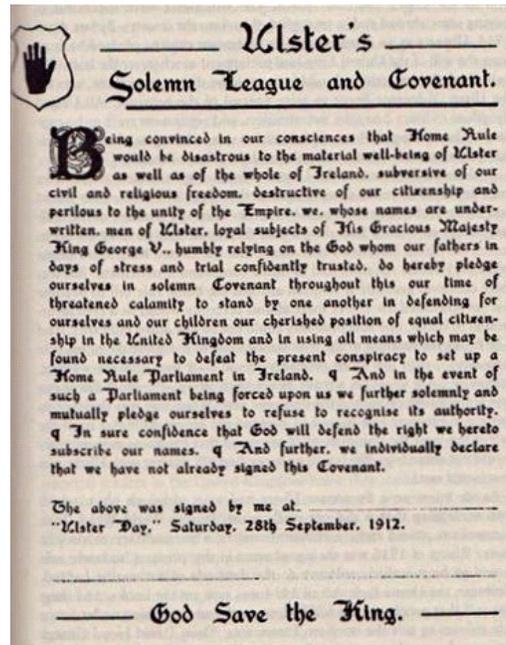


*Covenanting Families - The Clarkes, McConnells & Kings:  
Three County Monaghan Families who supported the Ulster Covenant*

By Brian McConnell  
June 2, 2012

September 28, 2012 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Ulster Covenant, an auspicious event which according to some news accounts is a cause for celebration. However, if your home was County Monaghan and you signed the Covenant, since the following years witnessed the division of Ireland it turned out not to be the powerful symbol your community had desired.

The Ulster Covenant, signed all through the nine counties of the old province of Ulster before or on September 28, 1912, had pledged all men to stand by one another in defending their position in the United Kingdom. There was also a Declaration signed by women. It was signed in Homes, Churches and Assembly Rooms in County Monaghan.



Joseph Clarke signed the Covenant at Newbliss. His family resided at Newbliss and were members of the Presbyterian Church. The Presbyterian Church in County Monaghan made known its' support for the union of Ireland with Great Britain by Declaration as early as February 2<sup>nd</sup> , 1886 stating it should "protest in the strongest manner any measure that has as its object the severance of the union" as referred to by Dr. L. T. Brown in "*Shepherding the Monaghan Flock: The Story of First Monaghan Presbyterian Church, 1697 - 1997*", pages 93-94.

As a young man Joseph traveled with his father William to Toronto, Canada where many had already moved in the hope of better fortunes. There they obtained a parcel of farmland north of the city. At the outbreak of World War I, however, both returned to County Monaghan, Ireland so Joseph with his younger brother William could do their duty and enlist together with the Ulster Division in the British Army to fight for King and Country.



Joseph Clarke volunteered in the  
9<sup>th</sup> Battalion Royal Irish Fusiliers

William Clarke, Joseph's brother was killed in action at the Battle of the Somme, in France, on July 1, 1916. Joseph was seriously injured with gunshot wounds to his left leg, stomach, and loss of his right eye.

**Presbyterian Church In Ireland -- Roll of Honour 1914-1919**

**Extract for the Congregation of Newbliss**

Surname	First Name	House	Address	Rank	Regiment, Battalion or Unit	Remarks
Carson	Hugh		Rawderly	Private	R.I.F.	Killed in Action
Carson	Wm.		Rawderly	Corporal	Cameron Highlanders	Wounded
Clarke	Joseph		Newbliss	Corporal	R.I.F.	Wounded
Clarke	Wm.		Newbliss	Private	R.I.F.	Killed in Action
Dale	Albert		Edengoash	Sergt.-Major	Northumberland Fus.	M.M., Killed in Action
Dale	John		Edengoash	Sergt.-Major	R.I.R.	M.M., Killed in Action
Dixon	Thomas		Mullagreenan	Private	R.F.A.	
Johnston	Matthew		Cottage, Smithboro'	Captain	R.A.M.C.	
Keers	William (Rev.)		Newbliss	Private	R.A.M.C.	
Moore	James		Drumgarley	Private	R.I.F.	Killed in Action
Nesbit	James		Cashland	Private	Labour Corps	Died
Pollock	Geo. Foster		Killykeeragh	Private	R.A.M.C.	Died
Scott	George		Boghill	Private	R.A.F.	
Scott	John Wm.		Boghill	Private	Tanks	
Williamson	John Jos.		Carn	Private	Northumberland Fus.	Wounded

After service with the Ulster Division, Joseph returned to County Monaghan. He obtained employment at Givens Garage in Monaghan Town and trained to become a motor mechanic.



Givens Garage, Monaghan Town, 1922

Joseph also was active in the Orange Lodge in Monaghan, as were many in his community. The Lodge strongly supported maintenance of the union of Ireland in the United Kingdom.



