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Bruce Springsteen:

Born in the USA, Roots in Ireland

By Helen Moss and Fiona Fitzsimons



^ **Figure 1** Bruce Springsteen playing in Valladolid, Spain, in August 2009. [Wikimedia](#)

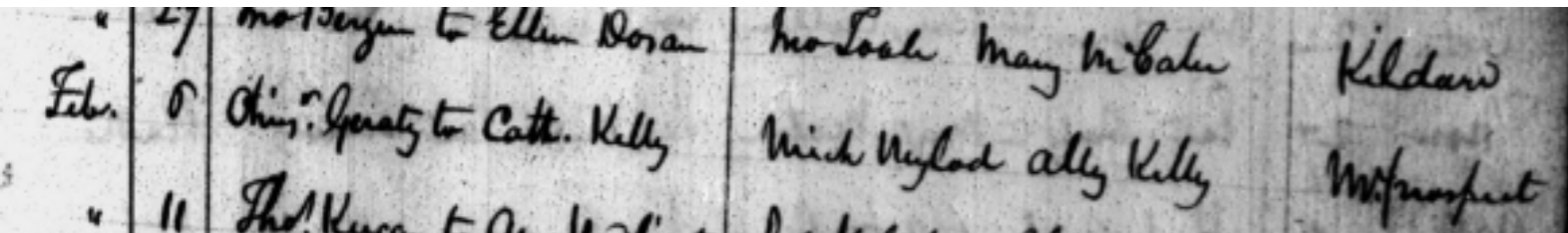
Irish people have long taken legendary singer-songwriter Bruce Springsteen to their hearts. His music speaks to people everywhere: it is an authentic blend of American roots music with lyrics that tell a narrative of the everyday lives of blue-collar America. Springsteen has been a regular visitor to Irish shores since 1985, when he played at Slane Castle. His appearances, backed by the E Street Band, are some of the best live shows you are likely to see. To celebrate Mr. Springsteen's May 2023

concerts at the RDS arena in Dublin, our researchers delve into the Irish ancestry of "The Boss" himself.

In 2013, the year of "The Gathering", Tourism Ireland commissioned the Irish Family History Centre to research Bruce Springsteen's Irish roots. His Irish immigrant ancestors were the Gerrity family, as well as Kelly, Farrell and McNicholas. In the 1850s, the Gerrity family settled in Monmouth, New Jersey. This is their story.

In 1827, Christopher Gerrity (or Geraghty) and Catherine Kelly of Mountprospect were married in Rathangan Catholic Parish, county Kildare, Ireland. They married on 6th February, before the start of Lent that year. These are Bruce Springsteen's great x 3 grandparents.

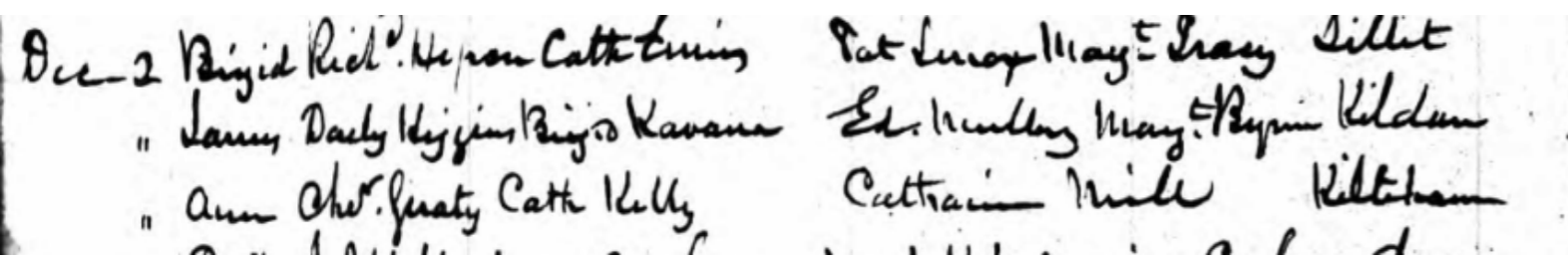
1827 Marriage of Christopher Geraghty and Catherine Kelly



^ Figure 2 1827 - 6th February: Married Chrisr. Geraty to Cath. Kelly, Mountprospect. Witnesses Michl. Neyland and Ally Kelly

