laughs, nearly. This moment will stay with Catherine forever.

After classes end, the home babies hurry back down the Dublin Road in two straight lines, boots tap-tap-tapping, and disappear behind those Gothic walls. Sometimes the dark wooden front door is ajar, and on her way home Catherine thrills at the chance of a stolen peek. Beyond those glass-fanged walls lay seven acres of Irish suffering. Buried here somewhere are famine victims who succumbed to starvation and fever a century earlier, when the home was a loathed workhouse for the homeless poor. But they are not alone.

Deep in the distant future, Catherine will expose this property’s appalling truths. She will prompt a national reckoning that will leave the people of Ireland asking themselves:

Who were we? Who are we? At the moment, though, she is only a child. She is walking home to her father tending to the cattle and her mother guarding a secret, away from the Irish town whose very name conjures the buried dead. In Ireland, the departed stay present.

You might still come across old-timers who recall how families in rural stretches would clean the house and set out a drink on the first night of November - the eve of All Souls' Day - in the belief that the dead will return. How it was best to stay in the centre of the road when walking at night, so as not to disturb the spirits resting along the wayside. Even today, the Irish say they do death well. Local radio newscasts routinely end with a recitation of death notices. In a country where the culture of Catholicism, if not its practice, still holds sway, this alerts the community to a familiar ritual: the wake at the home, the funeral Mass, the long gathering at the pub, the memorial Mass a month later, and the anniversary Mass every year thereafter. Wry acceptance of mortality lives in the country's songs, literature, and wit. A standard joke is the Irish marriage proposal: "Would you like to be buried with my people?" A standard song describes a thrown bottle splattering whiskey – from the Irish for "water of life" - over a corpse. Thus, the late Tim Finnegan is revived at his wake; see how he rises. Respect for burial grounds runs deep, with crowds gathering in their local cemetery once a year to pray as a priest blesses the dead within. This reverence for the grave may derive from centuries of land dispossession, or passed-on memories of famine corpses in the fields and byways, or simply be linked to a basic desire expressed by the planting of a headstone: To be remembered.

Some 60 years have passed since Catherine's primary school days. It is a gloomy June afternoon, and she is walking the grounds once hidden behind those shard-studded walls. As rain falls from the crow-flecked sky, she drapes her black jacket over her head, almost like a shawl. Her name now is Catherine CORLESS, née FARRELL. At 63, she is a grandmother with a smile not easily given, and any fealty to Catholicism long since lost. True, she occasionally volunteers to paint the weathered statues outside the local country churches: the blue of the Blessed Virgin's eyes, the bronze in St. Patrick's beard. But this is for the community, not the Church. She finds deeper meaning in her garden, in the birds at the feeder outside her kitchen window, in the earth here at her feet.



Catherine (Farrell) CORLESS

Few photographs exist of the grim building that once loomed over this corner of Tuam (pronounced Chewm), perhaps because few desired the memory. In its place stand drab rows of subsidized housing and a modest playground. A silvery swing set, a yellow slide, a jungle gym.

One day, a few years back, Catherine began to inquire about the old home that had stoked her schoolgirl imagination. She set out on an amateur's historical quest, but whenever she focused on the children who lived there, so many questions arose about the children who died there - the ones who never made it to the classroom, or even past infancy.

What, then, of Patrick DERRANE, who died at five months in 1925 and Mary CARTY, at five months in 1960 and all those in between, children said to have been “born on the other side of the blanket”. The Bridgets and Noras and Michaels and Johns, and so many Marys, so many Patricks, their surnames the common language of Ireland. Would people pause at their graves? Would they be remembered? In asking around, what Catherine heard was: “*Ah, them poor children. Them poor children*”. The more she dug, the more a distant time and place was revealed. Now, standing on the sodden grass, she can nearly see and hear all that was. The polished halls and bustling dormitories, the babies’ nappies and nuns’ habits, the shouts, the whimpers, the murmur of prayer. The women and their newborns often arrived after the inquisitive street lamps of Tuam had dimmed. They came from towns and crossroads with names like snatches of song, Portumna and Peterswell, Claremorris and Lettermore, Moylough and Loughrea. And now they were here at the St. Mary’s Mother and Baby Home, a massive building the colour of storm clouds, a way station for 50 single mothers and 125 children born out of wedlock.

