CHAPTER 5

THE MYSTERY OF MATHEW SEE/SEAY

In my manuscript, "The Mystery of Mathew SEE," ³⁶ I established the fact that Mathew was an immigrant to this country and documented in greater detail some of the aspects of his life, and that of his descendants, that I have but alluded to in this narrative. The particular "mystery" I set out to solve in that discussion was to identify the immigrant for our family. There is, however, a further "mystery" of Mathew SEE/SEAY, and that is the mystery of his origin. To our misfortune, a comprehensive examination of documents in Ireland, England and Scotland has not produced any record of Mathew SEE/SEAY in the Old Country. Thus, there is no primary evidence, that I have seen, to connect Mathew with any country in Europe. In order to try to determine Mathew's origin, we are left to rely on a longstanding family tradition, for which there is no primary documentation, and an examination of the records of Ireland, which provides a few clues and suggestions, primarily with regard to the various spellings of particular names, for which primary documentation does exist.

Excellent comprehensive research by recent SEAY family researchers, including Dr. Hugh SEAY of Delaware, seems to prove that there were multiple immigrants to this country who carried the surname SEAY, or an equivalent. Thus, any discussion of the origin of the SEAY surname must consider the idea that there may be multiple origins. Perhaps this is the reason that persons by the name of SEAY claim Ireland, England and France, among other locations, as places of the name's origin. Perhaps all persons who today carry the surname SEAY are, in actuality, not related.

In addition, a discussion of the origin of our name must be tempered by the realization that traditions sometimes spring up in families which, when held to the harsh light of primary documentation and specific and circumstantial evidence, turn out to be unfounded. A family tradition can be helpful in many cases but, to be credible, it must be supported by facts, evidence and primary documents.

Why Mathew's Line Holds To An Irish Origin.

The descendants of Mathew SEE/SEAY hold to an Irish origin, based on the following two reasons.

1. It's a family tradition.

For all of my life, I have been told by my family that our SEAY name is Irish and that it evolved from the Irish name O'SHEA, or a variant spelling of that name, such as SHAY or SHEE. In my discussions with SEAY family members since 1970, I have found that most of the persons in the line of Mathew hold to this tradition, and I have found it to be true for various branches of Mathew's line, many of whom do not know each other and have not talked with each other. It is widespread and has been passed on from generation to generation since before 1800. This is not to say that the existence of the family

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Raleigh F. Seay, Jr., Ph.D., "Tidewater Virginia Families, A Magazine of History and Genealogy," Virginia Lee Hutcheson Davis, ed., vol. 6, nos. 1 and 2, May/June 1997 and August/September 1997.

tradition means that the tradition is true. It is to say that the family has believed it to be true, and that they have held this belief since some time prior to 1800. I have fully documented this tradition in detail in "The Irish Seays," vols. I and II.

2. Mathew's surname is found in Ireland.

In searching for Mathew's origin, I have found that the two variants of Mathew's name in America – SEE and SEAY – are also found in Ireland. O'SEE, O'SEEYE, SHEEY and O'SE are found in the south of Ireland, connected with the O'SHEA/O'SHEE family, and SEAY is found in the north of Ireland, in County Down, connected in some way with the name SAWEY. It is possible that the two names (SEE and SEAY) are connected in Ireland and it is significant that there is no other place in the western world, other than America, where one finds both of these names, spelled in these ways, over a period of many generations.

As a matter of interest, and in support of an Irish origin, I have documented over 100 instances of other SEAYs, who are both connected and not connected to Mathew, to my knowledge, who hold to an Irish tradition in their individual families and who have done so for many generations.

As a matter of clarity, here are several examples of the kinds of family traditions that hold to an Irish ancestry. None of these are primary and some of them are arguable. In at least two cases, they are part of official biographies. Nevertheless, while they do not constitute conclusive proof, they demonstrate the depth and breadth of the tradition and demonstrate part of the reason that our family believes our SEAY name to be Irish.

Examples Of The SEAY Family's Irish Tradition.

Walter Carroll SEAY.