According to Christy Gerrity's obituary, the couple had eight children born in Ireland: James (1828), Mary (1829), John (1830), Michael (1833), Christopher (1835), Ann (1838), Elizabeth (1843) and Thomas (1847). We found baptismal records for six, and evidence of a seventh child (Christopher) in the Rathangan Kildare school registers. Some of the online trees name a Catherine, born ca. 1842, but there is no baptismal record. Record of the eighth child, older daughter Mary Garrity, can be found in the 1860 US Census. Ann Geraghty, born in December 1838, is Bruce's great-great-grandmother.

1838 Baptism of Ann Geraghty



^ Figure 3 1838 - 2nd December: Baptised Ann [of] Chr Geraty [and] Cath[erine] Kelly Kiltahan, Sponsors Catherine Niell[?]

The church records gave us a townland address and parish: Mountprospect, Rathangan, in county Kildare. Our next step was to see what other documents survived for the district. We discovered school registers for Rathangan Boys' National School from the 1840s. It is unusual to have registers surviving from this early date and we found more evidence about the Geraghty family in this source. In October of 1841, the teacher of Rathangan N.S. noted that brothers James (13), John (11) and Michael Geraghty (10) entered the school. [1] The Geraghty boys were living in Mountprospect townland and their father's occupation was given as "carrier".

A carrier was a haulier; he transported people, goods and livestock. Mountprospect is situated on the Grand Canal, the southern route that linked the Liffey river in county Dublin to the Shannon in the West, Ireland's longest river. After 1779, when the Canal opened, it became easier to transport raw materials from farms and local businesses in Kildare to Dublin City. Christopher probably carried goods from the local district to the canal boats, and collected merchandise sent from Dublin to the town of Rathangan.

The school registers showed the three Geraty brothers remained at school until September 1845. They gave their reason for leaving as "working".

Chris Geraghty	14	Mt. Prospect	Carrier	10/91	10/91	9/45	Working
John Geraghty	11	Do	Do	10/91		9/45	Do
Michael Geraghty	10	Do	Do	10/91		9/45	Do

^ Figure 4 Rathangan Boys' National School September 1845 school register shows the Geraghty boys leaving school to work

It is noteworthy that the Geraghty parents kept their sons at school after their eleventh birthday, the age at which most Irish children were withdrawn to enter the adult world of work. In 1845, the two older boys, James and John, would have been 17 and 15 respectively, and Michael was about twelve years old, judging by his baptismal register. The fact that their parents kept the children at school for longer than usual suggests that they valued education as important to their future.

432	"	Christy Geraghty	Mountprospect	Carrier	11/46	5/47	Sent to another S.
433	"	John Geraghty	do	do	11/46	5/47	do

^ Figure 5 Rathangan Boys' National School register of June 1847 records the two younger Geraghty boys transferring to another school

We noted two further entries in the Rathangan National School register: in November 1846, Michael Geraghty re-entered the school aged 13, along with his eleven-year-old brother Christy Geraghty, who started school for the first time. The brothers were recorded as still living in Mountprospect and their father's occupation was again given as "Carrier". In June of 1847, they were taken out of the school; the reason given was that they were "sent to another S.[school]".

"... the salt of exile..." - In a bad light, Eavan Boland

The Geraghty family survived the Famine, but their future lay overseas. In 1851, Christopher Geraghty left Ireland for America, to search for the most likely place for the family to settle. He sailed aboard the "Favorite", part of the Tapscott American Packet shipping line.

TAPSCOTT'S
LINE OF AMERICAN PACKETS
FOR NEW YORK.

TO SAIL POSITIVELY ON THE 6th AUGUST,
 THE MAGNIFICENT NEW AMERICAN LINE PACKET-SHIP

CONSTITUTION

CAPTAIN BRITTON, 2500 Tons Burthen.



This splendid new Packet-ship is one of the largest and most magnificent ships afloat, has three decks, and fitted with every modern improvement for the comfort of Passengers, which with Captain Britton's uniform kindness and attention, should obtain for this noble ship a decided preference; and parties about to cross the Atlantic, should examine the accommodations of the CONSTITUTION, before making other engagements.

