Ulster to Kansas

A 400 Year Journey

Ora and Maggie *Struble* Clark & Ancestors

Gary W. Clark

Acknowledgments

I am indebted to many family members, genealogy professionals, and friends for information, suggestions, and inspiration. I especially want to thank my late aunt, Gladys Clark Wolfe, who shared many family history stories. Also, I am indebted to my cousin, Paul Clark and his wife Carol who I visited many times for their stories and knowledge of Ora and Maggie's lives and farms; Paul grew up on a farm a few miles from them. Also, profound thanks go to my cousin Diana Clemence Palmer for her review and welcomed suggestions.

Like many historians and genealogists, one major regret is that I did not ask questions of additional family members who are no longer with us.

And I thank Gena Philibert-Ortega, the consummate genealogy professional and friend, for her valuable suggestions, edits, and encouragement.

Ora Clark and Maggie Struble – 1908

I am grateful that Maggie Struble Clark was an enthusiastic photographer; many of her photographs are showcased in this book. Maggie was also an occasional writer, revealing insight into her life and thoughts from the postcards she sent and milestones she recorded.

Contents

Introduction

If you lived in Ulster Province, Ireland, in the 1600s, you might find yourself toiling behind a one-ox plow, patching a thatched roof, weaving cloth from the flax flowers you grew, and treating sickness and injuries at home—all while wrestling with taxes, rent, and civil unrest.

Irish family and house with thatched roof.[1]

Periods of civil unrest, including political and religious upheavals, occurred every few decades or less, bringing fear, chaos, and physical danger to the community and life itself. Your entire world frequently changed with each new English King or Queen who implemented new laws, prejudices, and persecutions depending on their religion and alliances with foreign powers. The differences between Ulster, Ireland, Northern Ireland, and England are not simple, but are important to understand. Even more confusing, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Papists (Catholics), Puritans, Quakers, and Congregationalists are among the religious sects that frequently battled each other. However, the fundamental chasm was between Catholics and Protestants. This was life in post-medieval Ireland.

Today's popular books and films tell dramatic and sometimes glorified stories of the era, though gruesome episodes were more common than glory. Tumultuous consequences altered ancestral timelines, which are inherently fragile to begin with, and frequently changed the historical path of families.

Our Clarks have survived these challenges and prevailed for more than 400 years, but not without tragedy. Still, I feel lucky to exist and write this book—you are equally fortunate to be alive and and here to read it.

This book strives to unravel the mysteries of our ancestors. Who they were, where they came from, and how the lived. Just as important, *Ulster to Kansas* reveals the historical background and significant events that shaped our ancestors' character and influenced their lives. However, the story is not confined to early Ulster; it continues to America in 1718. It crosses Massachusetts, explores life in Vermont and New York, then sets its sights on Indiana, Iowa, Missouri, Oklahoma, and Kansas. Hopefully, you find this story fascinating, and it answers ancestral questions. The story is about you.

Where Did Our Clarks Come From?

Our family arrived in America in 1718 from Northern Ireland, which is the region's official name today. Yet, when the Clarks left home to cross the Atlantic, it was known as Ulster Province, Ireland—subject to English rule at the time (which all of Ireland was under the English crown then). Currently, Northern Ireland's affiliation with England is not easily described; it is not a province, region, nor state. It is simply Northern Ireland, although most of its laws, governance, and other matters are subject to the authority of the English parliament. To be clear, despite its name, it is separate from the Republic of Ireland, an independent country since 1922.

Many Northern Ireland Protestants prefer the term *Ulster* over *Northern Ireland* to describe their homeland. The name Ulster brings a profound sense of pride to a significant number of people in Northern Ireland. While it is not an exact parallel, the term is similar to referring to the United States as America in casual speech. It is fair to say that Ulster and Northern Ireland refer to the same place in today's language. However, some historical purists point out that equating Ulster today with Northern Ireland disregards the fact that the original Irish Ulster Province included three older counties that are not part of Northern Ireland but, are part of the Republic of Ireland.

Ulster or Northern Ireland?