Sherry Blanchette of Lovingston, Virginia, in a letter of February 28, 1990, states, of her grandfather, Walter Carroll SEAY, "Many times Grandpa would say that we were Irish and that the name was formerly O'SHEA. Grandpa could speak a little Gaelic and sometimes he would talk in an Irish brogue to tickle us. 'Don't let them tell you that you are anything but Irish,' he would say.'" Later, in a telephone conversation, Sherry said that she was told by her grandfather that the name was changed at the "custom house." Mae SEAY, wife of Dexter SEAY, of Lynchburg, Virginia, said that Walter told her the family went to England, changed the name to SEE or SEAY, then came to America.

> John SEE/SEAY.

In "Old Meriwether County, Georgia And Its People," publication date unknown, sent to me from Frank SEAY of Perry, Florida, the manuscript reads, in part, "The first John SEE came to North Carolina from Ireland so the family legend goes. It must have some truth for each of the present generations were told the same story. The John SEE who came into Meriwether County was born in Georgia, but his parents were born in North Carolina." This manuscript, of which I have a copy, goes on to say that SEE was the original spelling in this country, that it was O'SEE or O'SEAY in Ireland, and that the name was changed at some point to SEAY because of

the teasing that the SEE spelling engendered.³⁷

Barbara SEAY Powell.

Responding to my letter of July 9, 1991, Barbara POWELL of Highland Springs, Virginia, told me that the name SEAY is Irish "mixed with English." She stated that "the original name was O'SHEA." In a subsequent telephone conversation, she said that she has always been told the name was O'SHEA and was changed to SEAY. She said they were in England at the time and changed the name to SEAY in England.

> Charles Marian SEAY.

Charles Marion SEAY, of Appomatox, Virginia, and died in 1987. According to his son, Mike SEAY, he wrote in one of his personal library books (probably on December 16, 1948) the following information:

"History of the SEAYs

Charles Edward SEAY -- father Annie Martin SEAY -- mother

Charles Thomas SEAY -- grandfather Susan Carolyn Thomas SEAY -- grandmother

George SEAY -- great grandfather (lived to be 104) Betsy SEAY -- great grandmother (lived to be 106)

George and Betsy SEAY came to America from Ireland and settled in Lynchburg at the time of George LYNCH, founder of Lynchburg. Charles Thomas SEAY was married twice. His second wife was Francis LINTHICUM."

Mike also told me that the name SEAY used to be O'SHAY and that his father had told him this. He said that his father got the information from his own father, Charles Edward SEAY.

This same information was found in the family Bible of Lennie Thomas SEAY, probably written by his daughter Cora Lee in 1977 and, perhaps, obtained from Charles Marion SEAY. According to numerous relatives of Charles Marion SEAY, the fact that the SEAYs came from Ireland was widely held in the family.

B.C. SEAY.

From "History of Kentucky," published 1922, there is a citation that references B.C. SEAY.

One cannot help noting Walter Carroll SEAY's comment that when the family went from Ireland to England, they changed the name to SEE, and that Mathew SEE/SEAY's surname was spelled SEE the first 3 times for which we have written records in this country. The Irish Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns includes a citation for an O SEE and an O SEEYE in the 1500's (discussed later in this report).

"His great-grandfather was a native of Ireland, and on coming to this country, lived for a time in Virginia and later became a pioneer of Washington County, Kentucky."

> Rufus SEAY.

Lee Ann COLLINS posted the following information on the Internet on November 17, 2000, extracted from an Oklahoma history, with respect to her ancestor, Rufus SEAY.

"The present editor and proprietor of the Oklahoma Ledger at Sterling has had a long and varied career in the states of Oklahoma and Texas, was one of the early settlers in Pottawatomie County, Oklahoma, more than twenty years ago, and has at different times been a farmer, rancher, preacher and editor. He is one of the strong men of his community, and conducts his paper for the enlightenment of the community. Born in Van Zandt County, Texas, November 25, 1857, he comes of an old North Carolina family, which was transplanted from Ireland in the early days by his great-grandfather, Austin SEAY, who spent the rest of his days in North Carolina."

Thus, we have a continuing Irish family tradition and a continuation of the SEE and SEAY spellings. Accordingly, the mystery of Mathew's origin may have much to do with the original or preferred spelling of his name. If he spelled his name SEE, then it is likely he originated in the south of Ireland. If he spelled it SEAY, he may have come from the north. It is possible that the two names may be connected, both in the north and the south of Ireland..

