

A Note from the Editor: Ireland Reaching Out Diaspora Project

by Lynn Betlock, Editor

I recently learned about the Ireland Reaching Out (Ireland XO) Diaspora project. According to the group's website, "the Ireland XO project is based on a simple idea; instead of waiting for Irish-Americans and their global counterparts to come to Ireland to trace their roots, we go the other way. Working through voluntary effort at a townland, village and parish level, we identify who left, and trace them and their descendants worldwide, proactively engaging with them and inviting them to become part of an extended 'virtual' community with their place of origin. In this way, the entire Irish Diaspora of 70 million can be systematically reunified online and invited back to engage with their ancestral parish for the benefit of all. . . ."

"While Ireland XO parish volunteers are reaching out around the world, the project's website provides a landing point in Ireland for people abroad who have some detail about where their emigrant ancestors come from in Ireland. By joining any parish community online, they can seek direct genealogical research assistance from local people in the area who also volunteer to meet them on their return. This "Meet/Greet/Connect" offer from parish communities across Ireland has been identified as a missing element from developing the Irish Diaspora in times past." A successful pilot already occurred in South-East Galway and the project was launched as a "National Diaspora Programme" in March 2012.

I'm very intrigued by this project. Instead of a descendant tracing one ancestor back to a place of origin, this model has the impetus for the search coming from the place of origin, with a goal of reconstructing the essence of a long-vanished community. This effort reminds me of the numerous and very popular old settlers organizations and Old Home weeks held in New England and elsewhere in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. (For an article on this topic, see "Tracking Migrating Families: The Records of Old Settlers Organizations," by Paula Stuart Warren in the winter 2010 issue of *American Ancestors*.) In the Internet age, it will be fascinating to see what kinds of genealogical and historical connections can be made on a group level across time and distance.