Before the 1919–1921 Irish War of Independence, Ulster was a province of Ireland consisting of nine counties. After a bloody war between Irish and English forces, the Anglo-Irish Treaty of 1921 established the Republic of Ireland as an independent country. However, this treaty also carved out six counties from the Ulster Province and designated them Northern Ireland, keeping them under English rule. These six counties are still called Ulster by the Protestant population, to the chagrin of many Irish.

Northern Ireland (Ulster) occupies the northeast portion of the island of Ireland, with Belfast as its capital. It is a member of the United Kingdom, which also includes England, Wales, and Scotland. The Republic of Ireland is an independent country. (This book uses modern Ulster and Northern Ireland interchangeably.)

United Kingdom (England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland), and the Republic of Ireland

A confusion sometimes exists with the term British Isles, which describes the entire collection of islands in this area of the North Atlantic. That is a geographical name and not a political or national entity. It includes the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Isle of Man, the Inner and Outer Hebrides, the Northern Isles (Orkney and Shetland), and over six thousand smaller islands. It is known that the Republic of Ireland does not like being labeled or included as part of the British Isles definition.

Northern Ireland (Ulster) encompasses approximately 5,500 square miles; 110 miles at its widest. For comparison, Kansas includes over 82,000 square miles, about 410 miles wide and 210 miles tall. Northern Ireland's population in 2024 was approximately two million, and covers an area slightly less than the state of New Jersey, the 4th smallest U.S. state.

Six Northern Ireland counties and three original Ulster province counties.

From the 1921 *Anglo-Irish Treaty*, Northern Ireland received six counties of the original Irish Ulster Province (County Antrim, Armagh, Down, Fermanagh, Londonderry, and Tyrone). Three counties (Donegal, Cavan, and Monaghan) were assigned to the Republic of Ireland. Clark history primarily occurred in the Northern Ireland counties of Antrim and Londonderry. Within those counties, the towns of Carrickfergus, Coleraine, and Londonderry (Derry) figured prominently in our ancestors' lives, along with smaller towns near Leogh (Lake) Neagh.

To say the Clarks came from Ulster is true, but that does not explain their ancestry, since many inhabitants of Ulster were imports from other areas in the United Kingdom, primarily Scotland and England. Those long-ago ancestries are not easily documented, though legends, evidence, and facts are offered in the first chapter.

We Are Scots-Irish

Beginning in the 1600s, our ancestors became a blend of heritages. Not purely English. Certainly not Irish. And not entirely Scottish—though it arguably exerted the strongest influence. Through generational marriages, our early English lineage gradually embraced Scottish influence, including identification, religious leanings, and character traits.

However, like many of their countrymen, they were tagged with a variety of heritage names, usually a reflection of others' perspectives or prejudices. But soon, a hybrid label became popular, one that is still used to describe their heritage: *Scots-Irish*. This was a blend of their dominant lineage and the new geographic home, though it was never a perfect description.

Instead of Scots-Irish, some people prefer the term *Ulster-Scot*. Both are heritage descriptors similar to labels such as English, French, German, or others. Whether Scots-Irish or Ulster-Scot, each is proudly worn by those who left for America and many who still reside in Ulster.

You may occasionally encounter the term Scotch-Irish. This term is incorrect in today's vernacular, though many older books used that phrase; word usage and meanings change over time. An old saying repeated by die-hard Scots-Irish is "*The only thing Scotch is something you drink*." Additionally, people of Scotland do not call themselves Scotch either, but simply "*I am a Scot*" or "*I am Scottish*."

Popular DNA tests calculate a person's estimated ethnicity based on their genetic (chromosomal) composition. Those who claim to be of Scots-Irish heritage will frequently show Scotland as some percentage of their ethnicity, from either a male or female ancestor. Also, many original Scottish immigrants married English immigrants in Northern Ireland; therefore, English ties may also be reported.

Once in America, our Scots-Irish ancestors did not like being called Irish, though the country they were from was officially still Ireland. It inferred they were Catholic, which they were not, plus the Irish-only moniker ignored their proud Scottish heritage.