The SEE Name In The South Of Ireland.

If you look at Ireland from the air, the island resembles a giant teddy bear lying on its side, facing the Atlantic. The area of Ireland from which the O'SHEA family springs is in the south and includes the counties of Kerry, Cork, Limerick, Tipperary and Kilkenny. Predominantly, the O'SHEA spelling is found in Kerry and Cork and the O'SHEE spelling in Kilkenny. Limerick and Tipperary are not primary repositors of the O'SHEA/O'SHEE name, but persons by that name have lived there for centuries.

If Virginia is a "burned county," then Ireland is a "burned country," in many respects. Most of Ireland's genealogical records were burned in 1916, during the Easter Rebellion, which led to Irish independence from England. Thus, Irish genealogical records are sparse, particularly prior to 1850. I read somewhere that if your family came to Ireland prior to 1850, you have less than a 10% chance of identifying the immigrant. This dearth of records stands in marked contrast to England, whose genealogical records are abundantly more plentiful.

In addition, Irish names have been notoriously anglicized, some beyond recognition. Many "O's" and "Mac's" have been dropped and some Irish names have disappeared forever. The most authoritative examination of early Anglicization of Irish names is found in volumes I – IV of The Irish Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns, recently published in 1994, Edmund Burke Publisher, Dublin. Volume I contains a marvelous introduction which is worthwhile reading by itself. Only 350 1994 editions were published, of which 330 were for sale. I own number 326 which occupies a prominent place in my personal library. According to the introduction, many Irish names, particularly rare ones, are found here, that are not found in any other place, and they manifest the Anglicization of Irish names that was occurring in Ireland at that time. A "fiant" is a kind of pardon, offered by the Crown to persons in Ireland that have offended in some way.

Thus, the persons listed in the fiants are Irishmen, either native Irishmen, or like the Normans, persons who have, at the time of the fiants, been in Ireland so long as to be regarded as Irishmen. The Normans, it is well known, became "more Irish than the Irish." The persons listed in the Fiants are not Englishmen nor Scotsmen.

Two of the volumes contain information that shed light on our "mystery." The first is an O'SEE spelling in County Limerick in 1577.

Ryckerd O See, 1577

"Pardon to Donoghe M'Crab, of Galbally, in Arhle, co. Limerick, gent., Murrihirtagh m'Rery O Hirnan of Sronell, same co., and Ee m'M wrihirtig O Hirnam, of same, kerns, Donald M'Ne Marra, of Galbally, harper, Ryckerd O See, husbandman, John roa O Brennan, kern, Rory M'Donnell, tailor, Philip m'Edm. M'Bubbon, Philip m'Teig O Kelly, and Ea more O Hikye, kerns, Conoghor m'Diermod O Mulrian, husbandman, Ullig m'Miler Burck and Tho. M'Shane O Keyllye, kerns, of the same place. 7 Sept., 1577." 38

Here, we find the O'SEE spelling in the year 1577 and we find it in the south of Ireland, County Tipperary, which connects with County Kerry to the west and County Kilkenny to the east. Recall that Mathew's name was spelled SEE in Virginia in 1685 and later, and this may have been his preferred spelling. Dropping the "O," we find that Mathew utilized the exact spelling in Virginia that is found in Ireland, some 112 years earlier. By note, in addition, the various ways the English recorders wrote the names of all of these Irishmen, we can more easily understand how Mathew's name might have been anglicized. This phenomenon is much more apparent in Ireland than in other countries.

The <u>Fiants</u> volumes contain another interesting spelling that gives us more information with which to understand Mathew's name:

Conoch wre oige O Seeye, 1573

"Pardon to Donal O Sullivain alias O Swllivain More, of Dounkeran, co. Cork, gent., Mary ni Cormicke, his wife, owen O Swllivain, of Donkierrain, gent., Silli ni vecarri, his wife, Dermot O Swllivain, and Bwoghe O Sullivain, gentlemen, Dermot m'Moris I Brenain, Donald m'Moris I Brenain, and John m'Moris I Brenain, yeomen of the same place, John m'Marihirti I Brenain of Donlooch, Thomas m'Marihirti I Brenain of same, Teige m'Marihirti Y Brenain, of same, Donald m'Teige Y Brenain, of Donkieran, John rowe O Brenain, of Donkieran, Conochowr rowe O Brenain, of same, Conoch wre oige O Seeye, of Donlooche, Thomas O Shey of same, Dermon m'Bwoige Y Hullivain of Donkieran, Buellagy M'Keygan of Doonloghe, and John O Dwill of Donlooch, yeomen. In consideration of their having given 51 cows for the army in Munster, and other conditions. 6 May, 1573." 39

³⁹ The Irish Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns, Vol. II, 1558-1586, Edmund Burke Publisher (1994), Dublin, # 2258, p. 292.