Joseph Clarke seated wearing orange collar

In 1924 Joseph became engaged to marry Margaret McConnell. Margaret's Aunt was married to Thomas Graham, Managing Clerk for Parke & McWilliam, Solicitors, of Monaghan Town. Margaret lived for several years with her Aunt and Uncle at their home on Swan Park in Monaghan Town. The large home was next to the office of Parke & McWilliam and was host to visiting magistrates and judges as well as prominent unionists.

Margaret's Aunt, Mrs. Margaret Ann (McConnell) Graham, also had the distinction of winning one of the most noted trophies presented at the Monaghan Count Show, namely the Sir John Leslie Challenge Cup for the best exhibitor in the cut flower section of the Show, where she also found herself in competition with professional gardeners. The Cup was first presented by the Lord Lieutenant to the Royal Horticultural Society of Ireland and was won by Sir John Leslie as far back as 1873. He presented it for competition at Monaghan Show and Mrs. Graham by winning it in three successive years became the owner.

The son of Mrs. Margaret Graham, George Graham, became a well known lawyer in Castleblayney in association with Jack Gillespie. Jack Gillespie was educated at Dungannon Royal School and Trinity College, Dublin. He served in the First World War when he was made a Captain and awarded the Military Cross.

Captain Jack Gillespie later was nominated as the Protestant Association Candidate to run as an Independent in an election to succeed Alex Hazlett, T.D. He was unsuccessful and later departed Castleblayney for employment in Belfast.

A few weeks before their wedding Joseph Clarke received a sign, a Black Hand on paper, meant to be the Red Hand of Ulster but colored black, as a warning. This was common during the period and is mentioned by Anita Leslie, daughter of Shane Leslie of Leslie Castle, County Monaghan, in her autobiography "*The Gilt and the Gingerbread*" on page 41. She writes that in the summer of 1920 her mother went away with her to Bundoran, the County Donegal resort which had a big hotel but when they arrived "no maids, or waiters remained and over the entrance had been painted a black hand - the Sinn Fein warning to 'Get Out'".

Throughout the 1920's there were attacks on Protestant churches in County Monaghan with graffiti painted on them urging members to leave the area. As well businesses in the County, many of which were Protestant and supporters of the union, had long traded with Belfast but were given notice by Sinn Fein and the Irish Republican Army that this was not to continue. They imposed a boycott of all Belfast goods making it extremely difficult.

*In Cuimhneachan Mhuineachain, 1916 - 66 on page 78 it was noted that "The boycott of Belfast goods was more rigidly enforced in Monaghan than elsewhere. The county received much of its imported goods from Belfast. Most of the large town traders in Monaghan, Castleblayney, Clones, Carrickmacross and Ballybay were distributors for Belfast firms, and many of these traders were themselves Unionists."*

The Protestant population of County Monaghan declined by 23 % between 1911 and 1926, while the Catholic population declined by just over 4%, according to Terence Dooley on page 47 in his book "*The Plight of Monaghan Protestants, 1912 - 1926*".

Joseph and Margaret departed by ship from Belfast to settle in Toronto, Canada the day after their wedding at the First Monaghan Church on April 18, 1924. Two of Joseph's brothers also moved to Canada and four of Margaret's siblings left Monaghan, two for the USA and two to Canada. The McConnell family, originally believed to have come from Scotland, traced its roots back many years in Monaghan Town and was mentioned in the church census done in 1821.

Margaret was the oldest of the McConnell children and perhaps because of that and she helped out with the younger ones was called in her family by the nickname of "Sissy". There were thirteen children in the family. They attended the National School in Monaghan Town.

Sarah McConnell, Margaret's Aunt, signed the Women's Declaration of the Ulster Covenant at the Diamond in Monaghan Town. She later left Monaghan but on her death was returned for burial in the family plot.

The Northern Standard Newspaper referred in the notice of her passing on September 14, 1943 to the McConnells as being 'a very old and highly esteemed Monaghan family'.

**LAST OF OLD MONAGHAN FAMILY.**  
**DEATH OF MISS SARAH M'CONNELL.**

**T**HE last member of a very old and very highly esteemed Monaghan family passed away at Bangor Cottages Hospital on Tuesday, 14th September. She was Miss Sarah M'Connell who first saw the light in Park Street, Monaghan, seventy-eight years ago and who was eldest daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. William M'Connell.

One of the best known members of the family, Mrs. Margaret Graham, North Road, mother of Mr. George Graham, solicitor, Castleblayney, died in May, 1942. Her brother, Mr. Wm. M'Connell, High Street, also well known in Monaghan, and father of Mr. Geo. M'Connell, Belfast, and of Mr. Alex. M'Connell, Monaghan, died in October, 1938, and another brother, Mr. Alex. G. M'Connell, died in America seven years ago.

Profound sympathy is extended to her nephews and nieces, all of whom are well and popularly known.

The late Miss M'Connell left Monaghan some twenty-six years ago and had since then resided at 8 Park Drive, Bangor. Her illness was only about a weeks duration and she was given every attention during it.