To be clear, once in America, successive generations entered into marriage with a variety of other heritages, especially as families moved farther away from the original group of immigrants. However, you may find that DNA tests will still show a portion attributed to Scottish or English origins, as mine does.

Religious Conflicts Haunt the Clarks

In addition to geographic descriptions of people (Irish, Scots-Irish, etc.), a religious connection was frequently associated with one's geographic origin. While this can be an oversimplification and indeed a stereotyping of people, it was a primary classification of people in the early years. Protestants (primarily Presbyterians) and Roman Catholics (frequently called Papists) were at odds, many times literally at war. Throughout the 16th and 17th centuries, a specific religion and its ethnic followers were associated with a particular geographic area more often than not.

Royalty turnover caused dramatic changes to countries and their people, more so than power changes in modern democracies. Sir William Blackstone, the Thomas Jefferson of his time, in his 1765 *Commentaries on the Laws of England*, stated, "*That the King can do no wrong, is a necessary and fundamental principle of the English Constitution.*" Absolute power was implicit for a monarchy.

Frequently, a new King or Queen held decisive views and allegiance to a specific religion. Power shifted back and forth between Catholic and Protestant rulers. More than just an endorsement of one faith or the other, many times the followers of the out-of-favor religion were subjected to stringent, if not dreadful, conditions. These circumstances frequently led to rebellions and outright wars. Religious conflict exerted a perpetual influence on the evolution of England, Ireland, and Ulster—directly impacting our ancestors, who were predominantly Presbyterian, one of many Protestant sects.

Catholic Church or Roman Catholic Church

At the time, many churches from the Reformation still considered themselves Catholic, as it was a general term for followers of Jesus Christ. However, these reformists differed in many ways from the Pope-led church, including the desire for local control of congregations, services, and other acts. The reformers began calling the Rome-led Church, the *Roman Catholic Church*. Besides separating the reformist churches from the Pope, this also helped distinguish the Eastern Orthodox Church as a separate entity. The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes the description Roman Catholic was first used in 1605.

Papists, Papism, and Popery

In addition to appending *Roman* to the general description of the Catholic Church, the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s led to the creation of new words to describe the followers of the traditional Catholic Church. With little doubt, these new words were not meant to be flattering.

Papist was used extensively to describe the followers of the Roman Catholic Church. The *Oxford English Dictionary,* a 16-volume set, considered *the principal historical dictionary of the English language*, describes papist as:

> *An adherent of the pope; esp. an advocate of papal supremacy; also, more generally, a member of the Roman Catholic Church; a Roman Catholic or Romanist (Usually hostile or opprobrious).*

Depending on sentence usage, *Papism* and *Popery* were two other versions frequently found in 16th and 17th-century writing, even in legal documents, official acts, and laws. The same dictionary recalls Popery's first usage in 1525 and describes it as a "hostile term." Ironically, the modern versions, Papal and papacy, are acceptable and are used today by the Church to describe acts of the Pope.

While this book is not an essay on the era's religions, these terms are referenced in Part I. As we will see, religious intolerance impacted Clark lives in Ulster and early America and even influenced where they lived.

Evolution of the Clark Name

Clark is a variation of *Clerc*, derived from the Latin word *clericus*, which was brought to Britannia by the Romans in the first century A.D. In medieval times, it referred to the

clergy and people that could read and write. Currently, the term *cleric* still may refer to a religious official or member of the church, while *clerk* is losing its use in modern business environments to more sophisticated terms.

In addition, the Clark surname is common throughout Western countries of the world. A variety of spellings are found, including Le Clerq in France or De Klerk in Germany. The 'c', 'k' or 'q' may vary as the last consonant, plus an *e* is sometimes found at the end. The common variation, Clarke, is usually of English descent.

A caution to family historians and genealogists researching Clarks—do not rush to connect a famous or even a nearby Clark to your family. As mentioned, it is a common name, and unrelated people may come from the same general area, either in the United States or a far-off homeland.