For terms of Passage, which will be moderate, early application should be made to

W. TAPSCOTT & CO.,

St. George's Buildings, Regent Road, Clarence Dock, Liverpool.

N.B.—The "Constitution" made her last Passage to New York in the short space of TWENTY Days, and returned here in NINETEEN Days!

Persons wishing to go by this fast-sailing favourite Ship, should send Deposits of £1 each, to secure good berths.

* * * The splendid Packet-ship "GARRICK," so long and favourably known, to the Emigrating public, is the succeeding Packet, and Sails on the 11th of August.

ALSO, FOR NEW YORK.

SHIP.	CAPTAIN.	TONS.	TO SAIL.	Steerage.			
				Adults.		Children.	
				£	s.	£	s.
RICHARD COBDEN.....	Barrell,	1500..	19th July				
J. Z.,	Zeraga,	1500..	23rd "				
A. Z.,	Chandler,	1500..	8th Aug	3	8	2	5
CAMBRIDGE,	Peabody,	1800..	1st Aug.	3	8	2	5
CONSTITUTION	Britton,	2500..	6th "	3	8	2	5
GARRICK	Howe,	2000..	11th "	3	8	2	5
J. H. SHEPPARD	Ainsworth	1500..		3	8	2	5
FIDELIA,	Yeaton,	2000..	16th "				
ARLINGTON,	Ryan,	1500..					
WEST POINT	Allen,	2000..	26th "				
E. Z.,	Hartshorne,	1500..					
ISAAC WRIGHT	Marshall,	2000..	1st Sept.				
HOTTINGUER,	Bursley,	2000..	6th "				
ROSCIUS,	Eldridge,	2000..	11th "				
YORKSHIRE,	Hackstaff,	2000..	16th "				

FOR NEW ORLEANS.

ELIZABETH,
 Hasty, | 1800.. | 1st Aug. |

And to be succeeded every Ten Days after.

FOR PHILADELPHIA.

WILLIAM PATTEN,
 Decker, | 1500.. | 25th July. |

FOR BOSTON.

HENRY WEAR,
 | 1000.. | 27th July. |

NEW SHIP
 | 1000.. | 10th Aug. |

For the information of those whose friends sailed per Constellation, we are pleased to inform them that the Ship arrived safe at New York, after Twenty-six Days passage.

Second Cabin, 10s., and Rooms, £1 a-head extra.

^ Figure 6 We cannot find a ship named "Favorite", which Christopher Geraghty reportedly sailed on initially, in contemporary newspapers but can find references to "Tapscott Favourite Line", referring to a list of ships travelling across the Atlantic

"American Packets" were medium-sized ships, transporting passengers and freight across the Atlantic. Onboard accommodation was minimal; the duration of the voyage could depend on the weather. Christy Geraghty was one day's sailing from Newfoundland when a storm at sea "carried away the main mast". The ship was forced to turn back and, after a perilous journey, docked at Liverpool. Christy Geraghty re-embarked, this time aboard the *Mary Carson*. We find Christy Geraghty (Chris Garritty) aged 46, in the passenger lists. [2] He was travelling with an Edward Garritty, aged 27. Edward was too old to be Christy's son, but may have been a nephew. On 23 May 1851, the *Mary Carson* arrived in the port of New York.

Name	Age	Sex	Origin	Destination
Ellen Coughlan	5	f	Ireland	United States
George Langan	40	m	Ireland	United States
Agnes	21	f	Ireland	United States
Anne	20	f	Ireland	United States
John	13	m	Ireland	United States
Chris	10	m	Ireland	United States
Margaret	8	f	Ireland	United States
Richard	5	m	Ireland	United States
Chris Garritty	46	m	Ireland	United States
Edward	27	m	Ireland	United States

^ Figure 7 Christopher Geraghty (46) and Edward (27), a possible nephew, on the passenger lists of the *Mary Carson*

During his first six months in America, Christy Geraghty worked as a longshoreman. In 1851, he "fell in" with Daniel H. Ellis. Ellis employed Geraghty on his farm at Manalapan, in Monmouth, New Jersey. Christy appears to have found work as a carrier on the stage coach and wagon train routes connecting Monmouth county.