The building opened in 1846 as a workhouse, but almost immediately it began receiving victims of the Great Hunger, a famine so horrific that the moans of the dying, “The Tuam Herald” reported, were “*as familiar to our ears as the striking of the clock*.” It later became a military barracks, serving the new Irish government formed after a treaty between Irish rebels and Great Britain in 1921. One spring morning during the civil war that followed, six prisoners - republicans who disagreed with concessions in the treaty - were marched into the yard and executed against the ashen wall. The government repurposed the building to be among the institutions intended as ports of salvation where disgraced women might be redeemed. These state-financed homes were invariably managed by a Catholic order, in keeping with the hand-in-glove relationship between the dominant Church and the fledgling state. Given the misogyny, morality, and economics that informed the public debate of the time - when a pregnancy out of wedlock could threaten a family’s plans for land inheritance, and even confer dishonour upon a local pastor - imagine that naïve young woman from the country: impregnated by a man, sometimes a relative, who would assume little of the shame and none of the responsibility. She might flee to England, or pretend that the newborn was a married sister’s - or be shipped to the dreaded Tuam home, run by a religious order with French roots called the Congregation of Sisters of Bon Secours. Their motto: “Good Help to Those in Need.”

You rose early and went down to the nursery with your infant. Mass at 8.00, then porridge and tea for breakfast. Breast feeding next, after which you rinsed your child’s diapers before moving on to your daily drudgery. You might polish the dormitory floors with beeswax or clean bedsheets stained with urine. “An awful lonely auld hole,” recalled Julia Carter DEVANEY. Born in a workhouse and left in the care of the Bon Secours, Julia became an employee who lived in the home for almost 40 years. Although she died in 1985, her rare insight into this insulated world - one she described as “unnatural” - lives on in taped interviews. The gates remained unlocked to accommodate deliveries, but so powerful was the sense of cultural imprisonment that you dared not leave. Save for the chance gift of a cake from the bread man, you starved for love or consolation over the loss of your innocent courting days. “Many a girl shed tears,” Julia said. The Bon Secours sisters who watched your every move were doing the bidding of Irish society. They, too, existed in a repressive patriarchy with few options for women. They might have experienced a spiritual calling as a young girl, or simply desired not to be a farmer’s wife, having seen overworked mothers forever pregnant, forever fretting. A vocation offered education, safety and status, all reflected in clean, freshly pressed habits. And Julia remembered them all. Mother Hortense had a big heart, yet she was quick to punish; Mother Martha was more enlightened, but a thump from her could “put you into the middle of next week.” This one hated the mere sight of children, while that one used kindness the way others used the rod. And so it went. The sisters frequently threatened banishment to the mental asylum in Ballinasloe, or to one of the Magdalen Laundries: institutions where women perceived to be susceptible or errant - including “second offenders” who had become pregnant again - were often sent to work, and sometimes die, in guilt-ridden servitude. You preferred instead to suffer at the mother and baby home, bracing for that day when, after a year or so of penitent confinement, you were forced to leave - almost always without your child. Waiting for that moment of separation, Julia recalled, was “like Our Lady waiting for the Crucifixion.” Typical is the story of one unmarried woman who had been sent to the home from a remote Galway farm.

Determined to remain close to her child, she took a job as a cleaner at a nearby hospital and, for several years, she appeared at the home's door on her day off every week to say the same thing: "*That's my son you have in there. I want my son. I want to rear him*". No, would come the answer. And the door would close. For the children left behind, there were swings and seesaws and donated Christmas gifts from town, but no grandparents and cousins coming around to coo. They lived amid the absence of affection and the ever-present threat of infectious disease. "Like chickens in a coop," Julia said.