The Irish Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns, vol. 2, 1558-1586, (Edmund Burke Publisher, 1994) # 3097, p. 420.

In this instance, we have the intriguing case of the name being recorded as O'SEEYE, in County Cork, at an even earlier date, 1573. County Cork is located in the far southwest of Ireland and is the home of, among others, the Irish patriot, Michael Collins. When we examine the current spelling of our name, SEAY, and contrast it to this O'SEEYE spelling in 1573, the similarities are eerily similar. Perhaps this is an example of the mysterious silent "y" that came to be associated with our name.

According to Sylvia SEE of Alberta, Canada, Margaret SEE arrived in New York on September 21, 1847, age 18.⁴⁰ The citation gives her port of departure was Liverpool and her native country was given as Ireland. Two years later, Francis SEE arrived in New York on May 7, 1849, age 26.⁴¹ The citation gives his port of departure as Liverpool and his native country as Ireland. Thus, according to these records, we have an SEE spelling in Ireland in 1847 and 1849.

Three other points deserve consideration. First, the surname O'SE or SE as a variant of O'SHEA has come into use in the west of Ireland in the past 100 years. Perhaps this is a further example of the way Mathew's surname evolved. Second, the <u>Fiants</u> contain a variety of other names related to O'SHEA/O'SHEE, any of which is phonetically equivalent to SEE or SEAY. One, in particular, bears closer scrutiny, and that is the name of Shane O'SHEE, about which we will talk more momentarily. Third, the Gaelic spelling of O'SHEA or O'SHEE is O SEAGHDHA, a name that seems very similar to SEAY.

"History House Publishing Ltd," Ennis, County Clare, Ireland, lists the variants of O'SHEA as SHEA, SHEE, SE, SEAY AND SHAY, with and without the "O."

When subjected to the scrutiny of professional genealogists, the consensus suggests that it is more likely the name evolved from the Kilkenny line of the family, nearly all of whom spell the name as O'SHEE or SHEE. The history of this family makes for interesting reading. ⁴² Suffice it to say that they originated in Kerry back in the mists of antiquity, moved to Tipperary for a generation or two, then migrated to Kilkenny in the sixteenth century, where they were active and prominent. According to the history books, they were "disposed" of their lands immediately following the Cromwellian invasion, in 1649. The most famous member of the Kilkenny family is Sir Richard SHEE, who lived in the middle to late 16th century, for whom the SHEE Alms House in Kilkenny is named. Interestingly, the family includes at least four persons by the name of Mathew SHEE.

⁴² Any number of books of Irish history and genealogy, such as "Old Kilkenny Review"; <u>The Book of Irish Families Great and Small</u>, (Irish Genealogical Foundation, Kansas City, 1992) 239; Rev. Patrick Woulfe, <u>Irish Names and Surnames</u> (Irish Genealogical Foundation, 1992) 641.

⁴⁰ Ancestry.com. "Irish Immigrants: New York Port Arrival Records, 1846-1851."

⁴¹ Ibid

http://www2.smumn.edu/uasal/sheagen/D0001/1763.html. Any good book of Kilkenny history will enumerate these persons, also.

<u>Name</u>	Date of Birth	Date of Death	Location
Mathew SHEE44	c. 1559	Unknown	Kilkenny, Ireland
Mathew SHEE ⁴⁵	c.1575-1585	Unknown	Kilkenny, Ireland
Mathias SHEE ⁴⁶	1680	1736	Kilkenny, Ireland
Mathias SHEE	1720	Unknown	Nantes, France

According to Paul Reed, a Mathew SHEE was awarded a grant of arms in Dublin on December 10, 1730. He was the son of John SHEE and Mary O' Ferrell and we know very little else about him. However, this person seems to be the same Mathias SHEE, born in 1680, who emigrated to Nantes, France, and died there in 1736.