"... [B]y patient saving, [Christy] purchased a small house and lot on Mulberry St. in Freehold, and... sent to Ireland for his wife and ... children"

- Christy Geraghty obituary, published in the *Monmouth Democrat*, 28 August 1884

Meanwhile, Catherine and the surviving Geraghty children were at home in Kildare, Ireland. In late summer 1853, we see Catherine Geraghty identified in the land-tax record *Griffith's Valuation* as the householder of lot 4b Mount Prospect. We are lucky to have this record, as the family left Ireland within months of its being made.

PARISH OF RATHANGAN.

No. and Letters of Reference to Map.	Names.		Description of Tenement.	Area.	Rateable Annual Valuation.		Total Annual Valuation of Rateable Property.
	Townlands and Occupiers.	Immediate Lessors.			Land.	Buildings.	
	MOUNTPROSPECT. (Ord. S. 17.)						
1 A	Patrick Kelly, . . .	Duko of Leinster,	Land,	A. R. P. 35 0 20	£ s. d. 17 10 0	—	} 18 0 0
2 B			Land,	1 0 11	0 10 0	—	
3			House and land,	1 0 32	0 15 0	0 10 0	
4	Grand Canal Company,	In fee,	Canal and towing-path (182 lineal perches),	8 2 2	—	—	18 4 0
5 A	Walter Tyrrell,	Duko of Leinster,	House, offices, and land,	103 2 23	172 0 0	5 0 0	177 0 0
6	Catherine Geraghty,	Walter Tyrrell,	House and office,	—	—	0 10 0	0 10 0
	John Kane,	Same,	House and offices,	—	—	0 15 0	0 15 0
	Daniel Grehan,	Same,	House and garden,	0 1 0	0 5 0	0 15 0	1 0 0
	Vacant,	Same,	House,	—	—	0 10 0	0 10 0
5 B	Andrew Flood,	Same,	Land,	3 0 10	2 15 0	—	} 5 10 0
6	Thomas M'Hugh,	Same,	Land,	3 1 4	2 15 0	—	
			House, offices, and land,	3 0 12	2 15 0	1 0 0	3 15 0
	MULLANTINE.						
	Total,			249 1 3	199 5 0	0 0 0	226 0 0

^ Figure 8 Summer 1853 *Griffith's Valuation* record for Catherine Geraghty

Catherine Geraghty sublet lot 4b from Walter Tyrrell, comprising a house and outhouse or farm buildings with a 10 shilling valuation. The low valuation indicates a house built of cob (clay mixed with rushes), probably whitewashed to protect against the elements, with one or two rooms. (Fig. 9)

The Geraghty house is no longer standing. The evidence of the Valuation Office records is that it was “down” by 1887. The cob house appears to have “melted” back into the landscape, there are no remains on site, and the foundations lie hidden in a field given over to agriculture. (Fig. 10)



^ **Figure 9** This near-contemporary 1854 drawing of a 10s house in Geashill, county Offaly, from Digby Estate records resembles Catherine Geraghty’s house as recorded in her *Griffith’s Valuation* entry



^ **Figure 10** These gates mark the approximate entrance to where the Geraghty house stood, close to the road in Mountprospect, co. Kildare

Monmouth, New Jersey

After three years living apart, the Geraghty family must have been overjoyed to be together again in New Jersey. They began to make plans for their future. Around this time, Christy Geraghty secured a contract with the U.S. Post Office to carry the mail from Freehold to New York. In September 1853, Christy sent in his declaration of intent to naturalise as a U.S. citizen.

The family’s happiness was short lived – in 1855, Mrs. Catherine Geraghty died, still in her 40s. Life is for the living and so, in or around 1858, Christy Geraghty remarried and started a second family: Ellen (b. 1859); Jane (b. 1864); David Daniel (b. 1865); Thomas (b. 1867); and Theresa (b. 1868). He remained close to the adult children of his first marriage.

