



John Watson, Who's Your Daddy – and Mama?

Identifying John (Jane) Watson's most likely parents involved some guesswork.

Concluding that the John Watson who married Jane Lambie was the son of John Watson and Helen Skeene involved more guesswork than any other decision I made when researching our Dailly ancestors. After all, there were four John Watsons in Dailly Parish whose birth years were reasonably age-appropriate for marrying Jane Lambie, who was born in 1778.

Two of those four were sons of John Watson and Helen Skeene – John¹, born in 1773, and his younger brother John², born in 1778, both born at the Smithy in Old Dailly. It was not uncommon to reuse a given name for a younger sibling when the older sibling with that name died. John¹ would have died by 1778, and thus can be ruled out as John (Jane).

John³ Watson was the son of Gilbert Watson, who had moved into Dailly Parish from Maybole, and his wife, Elizabeth Gowdie. John³ was born in 1774. John³ had two sisters: Agnes and Anne. The three children were born at Balcomie, Merkland and in the village of Dailly.

John⁴ Watson was one of four children of Robert Watson and Agnes Crawford. John⁴ was born in 1776. John⁴ had three sisters: Jean, Agnes and Margaret. The four children were all born at Kilkerran.

Geography as a Clue

After John and Jane married, they started their family at Hawkhill, which is just outside of Old Dailly, whereas Gilbert and Elizabeth's family was centered around New Dailly, and Robert and Agnes' family was centered around Kilkerran.

But people often traveled much further to find work. It is also possible that Robert himself was born at Old Dailly, and John Watson and Jannet Cathcart were his parents, making him John²'s uncle. So, geography by itself does not provide compelling evidence at this point.

Traditional Scottish Naming Conventions as a Clue

John Watson and Jane Lambie named their eight kids, in order, William, Robert, Agnes, James, Janet, John, Helen and Hugh.

John²'s parents' names were John and Helen. His siblings' names were Hugh, William, Alexander and Henry.

Jane's father's name was William (her mother's name is unknown). Her siblings' names were Robert, Agnes, Janet, William, Thomas, Margaret, James and Elizabeth.

Traditional Scottish conventions for naming a child relied heavily on drawing on names of the parents, the grandparents, the parents' siblings and sometimes the great grandparents, sometimes in a preferred order. However, the rules were not rigid, and there were many reasons for not always following them.

- For more about these naming conventions, see [Scottish Given Name Conventions for Children](#).

If John (Jane) were John², then every one of John and Jane's eight children shared a name with one of their close relatives, and all the known grandparents' names were used. Because of the popularity of some names, if there were just two to three children to consider, this might be regarded as a coincidence. But there were eight children who fit the conventions.

If John (Jane) were John³, then his parents' names were Gilbert and Elizabeth. His siblings were Agnes and Anne. It would be reasonable to find that at least one of John and Jane's children would be named Gilbert (especially as there were five sons) or Elizabeth if naming conventions were followed. But only five of the eight children shared a name with a close relative, and two of the three known grandparents' names were not used.

If John (Jane) were John⁴, then his parents' names were Robert and Agnes, and his siblings were Jean, Agnes and Margaret. All of the known grandparents' names were used. It would be reasonable to find that at least one of John and Jane's children would be named either Jean or Margaret if naming conventions were followed. But only five of the eight children shared a name with a close relative.

Geography as a Better Clue

Rather than being born to John Watson and Jannet Cathcart in Old Dailly, I believe that it is more likely that this Robert Watson was originally from Kirkmichael Parish. He was living in High Mains of Barclanachan when he married Agnes Crawford, a servant at Kilkerran (Barclanachan was part of Kilkerran at this point, and the Barclanachan name was falling out of use). Their children were born at Kilkerran. Kilkerran is in Dailly Parish, although it is close to Kirkmichael Parish.

Robert died soon after – at High Mains – and was buried in Kirkmichael. Especially because his wife Agnes herself was from Dailly Parish, if Robert had been born at Old Dailly, it would have been unusual for him to be buried at Kirkmichael instead of with family in the Old Dailly Church churchyard or in the churchyard of the Dailly Parish Church.

Kirkmichael Parish does not come up anywhere else in our family history, so I think this makes it less likely that Robert's son John⁴ is the one who married Jane Lambie.

Other Evidence

Although the ages are slightly off, the record of John and Jane Wasson's 1834 arrival in the United States shows that John and Jane were about the same age. John² and Jane were both born in 1778. John⁴ was two years older than Jane, and John³ was four years older than Jane.

Conclusion

Traditional Scottish naming conventions were widely but not always followed in the 1700s. But if John Watson and Jane Lambie were reasonably following them when naming their eight children, then John² is easily the best fit for who John (Jane) is, making John Watson and Helen Skeene his parents.

I did come across someone else's research who used John³ as John (Jane) and another who used John⁴. But their available information did not provide any explanation that supported their choice over other options. I have not yet found any information that favors either John³ or John⁴ over John².

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