During that same period, the name of Henry SHEE, of the same family, was spelled as SHEATH and as SHEEY (c. 1586-1588). There may be other instances of this spelling, but the records are very sparse and do not provide that information.

At the very least, this establishes the presence of the name Mathew SHEE in Ireland and, in the midst of the family's oral tradition, the fact that so many records have been destroyed, as well as the O'SEE, O'SEEYE and SHEEY spellings, one must consider the possibility that Mathew SEE might have come from this line.

The SEAY Name In The North Of Ireland.

According to the IGI and the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland, the name SEAY has been present continuously in the north of Ireland, associated with County Down, since at least 1721.⁴⁷ The records of the great manor house Finnebrogue, formerly owned by the Maxwell family, where many SEAYs worked as tenant farmers, also provide evidence that establishes the presence of the family in County Down since the middle 1700's. The same is true for a variety of gravestone inscriptions in the parish of Inch, near Downpatrick, where we find James SEAY (1762-1850) and others, and in Bangor, twenty miles to the north, where one finds Patrick SEAY (1757-1827) and his family.

There are six families by this name in the north of Ireland in 2001. I have personally spoken to each of them by phone and have met two of them in person. In addition, I have traveled to County Down and conducted a week-long investigation in the area around Downpatrick, Bangor and Belfast. As noted earlier, there is no other place in the western world, outside of America, where one finds the name SEAY, spelled this way, over a period of many

This person was born at about the same time as Mathew SEE of Virginia. Is this person our ancestor? He is the son of Robert IV O'SHEE and Margaret Rothe. According to Paul Reed's research report of June 14, 1995, there is a reference to Mathew SHEATH (same name, different spelling) on May 30, 1613, and a notice that he represented the town of Rosse (close to Kilkenny) in that same year. Also, there is a reference for a Mathew SHEE appointed to examine "a matter" in Kilkenny, dated July 13, 1647. These references may or may not be the same person.

The Kilkenny family often wrote its given names in Latin. Mathias is Latin for Mathew.

⁴⁷ Ulster Historical Foundation Search Report, 1994, which cites the 1721 marriage of Jane Seay to John West, in Downpatrick, Church of Ireland. One cannot refrain from noting that the town of West Point, Virginia, in King William County, was named for the West family.

This person is the son of Elias SHEE, who was the brother of the above Mathew SHEE.

generations. According to a variety of researchers and historians, the SEAY name is also connected with SOY, SAWEY and SHAW. I have all of these names documented in my office and have a host of supporting reports from historians, genealogists, researchers, university professors and museum curators. If Mathew preferred to spell his name SEAY, instead of SEE, it seems that he must have come from County Down, because this is the place where one finds this name.

The consensus of opinion by the researchers seem is inconclusive with respect to the origin of the SEAY name in County Down and there is no primary documentation to help. Ulster, as we all know, is mostly populated with persons of Irish, Scottish and English descent, although one also finds persons of French, Norman, Viking and Flemish ancestry, among others. In addition, while most native Irish are Catholic and most English are Protestant, this is not universally true and is certainly inconclusive with respect to identifying one's ancestry.

The Ulster Historical Foundation says that there is more evidence to believe that the SEAY name is Irish than there is to believe that it is Scottish or English and, indeed, the UHF rules out a Scottish origin. Professor Roger Blaney, of Queen's College, Belfast, suggests O SEAGHDHA. ⁴⁸ Linguist and historian Ed Kneafsey believes the name derives from the Gaelic Mac SITHIGH, which is pronounced "Mac Sheehy," and is Sheahy without the "h's" – S'EA'Y. Professor John Buchanan agrees that MacSITHIGH is a probability. Genealogist and historian Sean Murphy believes the name comes from the same root as SHAW. Genealogist Shelley Rowan agrees with a SHAW derivation. Dr. Brian Turner, curator of the Down Museum, says it is a "mystery," but leans toward something connected with SHAW.

In 1997, the UIster Historical Foundation researched the Tudor <u>Fiants</u>, to which we have referred several times, and discovered the presence of Shane "SAYE (or EAYE)" in County Down. UHF reported that this is "certainly" a reference to the SEAY family of County Down, and establishes the presence of the family there in 1550.