Given-Name Traditions

Do you have trouble remembering your cousins', grandparents', aunts', and uncles' names? And where does a particular relative belong on the family tree? Buckle up. Tracing some of our ancestors by their first name is very taxing.

One of the challenges encountered while tracking our ancestors was how they named their children. They followed traditions that flowed from their Scottish background, though it is similarly found in many cultures. Scots-Irish parents typically named their first-born son after the paternal grandfather and the second-born son after the maternal grandfather. Daughters were named in a similar fashion, starting with the maternal grandmother. The successive sons and daughters were named after uncles, aunts, cousins, and of course, the parents. Once the first and second-born children were named after a grandparent (paternal and maternal), the third-born was frequently named after a parent. If a child died after it was given an ancestor's name, the next-born child often received that same name.

A look at our Clark lineage reveals a consistent adherence to the naming tradition in the early years. While this is useful in establishing connections within a family, it can also be confusing when multiple people share the same given name. In addition, we are frequently burdened with two common given names: John and George, who appear repeatedly in our Clark family.

Our direct Clark lineage demonstrates one of the challenges of following our genealogy. There is little variation in given names from my eighth great-grandfather, William Clarke to my grandfather, Ora Clark, nearly three hundred years later.

The following list of Clark ancestors would be almost comical if it were not essential to understand. It certainly has increased the challenges of research.

Direct Clark lineage through the years.

- William Clarke (b: 1604)
- John Clark (b: 1630)
- John Clark (b: 1660)
- George Clark (b: 1722)
- John Clark (b: 1767)
- George Clark (b: 1795)
- Orange Clark (b: 1823)
- John Clark (b: 1860)
- Ora Clark (b: 1886)

There is an inestimable number of John Clarks descending from our first John Clark who arrived in America. It was common for a family of the era to have ten children, more or less. This created a plethora of repetitive first names as each child was named after other family members, which they continued with their children, and so on down the family tree. Many families named at least one child John in every generation.

To help understand which John or other repetitive name the story is referencing, their birth year may appear after the name, such as: John Clark (b: 1660). Three different Johns could be referenced in the same paragraph.

The birth-year notation is not always used if it is clear who is being referenced. For example, two hundred years after our first John Clark (b: 1630) was born, our last John Clark was born in 1860. Since no other John Clarks were in this era or location, his birth year does not repeat after its first appearance.

Nicknames

Nicknames were popular, primarily for women, throughout colonial history. This caused confusion in identifying the actual person, as nicknames are sometimes found in legal documents or census records. Some examples we find among our ancestors include:

- Elizabeth → Betsey or Betsy
- Sarah → Sally
- Mary → Polly

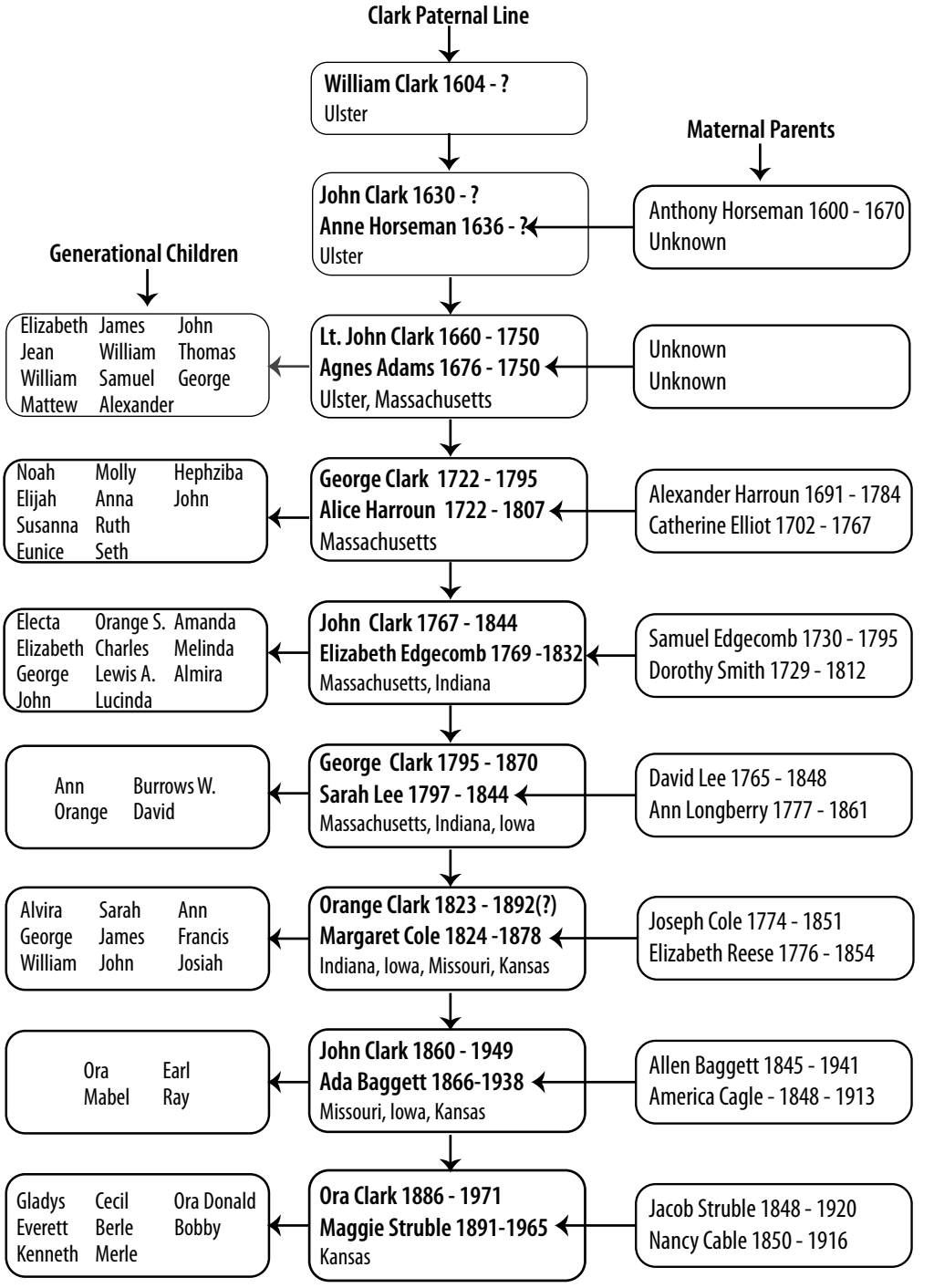
Some nicknames are easy to recognize how they came to be, such as derivations of the original name. Both names may be referenced when they clarify who the person is, placing the nickname in single quotes. For example, one of our great-grandmothers was Elizabeth 'Betsey' Clark; her gravestone is inscribed simply as 'Betsey Clark.'

Maiden Names

Women's maiden names will be used for clarification within their married names. Continuing with the nickname example, she could be referenced as Elizabeth 'Betsey' *Edgecomb* Clark, with the maiden name in italics.

The Cast of Characters

This simple family chart reveals our ancestors and quickly illustrates the repetitive names through history. Extended family charts are provided throughout the book, revealing greater detail for each generation.



Extended Families

The classic adage *Safety in Numbers* has been an unspoken principle throughout history, including extended family associations. Throughout this story, we will see that a man or woman who married into the Clarks often brought their extended family into the Clark clan as well. Frequently, multi-generations of in-laws become part of the Clark group that traversed the country. These included familiar and some lost names, such as Baggett, Cagle, Lauderbaugh, Cole, and others who crossed the country together.

Clark History: Legend, Evidence, or Fact?

History is not kind to family records. Nor civil records. Both of these are the lifeblood of family historians, yet the further back in time you travel, the scarcer they become. In the 1600s, few civil records—of a country, county, or town—were even recorded. Gradually, as governmental offices became more sophisticated, they recorded taxes, census, and military-aged men's rolls. However, these processes experienced growing pains and lacked standardization, organization and, most importantly, were not well protected and saved.