Many survivors have only the sketchiest memories of those days, a haze of bed-wetting and rocking oneself to sleep. One man, now in his 70s, remembers being taken for a walk with other home babies, and the excitement of seeing themselves in the side-view mirrors of parked cars. "We didn't even know it was a reflection of ourselves in the mirror," he recalled. "And we were laughing at ourselves. Laughing." Until they were adopted, sent to a training school or boarded out to a family, the older children walked to one of the two primary schools along the Dublin Road, some of them calling out "daddy" and "mammy" to strangers in the street. Shabby and betraying signs of neglect, they sat at the back of the classroom, apart. "I never remember them really being taught," Catherine said. "They were just there." Teachers threatened to place rowdy students beside the home babies. Parents warned children that if they were bad, they'd go right to "the home." And even though the babies were baptized as a matter of routine, there remained the hint of sulphur about them. "They were the children of the Devil," recalled Kevin O'DWYER, 67, a retired principal who grew up just yards from the home. "We learned this in school." Still, when a bully targeted a young Kevin during one recess, the child who came to his rescue was a home baby. "*You leave him alone*", the older girl warned. "*I see you doing that to him again, I'll get ya*". The man has never forgotten his protector's name: Mary CURRAN.

One September day in 1961, a rare and ferocious hurricane howled across Ireland, downing power lines, destroying barley fields, battering cottages. As gales flicked away slates from the roof above, Julia helped lock the doors of the mother and baby home for good. Its conditions were poor, some of its staff untrained, and County Galway officials decided not to proceed with a planned renovation. Abandoned, the massive H-block building devolved into an echoing, eerie playscape, where games of hide-and-seek unfolded in dull halls once polished with beeswax. Even the old chapel became a place where children became the priests and confessors. "Bless me, Father, for I have sinned. I shot Brother Whatever," Kevin recalled. "That kind of thing." The years passed. Galway County moved forward with plans to demolish the home and build subsidized housing. And the memories of hobnailed pitter-patter faded, replaced by the faint sounds of children outracing the home baby ghosts that inhabited the property at night.

Catherine still wonders what led her to the story of the mother and baby home. Chance, perhaps, or distant memories of the little girl she once teased. Despite her bone-deep modesty, there are even times when she feels chosen. She thinks back to her solitary childhood, her best friend a dog she called "Puppy," her time spent navigating the sadness that enveloped her mother. She admired the woman's deep empathy for others but was puzzled by her refusal to say much about her own people back in County Armagh, a good 140 miles northeast of Tuam. "*Sure they're all dead and gone*", is all she'd say, and God help you if you pried much further. "A troubled soul," her daughter said. Catherine graduated from secondary school, left a Galway Art College for fear of lacking the necessary talent, and found satisfaction as a receptionist. In 1978, she married Aidan CORLESS, a man as gregarious as she was shy, a fine singer, nimble on the accordion, comfortable on the community theatre stage. Four children quickly followed. Before long, Catherine was minding the children of neighbours as well, immersing herself in the homework, play and exuberance of the young. Her mother, Kathleen, died at 80 in 1992, leaving behind so much unsaid. Catherine eventually headed up to Armagh to examine public records that might explain why her mother had been so withholding, so unsettled. As if part of some cosmic riddle, the answer was provided in the absence of one. On her mother's birth certificate, in the space reserved for the name of the father: nothing. Her mother had been conceived out of wedlock. Other tell-tale strands to the woman's early years came to be known: Fostered out, moving from family to family before finding work as a domestic. Then harbouring until death, a secret she found shameful

enough to keep from her husband. "That she went through her life, that she didn't like telling us," Catherine said. "That she was ashamed to tell us..." In this patch of pain and regret, a seed was planted.

