

SAN ANTONIO TALK

Most of us who have visited the Alamo know that twelve of the defenders were born in Ireland and that another dozen defenders had Irish names. Those Irish fighters did not just happen to be in the wrong town at the wrong time. Irish men and women had been San Antonian and Mexican citizens long before the famous battle for Texas independence.

In 1776, when the United States announced its independence, San Antonio talk already included the rolling sounds of the Irish brogue. Well, maybe.

One of our city's landmarks is the Spanish governor's residence. The resident governor of Texas from 1767 to 1770, was one Hugh O'Connor. Hugh had been a Spanish soldier; but he had been born in Dublin, in Ireland.

At any rate, today more than seventy O'Connor families reside in Hugh's town, San Antonio. We also have a handful of spelling deviants; the O'Connors and OConnors and O'Coners.

You know, of course, what all these O'Connors have in common with their fellow San Antonians, the O'Briens, the O'Dells, the O'Dowds, the O'Krents, O'Learys, O'Neals, O'Neills, O'Rourks and lots of other O'Folks. You're right, of course. All of them are grandchildren.

That's what that Irish prefix *O'* means. Grandchild. (Well, truthfully it most likely meant Grandson. But some scholars argue that *O'* also could mean *descendant*. In any case, I'm sure it means *Grandchild* today.)

Linguistically, you see, those Irish descendants separate themselves from other San Antonio "O-folk," families like the Oakes, Odoms, Ogdens, Ojedas, Oliveres, Olsons, Oroskos, Ortegass, Osbornes, Otts, Ovalles. Oh, Dear. We could go on forever. Anyway, the point is that all of these folks are grandchildren also. Obviously. Obviously, but not linguistically. The Irish just outbrag us with that O'___ tag.

In fact, the Irish probably have even bragged about their names longer than any other known European groups. English people, for example, did not start using family names until after the Norman Invasion, in the eleventh century. The Irish, on the other hand, have been using the clan name O'Neill since the fourth century.

Yes. The clan name. And the clans consisted of many families. Funny isn't it. The Irish liked that grandchild stuff, but it was grandchild of a clan rather than of a family. That means, then, that in San Antonio all those O'Connors can trace their name back to the same clan, but not necessarily to the same family.

When the English invaded Ireland lots of changes occurred in Irish names. Among other changes, being grandchildren lost its importance to Irish men who married English woman. So the linguistic tag disappeared. O'Neill became Neill; O' Glasain became Gleeson; and poor old O'Beaglaoich became just old Begley.

So. How about the rest of you? How are your grandchildren?

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