From early history, countless fires intentionally set during warfare destroyed records throughout Ireland. As late as 1922, fire destroyed the Irish Public Records Office in Dublin. Of course, accidental conflagrations were common—candles and oil lamps turned over easily.

Hence, few records from the 1600s exist today—we are left with little evidence to support popular legends.

Legend

King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table are considered legends. Robin Hood and his merry men are considered a legend. Both of these have a basis of history and possibly some truth to them. But conflicting stories, with little or no documents (as we think of them) of the people and their deeds, leave us with romantic stories that bolster the image.

The Clark story is not quite as bold as the well-known medieval heroes, but it is not without exciting or tragic events. Some are unproven stories that hold a degree of truth. I will try to clearly state what appears to be legend, versus evidence, versus facts.

Much of our early information relies on records and stories left by families who migrated to America, and then tracing the names and relationships back in time. Initially, our Clarks were from England. At least the first ancestor identified in Ulster is portrayed as English. They were part of the migration to Ulster, around 1600, during the Plantation—comprised of Scots and English settlers, who were planted in Ulster, often living on adjacent lands, paying rent to a landlord.

Evidence

The genealogy community and institutes have explicitly defined many types of evidence while creating the *Genealogy Proof Standard*. I found these descriptions of the three types most commonly referenced offer the clearest explanations:[2]

- **Direct Evidence:** This is evidence that explicitly provides information about a specific fact. For example, a birth certificate that lists the parents' names is direct evidence of the parent-child relationship.
- **Indirect Evidence**: Indirect evidence requires inference or deduction to establish a fact. For example, if a person appears in multiple census records with consistent age and birthplace but different household members, it indirectly supports the identity of that person.
- **Negative Evidence**: Negative evidence is the absence of information where it might be expected. For instance, if a person does not appear in a specific census record where they were expected to be, it could suggest they were not present in that location at that time.

I have applied these principles to this research many times, while they are sometimes subject to the interpretation of the evidence being examined. I also prefer to use the term *Fact* as a general description of *Direct Evidence*.

Facts

Once the Clarks arrived in America, their names appeared more often in town records, deeds, wills, and other official documents. A valuable set of records includes compiled *Vital Records*. These are books or records were compiled from city/county/state records, church records, and even newspapers by historical groups over 100 years ago, as well as many volumes created in the 1930s through Works Progress Administration (WPA) programs. Vital Records usually include births, marriages, and deaths, and are compiled by town, city, or state.

Land transaction records and deeds, wills, probate files, homestead claims, pension records, and census records have been utilized extensively in assembling this story. These are some of the most useful records as they not only give dates and places to people but sometimes offer hints of the person's life.

Many of the original documents in colonial America have been preserved, scanned, and made available by local agencies and the New England Historical and Genealogical Society, publisher of the American Ancestors website, and other genealogy databases. They are fascinating to read.

Personal correspondence, diaries, and written stories contributed to some real-life adventures, including a surprising adventure to the California Gold Rush, written by one of our ancestors.