12.

The revelations about her mother fuelled in Catherine an interest in understanding the forces that shape who we are and how we behave. While attending a rigorous night course in local history, she learned an invaluable lesson: "If you don't find something, you don't leave it. You ask why it's not there. You use 'why' a lot."..... Continued in the June edition of "Genie-Allergy"

A long article but one I wanted to share in the hope that society has learned from these shocking mistakes and that history will never repeat itself.....Sharon

### *My Ancestors*

*If you could see your ancestors all standing in a row,  
Would you be proud of them or not or don't you really know?  
Some strange discoveries are made in climbing family trees,  
And some of them you know do not particularly please!*

*If you could see your ancestors all standing in a row,  
There might be some of them perhaps you wouldn't care to know  
But there's the other question which requires a different view,  
If you could meet your ancestors, would they be proud of you?*

Author unknown

## Your Family Tree

^  
You  
2 Parents  
4 Grandparents  
8 Great Grandparents  
16 Great Great Grandparents  
32 Great Great Great Grandparents  
64 Great Great Great Great Grandparents  
128 Great Great Great Great Great Grandparents  
256 Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandparents  
512 Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandparents  
1024 Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Great Grandparents  
and after just ten generations you then have  
2,048  
4,096  
8,192  
16,284  
32,568  
65,136  
130,272  
260,544  
521,088  
1,042,176  
One Million in only twenty generations!



# COFFS HARBOUR DISTRICT FAMILY HISTORY SOCIETY INC.

Email: [coffsgenie@gmail.com](mailto:coffsgenie@gmail.com)

Website: <https://www.coffsharbourfamilyhistory.com/>



## FULL DAY SEMINAR

**DATE:** Saturday, 23rd May 2020  
**VENUE:** Cavanbah Hall, 191 Harbour Drive, Coffs Harbour  
**TIME:** 10.00 am to 4.00 pm  
**SPEAKER:** Joy and Allan Murrin  
**TITLE:** "A Journey of Discoveries & Connections"



**COST:** Members .. \$25.00      Non-Members .. \$30.00

Morning tea and light lunch included

### ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

For more than 40 years Allan and Joy have been searching their own Family History, and in 1995 Joy was appointed as an Accredited Transcription Agent by the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The family business has now grown to include Transcription and Certificate Services for England/Wales, Scotland, Victoria and New Zealand. Over the course of time, Allan and Joy have visited family history libraries and centres throughout the world and since 1989 been volunteer librarians at the Mortdale LDS Family History Centre. Allan and Joy are exciting speakers and have spoken on Family History topics to many societies and groups. Their vast involvement equips them to speak on a wide range of topics and they have also written a number of books. Allan recently graduated from the University of Tasmania. They continue to find joy in their own family as well as helping others find joy in Family History.

PLEASE REGISTER BY Wednesday 20th May 2020 to PO Box 2057, Coffs Harbour 2450; in person at our Research Rooms at rear 169 Rose Avenue, Coffs Harbour or by email to: [coffsgenie@gmail.com](mailto:coffsgenie@gmail.com)

For further information: Phone our Research Room during opening hours on 02 6651 6126 or email [coffsgenie@gmail.com](mailto:coffsgenie@gmail.com)

### REGISTRATION FORM

NAME: ..... MEMBER NO. ....

PAYMENT METHOD:  CASH     CHEQUE     EFT:

(if you bank at BCU add \$11.1 to A/c) A/C NAME: CHDFHS BSB: 533 000 A/C: 106393

QUOTE REF: *PLEASE QUOTE YOUR NAME and MEMBER NUMBER (if relevant)*

**IMPORTANT FOR EFT PAYMENTS:** When payment made, please scan and email this completed form to:

[coffsgenie@gmail.com](mailto:coffsgenie@gmail.com)

Would you like to bring a small plate of food for morning tea:    YES/NO

Do you have any special dietary needs?.....