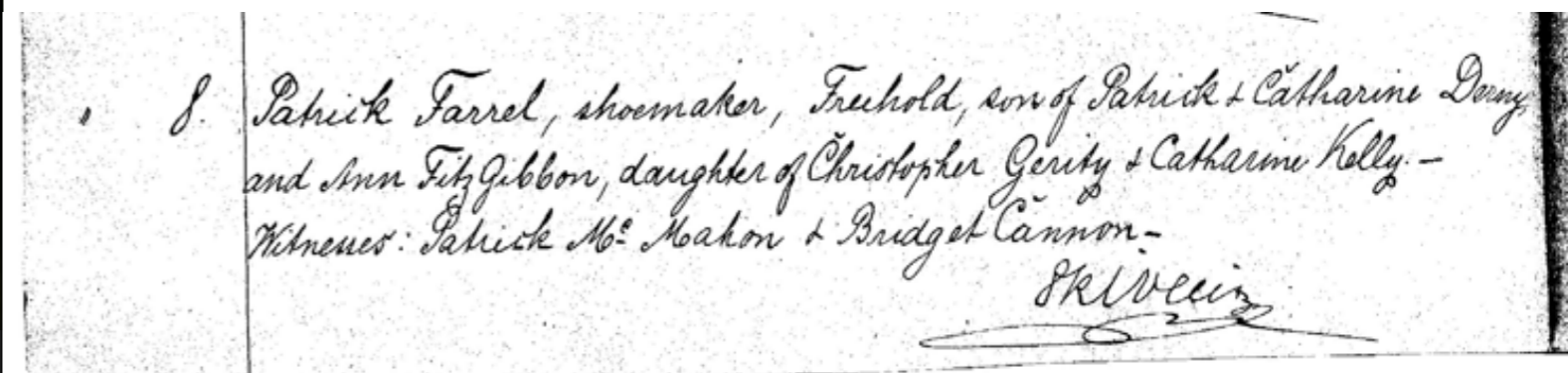
In the 1860 Census, we find daughter Mary Garrity (30 years old) living with her father, his new wife and infant daughter. Another married daughter, Mrs. Ann Fitzgibbon, lived next door to her father for the rest of his life, as demonstrated by the 1860, 1870 and 1880 U.S. Census, suggesting their close bond also. [5] Ann was Bruce’s great-great-grandmother.

Ann Geraghty (1838-1923)

Ann Geraghty was about 15 years old when she reached America, making her another immigrant ancestor. About 1856, Ann Geraghty married John Fitzgibbon: their children were Catherine (born ca. 1858); Margaret (or “Mary E.”, born ca. 1861); John (born ca. 1863); James (born ca. 1865); Annie (born ca. 1867) and Emma (born 1870). In 1871 John Fitzgibbon died, leaving a large family and a young widow.

In 1873, Ann Geraghty Fitzgibbon married Patrick Farrell, and had twin daughters Amelia and Jennie Farrell.

1873 Marriage of [widow] Ann Fitzgibbon to Pat Farrell



^ **Figure 11** Marriage register September 1873, St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church, Freehold, New Jersey

Freehold NJ to New York Mail service

In 1836, a daily stage line between Freehold and New York was established. The service connected “stages” [stage-coaches] from all parts of Monmouth county, to a steamboat that sailed from Middletown Point, New Jersey, to Keeler’s Dock at the foot of Robinson Street, New York.

Christy’s contract lasted until 1st January 1876, when the Post Office Department cut off the steamboat part of the route. [3]

The service ran Tuesday to Saturday, with a passenger fare offered at 50c. “The steamer made only one trip a day and carried the mail.... In the winter, the boat was often frozen in the ice and had to be chopped out.” [4]

“

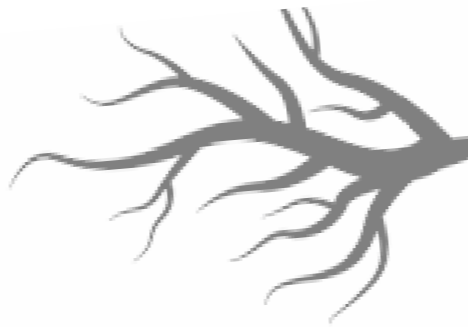
Married 8th September 1873 **Patrick Farrel** shoemaker of Freehold, son of **Patrick Farrel and Catherine Denny**

TO

Anne Fitzgibbon, daughter of **Christopher Geraty and Catherine Kelly**.

Witnesses, **Patrick McMahan & Bridget Canon**

”



When Mrs. Ann Farrell died on 3rd Oct 1923, her married daughter, Jennie McNicholas (née Farrell), registered her mother's death. Jennie was Bruce's great-grandmother.