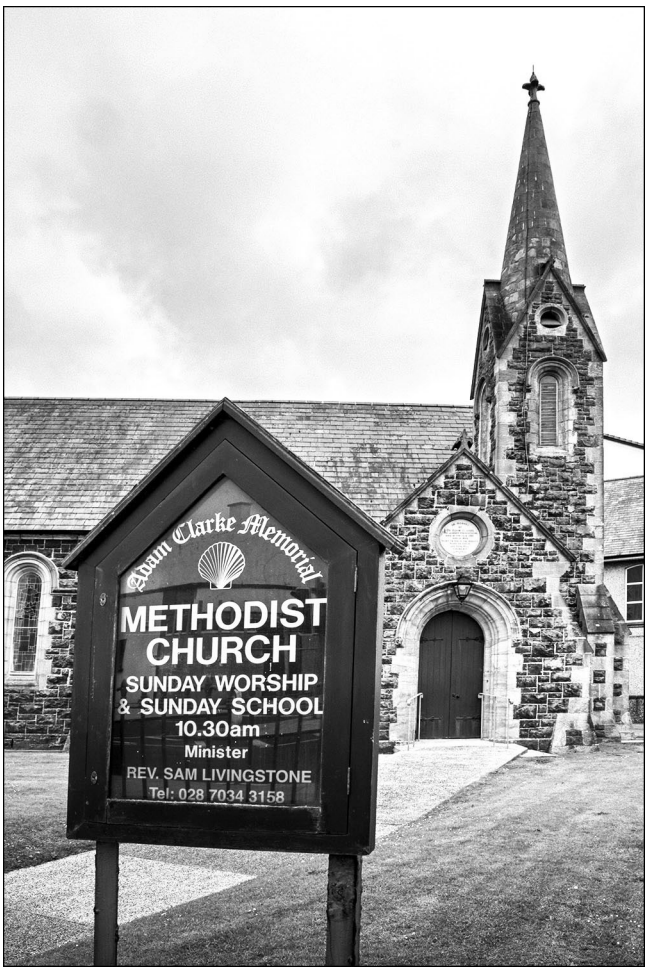
A Source of Clark History

An early source of Clark history is a blend of evidence and legend. Reverend Adam Clarke, a historian, theologian, and prolific author—who happens to be a Clark ancestor–wrote his autobiography late in life, and it was published in 1833, a year after his death. His work, *An Account of the Infancy, Religious and Literary Life of Adam Clarke, LL.D., F.A.S.,* included much reconstruction of early Clark history.

The three-volume autobiography primarily includes his religious writings, though it begins by recounting specific details of his ancestral line—including direct connections with us. This book brings some clarity and authentication to our Clark history, even though his line diverged from our direct line of ancestors in the mid-1600s.

Some of the information was verbally passed to him by an elderly aunt, recalling stories she heard that occurred nearly 200 years prior. I have sought independent corroboration for many of the purported facts as they are critical pieces of our ancestry.

Continued research is needed to satisfy strict genealogical proof, but most of the data is plausible evidence and valid. Details of his writing are included in Part I.



Adam Clarke Memorial Methodist Church
Portrush, Northern Ireland

Reverend Clark (1760-1832) funded and began building several schools and churches in Ulster before his death. Along with a school, he was building a home in Portrush, Northern Ireland, where he planned on retiring. Construction of this church began in 1859.

A Special Warning

Today's technology gives us instantaneous access to unimaginable sources of information. However, you may not know the validity or accuracy of the information, especially if the author does not cite any legitimate sources.

Many online genealogy services have flourished in recent decades. Most provide the ability to create family trees, share information with others, and view records scanned from documents such as U.S. Census, military records, local directories, and more. In addition, several cemetery or grave-profile websites now offer valuable data for family history research.

The best value genealogy services provide is publishing original records. In addition, information provided in personal family trees should not be ignored; instead it should be used to research leads—not simply copied.

Some of these services not only make it easy to copy other people's work, but they also encourage it. Once an error is introduced into a family tree, it is copied and repeated over and over again. I will offer corrections of these errors as we cover a specific person or area.

Much of the confusion is compounded by our surname, Clark, and the many common given names used in earlier times. We see John, George, William, James, Matthew, and others repeated often from generation to generation, and even within a given generation across sibling families.

Goal

The original goal of my Clark research was to satisfy my thirst for ancestral knowledge. However, all those pursuing genealogy and family history, should also share their discoveries with other family members, as others may not have the inclination to delve into the many places that hold historical secrets.

Beyond the larger goal, it has been my objective to make this book an interesting, enlightening, and sometimes even amusing historical novel. For the genealogist, a standard ancestor listing is included in the Appendix.

Enjoy the journey,
Gary W. Clark

[1] picryl.com, https://picryl.com/media/biddy-grays-crooked-wood-mullingar-co-westmeath-753849

[2] Christopher Padgett, *Eight Key Types of Evidence in Genealogical Research*, Kentucky Genealogical Society, https://kygs.org/eight-key-types-of-evidence-in-genealogical-research/