

## **‘Brothers at Law’**

The past series of blogs have attempted to capture a sense of the lives of my grandfather Davis’ generation, all born at the Boggaun farm in County Leitrim. There is a final story I want to relate which illustrates an aspect of the family that puzzled me. Doing the background work for these stories I had asked a number of times if the Davis family had a hunger for land, and the answer I got back was that it seemed no greater than that of most farmers. However, I discovered a report of a 1925 Drogheda court case that indicated the potency of land in a protracted quarrel between three of the Davis brothers: John, the eldest, Alex, his younger brother by eight years, and Richard, the youngest.



John Davis c 1920

John Davis was born in 1861 at Boggaun, his grandfather having taken up the lease there by 1850, most likely on what was a bankrupt Famine-era farm. Richard, my grandfather, the youngest died there in 1961. This period of 100 years saw enormous

transformation in Ireland. In 1861 Ireland was governed by the Protestant Ascendancy, a century later it had been independent for forty years.



Alex Davis after returning to Boggaun c 1934

I have fond memories of my grandfather Richard. He gives me some connection to his older brothers and sisters, none of whom I knew. He witnessed a period of significant change. While keeping the values of his Church of Ireland community, and with a strong ambition to better himself and his family, he was able to accommodate the transition to a new Ireland, at a time when many of his contemporaries emigrated. After Independence he stood for election with the Ratepayer's Defence Association (a proto Fine Gael party) and polled a reasonable number of cross-community votes. He won widespread support and respect when he put his family and farm into severe debt, following the collapse of his cattle shipping business, to pay farmers for their stock.



Richard Davis sketched from a damaged wedding photograph, original 1918.

‘Brothers at Law’ is a story of the conflict primarily between John and Alex, with Richard apparently involved. John left his home farm on his marriage to Anna Maria Cartwright in 1883 and moved to her home in south Leitrim. At that time Alex was farming at Boggaun, while Richard was a child of four. In south Leitrim John became embroiled in a conflict with the Land League, settling on an evicted farm at Garradice where he was boycotted as a “land grabber” (see previous blog). He faced down this opposition and appeared to prosper. Ten years later with a family of eight he had the resources to move ‘lock-stock-and-front-door’ to a farm at Corballis in County Meath. ‘Lock-stock-and-front-door’ because John brought with him his County Leitrim front door which was fitted to his new home, ‘Boyne View’. Some years ago, this door was replaced by the current owners and was used in an out-building, as it was still of good quality and in some respect to its history. John’s family most likely travelled to County Meath by train as there was a train halt very close to their Garradice farm.



Sisters, Maria Davis and Margaret Davis, nee Cartwright, c 1927

John encouraged a south-Leitrim friend, William Taylor to make the move to County Meath, and William built a house on a thirty-acre farm adjacent to John at Corballis. Their houses were some 50 yards apart. In 1911 William married John's sister-in-law Margaret Cartwright. William died in 1916 and in his will, he left everything to Margaret. The will was challenged in the High Court by William's brother. The Court ruled for Margaret, and she took ownership of the farm. Two years after William's death, Margaret married Alex Davis and he moved into the farm beside his brother John; Alex was 49 and Margaret 36 at that time. Margaret appeared to play some role in the brother's quarrel.

To be continued in next blog.