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## Tracing Muhammad Ali's Lineage To Ireland

Muhammad Ali may have long-lost cousins from the town of Ennis in County Clare, Ireland — and the world champion is due to meet his distant relations next month on a trip there. The county's genealogist Antoinette O'Brien, who traces Ali's lineage back to the O'Gradys of Ennis, talks to host Guy Raz about Ali's family tree.

Ms. MARY O'DONOVAN(ph): My name is Mary O'Donovan, and my mother was O'Grady from the Turnpike, and there is a possibility that I am related to Muhammad Ali.

Ms. EDELLE O'DONOVAN(ph): My name is Edelle O'Donovan, and I am most probably related to Muhammad Ali, my mother being O'Grady.

GUY RAZ, host:

These folks are not joking. Muhammad Ali may have long lost cousins living along a road called the Turnpike in Ennis, Ireland. And they are awaiting a visit from their famous American kinsman. The greatest of all time is due to arrive in County Clare, Ireland, next month to connect with his roots. And one of the locals hoping to meet him is county genealogist Antoinette O'Brien. She traced the former world champion's lineage for us.

Ms. ANTOINETTE O'BRIEN (Genealogist, County Clare, Ireland): Well, it's not that difficult to understand, I suppose. His mother was Odessa Grady, and she was born in the United States.

RAZ: In Kentucky.

Ms. O'BRIEN: In Kentucky, exactly right, and her father was a man by the name of John Grady(ph). And John Grady's father was the immigrant. So that would be Muhammad Ali's great grandfather, a man by the name of Abe Grady(ph), who was born here in County Clare, which is over in the west of Ireland, in the 1830s, 1840s, just before the great famine, the great famine which saw two million people die of hunger in less than five years.

And immediately after the famine, you had mass immigration, and Muhammad Ali's great-grandfather was one of the many millions that left our little island to seek new lives all over the world.

I don't believe he was registered as born as Abe here in Ireland. I think he may have taken that name on in honor of Abraham Lincoln.

RAZ: Of Abraham Lincoln.

Ms. O'BRIEN: Yeah.

RAZ: Ms. O'Brien, you've been receiving a lot of calls, I understand, at the Clare Heritage Center, where you work, from folks in the area calling to say they might actually also be related to Muhammad Ali, right?

Ms. O'BRIEN: That's right. Young Abe Grady, who left to go to America, almost certainly was not an only child, almost certainly had brothers and sisters, some of whom we believe stayed on here, were married, had children, and the descendants actually still live in the Turnpike area of the town of Ennis.

RAZ: There must be quite a few Gradys and O'Gradys in County Clare. How do you know which ones are actually related to...

Ms. O'BRIEN: Well, believe it or not, it's not a very - it is a relatively common name in County Clare, but not so much in Ennis. And the Turnpike is just a little street within the old town of Ennis, and the records long ago, going back to the 1840s and 1850s, only place one Grady or O'Grady family there, and they're all descended from that original one. So almost certainly, and we are actually working on this at the moment, they are all connected because it's not very far back, really, in terms of generations.

RAZ: So they're all related to Muhammad Ali.

Ms. O'BRIEN: Absolutely, yes, distantly related, but they would all be connected to that John Grady who was living in the Turnpike, renting a house there in 1855. He was the father, we believe, of Abe, who went to America and never came home.

RAZ: So will the Irish now claim Muhammad Ali as an Irish boxer?

Ms. O'BRIEN: Well, we're pretty successful in the Olympics. It's probably one of - our only successful sports in the Olympics. So we're not short of boxers over here, but we are certainly claiming him as an Irishman, anyway.

RAZ: Well, which would make him one of your greatest athletes in history, I'd imagine.

Ms. O'BRIEN: Yeah (unintelligible) absolutely.

RAZ: That's genealogist Antoinette O'Brien, who runs the Clare Heritage Center in County Clare, Ireland. Ms. O'Brien, thank you so much.

Ms. O'BRIEN: Thank you very much.

RAZ: And when Muhammad Ali does arrive in Ennis, O'Grady, descendent or not, everyone is going to turn out.

Councilor FRANKIE NEYLON (Mayor, Ennis, Ireland): As mayor of Ennis, representing the town council and the people of Ennis, we are overjoyed at the fact that Muhammad Ali is coming to visit us. And I can assure that with 50 to 60-thousand people just here to see that great sportsman.

RAZ: That's Ennis Mayor Frankie Neylon, laying out the welcome mat for Irishman Muhammad Ali.

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