Shane Saye B Tudor Fiant 6711 B Elizabeth, 1602

Pardon to Patr. Savage, Iord of little Ardes, in the province of Ulster, Rowland Savage, his brother, Rich. Savage f

Down, in the province of UIster. Submission in co. Down, and other provisions as in 6565. B 22 Nov. xIv. (Cal. P.R., p. 628.) 49

Thus, if Mathew preferred to spell his name SEAY, instead of SEE, it seems almost certain that he must have come from the County Down SEAY family.

Does Shane O'SHEE of Dublin Connect The Kilkenny And Down Families?

Based on the records that we have examined, there is little question that the SHEE family of Kilkenny moved around quite a bit, beginning with their excursion from Kerry in the 13th century, continuing through the Cromwellian invasion in 1649 and onward to the migration of Mathias SHEE to France in the early 1700's. In the 1600's, one finds SHEEs scattered throughout most of southeastern and central Ireland, including Waterford, Kilkenny and Dublin. Once again, we turn to the Tudor Fiants. Is there a person of the SHEE family who could connect to the County Down SEAY family? As it happens, there is a citation that places a man by the name of Shane O'SHEE in County Dublin in 1582.

Fiant 3995 B Elizabeth ⁵⁰ B 1582 A.D.

Pardon to Edm. O Byrne, of Tullaghferys, co. Dublin, gent., Donogh m=Edm. O Byrne, of same, gent. Gerald Roo of same, horseboy, Edm. O Morogh, of Hollywood, Chr. Eustace, of same, and John Morrishe, of same, yoemen, Donogh M'Gilpatrick, Shane O Shee, Patr. M'Teige, Shane O Quane, and Dermot M'Maoge, of the same, husbandmen, Molaghlyn Bane, of same, horseboy, Wm. O Nowan, of same, husb., Wm. M=Robart, of same, cottier, Mortagh O Morye, of same, Gilpatrick M'Cormock, of Russelston, Donyll duf M'Doole, Gillernowe O Rushe, Dermot O Rushe, of the same, husbandmen, Horloghe ne peke, of same, spinster, Mortagh M'Gilpatrick, and Donogh bedy O Murrye, of same, cottiers, Mayne O Rowerk, of same, husbandman, Elicia nyne Emon, of same, spinster, Edm. O Roreke, of same, cablert, Murtagh gare Keghow, of same, cottier, Phillip M'Dallow, of same, husb., Donogh O Kennaw, of Rasallagh, husb., Connor O Kennaw, of same, cablert, Murtagh O Kennaw, of same, husb., Maghe O Kahane, of same cottier, Hugh O Kahane, of same, cottier, Shane relaghe Tallon, of same, gent., Eleonora Keting, his wife, Charles Tallon, of same, gent., Elizabeth ny Conochor, his wife, Wm. Branagh, of same, husb., Gilpatrick O Ryane, of Hollywood, husb., Shane duff O Moillallagh, of same, cottier, Shane M'Conyll and Donogh boy, of same, stodekepers, David O More, of Kyll, co. Kildare, husb., and Gerlad m'Shane Fitz Gerald of Ballaghsex, gent. Security as in 897. Provision as it 3935. At the suit of Rob. Pyphold. B [26?] Aug., xxiv.

Is this Shane O'SHEE the same person who is listed as Shane "SAYE/EAYE" in County Down in 1602? Arguing in favor of this idea, one points to the reasonable proximity of County Dublin to County Down, the phonetic equivalence of the two surnames, the sameness of the two

The Irish Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns During the Reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI, Philip and Mary, and Elizabeth 1, Vol. 2, 1558-1586, Dublin, Edmund Burke Publisher, 1994, p. 553.

⁴⁹ <u>The Irish Fiants of the Tudor Sovereigns, Vol. II, 1558-1586, Edmund Burke Publisher (1994), Dublin, # 2258, p. 292.</u>

given names, the fact that the English were anglicizing Irish names indiscriminately and almost unrecognizably, and the similarity of the dates in question. Arguing against this idea, it is obvious that this is a tenuous and inconclusive notion. Thus, all we may say is that it is theoretically possible that these are the same persons, but we have no way of knowing for sure, at this point.