

The Many Blood Lines

Based upon currently available DNA test results, few as they are, it is already evident that there are possibly dozens of distinct Nolan "blood lines", some known to have originated in County Carlow and others with uncertain origins.

To understand how this could be, it is instructive to look back in history and consider how such blood lines might have originated. A good place to start is about a thousand years ago when surnames began to be adopted throughout Europe. At that time, we know that descendants of Eochaidh Fionn Fothairt, the second century warrior prince, and, likely their extended families, began using O Nualláin as a surname.

For the moment, given the limited number of DNA test results available, it is hard to know what the number of different "blood lines" might have been for the Carlow Nolans but a conservative guess might be 10 or so. From this point onward, the number of blood lines would have increased century by century each time an adopted or foster child took on the name of his adoptive parents, each time a child born out of wedlock took on the Nolan name, each time a family changed its name to Nolan for social or political reasons, etc.

Following this line of thinking, one can see that, again conservatively speaking, by the early 1600s, when immigration and internal migrations within Ireland became more commonplace, the number of Nolan blood lines could have easily doubled to over 20.

For Nolans with Carlow origins, over time, it may be possible to identify to which sub-sept they belong i.e. Ballykealey, Shangarry or Kilbride, etc. This, however, will require a much larger set of DNA test results than is currently available and the supporting genealogical evidence to show that at least a few in a particular DNA grouping are related to that sub-sept.

So far we have only considered Nolan blood lines originating in Carlow but there are indeed others, related to at least two other known Gaelic septs, the Ó hUllacháins (Holohans) of Laois and Offaly and the Ó hUltacháins (Hultaghans) of Fermanagh. For example, with regards to the Ó hUllacháins, it is known that in 1582 a certain Tomhas Ó hUallacháin, a sub-sheriff of county Mayo, acquired land at Crevagh, County Mayo, but then in subsequent land dealings, including the acquisition of the castle of Ballinrobe, County Mayo, he adopted Nolan as his family name.

Besides Ireland, there are other places in Europe where, over the centuries, the Nolan surname or one of its variants has surfaced, names like Knollin, Nollent, Nolin or Van Neuweland. Given the many major events which impacted Irish life over the past thousand years, early Irish Nolan ancestors for these families cannot be ruled out.

Hopefully, over time, as more historical documents come to light and as members of the families in question have their DNA tested, some light can be shed on whether or not they have a link to any of the known Irish Nolan families, families like:

- The Carlow Nolans dating back to the 2nd century with their many different blood lines
- The Kerry Nolans, descended from a Lucius (Luke) O’Nolan of Co. Carlow who resettled to Laois in the mid 1500s and whose descendants then resettled to Kerry in the early 1600s
- The Nolans of Loughboy, believed to be descendants of Carlow Nolans who resettled to Connacht after the arrival of the Normans in 1169
- The Nolans of Ballinrobe, Co. Mayo, descendants of a Thomas Nolan (alias Tomhas Ó hUallacháin) who died in 1628 and is believed to have originally come from Co. Kilkenny.

For many Nolans, conventional genealogical research may be unable to provide satisfactory answers or explanations. Those finding themselves in this situation may want to consider having DNA testing done for their Nolan family line to, at least, get some sort of idea as to the origin of their Nolan family. It should, however, be noted that the answer they seek may only come several years down the road after another long-lost relative of their Nolan family line has had a DNA test done and registered the results for comparison with that of others.

Those wishing to pursue DNA testing may want to check out the [Nolan DNA Project Information](#) at the Worldfamilies.net website where [several Nolan DNA Test Results](#) have already been registered.

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([Email me](#)) March 23, 2019***