Miss M'Connell was a kindly estimable and charitable lady. Her death will be learned of with deep sorrow by those who knew her in Monaghan as well as by all who became acquainted with her since she left.

She was laid to rest in her native town in the family burying ground at First Monaghan Presbyterian Church. The funeral was private. The service at First Monaghan was conducted by Rev. J. Kilgore, Clontibret.

The chief mourners were—Mr. George M'Connell, Belfast, Mr. Alex. M'Connell, Tullyherim, and Mr. George Graham, solicitor, Castleblayney (nephews); Jack and George Stewart, Cornaglare (relatives).

Wreaths were placed over the grave from the following—In loving remembrance of Aunt Sarah, from Sarah and Family, Tullyherim; "In loving memory of Aunt Sarah," from Martha and Tom, Belfast; "To my darling Sarah, with love," M. Killins, Bangor; "In loving remembrance," from Miss Simpson, Bangor; "With love," from Mollie and George.

Margaret's sister Martha was married to Thomas Quinn of Belfast, who she met while he was in the county on military service with the 'Black and Tans'. The para-military group formed by the British government to support the union was also despised by republicans advocating Home Rule or independence for Ireland. The McConnell family were very fearful when Thomas Quinn came around to see Martha. She and her husband immigrated to Detroit, Michigan where he obtained employment with the Ford Motor Company, as he was also educated as an engineer.

William McConnell, Margaret's father, was employed for almost 40 years by David Patton in Monaghan Town. The Patton business still survives as David Patton Ltd., now one of the oldest and largest private animal feed compounders in Ireland. The origins of the company go back to 18<sup>th</sup> century Scotland when the Patton family moved to the Monaghan area. David Patton became head steward to the Leslie estate in County Monaghan in 1830 and was responsible for introducing many of the new Scottish farm improvements to the area.

Elizabeth (Lilly) McConnell was another sister of Margaret's who with her husband Edward King of Laragh left County Monaghan after their marriage in 1927. Edward's father, John King, was Clerk at the Laragh mills. His family had a strong association with the mill. Several family members, worked there.

Lilly and her husband went first from Belfast to Toronto, Canada to visit her sister Margaret and Joseph Clarke, then on to Detroit, Michigan to see her sister Martha and her husband Thomas Quinn and then to New York City where Edward King had secured employment with a Bank.

When Lilly was in Toronto visiting her sister Margaret and brother-in-law Joseph she also saw two of her younger siblings that had left Monaghan for Canada. Her sister Rachel was in Toronto working as a Nanny to a wealthy Jewish family and brother William had been employed as a cook but was headed to northern Ontario to work in a gold mine.

After Lilly and Edward King arrived in New York City they were joined by Lilly's youngest brother Thomas McConnell. Edward helped secure him work at his Bank.



**Elizabeth (Lilly) McConnell wedding photo showing her seated at left and sister Eva with Edward and brother George H, King standing.**

George Henderson King, eldest brother of Edward signed the Ulster Covenant at Laragh. In his death notice in the Irish Times when he passed away in Dublin on September 22, 1932 it asked for copy of news to be sent to American papers. By then Edward with wife Lilly, and two of Edward's other brothers, Harold and Charles, were living in Manhattan, New York.

The King family socialized with the mill owners, and attended the Church of Ireland at Laragh, where Edward's parents, John and Mary King are buried. The church was supported by the mill owner. He had brought back the unique Swiss - gothic style church with a tin roof from Switzerland where he honeymooned. It opened in 1891 for the use of mill owners and friends. At one time there were five Church of Ireland churches within a radius of about three miles of Laragh. Edward's father-in-law, Joshua Carr, operated the mill shop at Laragh. The Carrs, also attended the Church of Ireland and were long time residents of the area.

For those members of the Clarke, McConnell, and King families who did not leave County Monaghan many missed their family who had gone but struggled to carry on in amidst economic challenges and political change.

Those who returned to visit their family were not always treated with a warm welcome. When Joseph Clarke's younger brother Fred, who joined the Canadian Army was on leave at the end of the Second World War in Europe he visited County Monaghan. He found his father working in the field and said "Hello". His father did not acknowledge him. Then he asked his father if he knew who he was since it had been over 20 years from when he left. His father nodded but did not speak.

Joseph Clarke returned to Monaghan in 1963, just over 50 years after he had signed the Ulster Covenant. He asked other old friends from Monaghan in Canada if they would like to go with him but could not find anyone to accompany him. They said they would rather remember it the way it was.

William McConnell wanted his remaining family in Monaghan to think well of him, that he had become a success in Canada as a Gold Miner. When he visited his family at Tullyherim in 1958 he wore a jacket from work with the name of Hollinger Gold Mine of Timmins, Canada.



**William McConnell on Plantation Bridge, Monaghan, 1958**