Music as a family tradition

Music played a huge role in Christy Geraghty's life; he was a keen musician and played the fife. According to his 28th August 1884 obituary in *The Monmouth Inquirer*, he was described by those that knew him as

“a good fifer... always willing to do the fife for any thing that came along”.

The fife is a high-pitched wind instrument, easy to carry. It is not improbable that it was part of Christy's luggage on his journey to America. In Ireland, he would have been regularly called upon to play at local events – dances, marriages, wakes and political meetings. In America, Christy was said to have played for Captain Mount's “Monmouth Blues”. He was also called on to provide music at political meetings, in processions and at picnics.

Christy Geraghty, born 1806 in Rathangan, Kildare, died on 25th August 1884 in Freehold township, New Jersey, US. His obitu-

ary in the *Monmouth Democrat* paints a picture of a musician, a man very involved in the community he settled in, and someone with a keen interest in politics.

“He always took a warm interest for the success of the Democratic party, and down to a recent period played the fife, with a drum accompaniment, at the head of all the democratic processions of the town, and in this capacity his face became familiar and his fame went abroad throughout the country.” (Fig. 12 & 13)

Christy Geraty, who made his way to America in the time of hardship after the Great Irish Famine (1845-52), could hardly have imagined that his great (x3) grandson Bruce Springsteen would become a musician of world renown, but it is tempting to think that, as a fellow musician, he would have got a kick out of it.

Death of Christy Garrity.

CHRISTY GARRITY, an old citizen of this town, and well-known throughout our county for many years, died, at his late residence in Freehold, on Monday evening last, in the 79th year of his age. Mr. GARRITY was born in the county of Kildare, in Ireland, on Christmas Day, 1806. About forty years ago he emigrated to this country on the good ship *Favorite*, of the famous *Tapscott Line*. When one day's sail from New Foundland the vessel encountered a storm which carried away the mainmast and obliged them to put back. This was in the month of March. After suffering many hardships they at length reached Liverpool, where the passengers re-embarked on the ship *Mary Carson* and in due time arrived safely at New York. At first Mr. GARRITY worked “along shore,” but after some five or six months he fell in with the late DANIEL H. ELLIS, who brought him to this county and employed him on his farm at Manalapan. Subsequently he worked on the farm of Mr. JAMES BOWNE, father of ex-Assemblyman WILLIAM C. BOWNE, of Manalapan. Having by patient savings acquired the means, he purchased a small house and lot on Mulberry street, in Freehold, and then sent to Ireland for his wife and six children, and brought them to the home which he had provided for them. His wife died in 1855 or '56, and two years afterwards he married again. He had eight children by his first wife and seven by the second wife—the latter, with twelve children survive him.

Mr. GARRITY was an industrious and hard-working man, and up to within two or three years was able by his daily labor to maintain himself and wife and his younger children who remained at home. He always took a warm interest for the success of the Democratic party, and down to a recent period played the fife, with a drum accompaniment, at the head of all the democratic processions of the town, and in this capacity his face became familiar and his fame went abroad throughout the county. He was a quiet and orderly citizen and a member of the Roman Catholic church, and to the best of his ability filled the station in life to which he was called. His memory will be long and kindly cherished by the older members of the community, who best know how to appreciate his life and character.

Acknowledgements

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Endnotes

- [1] National Library of Ireland Ms. 16,521-16,523 Registers of Rathangan Boys' National School [*incomplete*], 1841-1940
- [2] www.ancestry.com “New York, U.S., Arriving Passenger and Crew Lists (including Castle Garden and Ellis Island), 1820-1957”
- [3] *The Monmouth Inquirer*, edition 02 Dec. 1875 Thu., page 3. (www.Newspapers.com accessed 03.04.2023)
- [4] *Matawan: 1686-1936*, by the Federal Writers Project, ed. Alexander L. Crosby, (Keyport, N.J., 1936). (<https://www.digifind-it.com/matawan/data/books/Matawan%201686-1936.pdf> Accessed 04.04.2023)
- [5] www.Findmypast.com accessed 31.03.23

< Figures 12 & 13 *Monmouth Democrat* obituary for Christy Geraghty, 28 August 1884