

Ui Mac Muirheartaigh

Gaelic translation:

*'The family of the son
of a Sea Ruler.'*

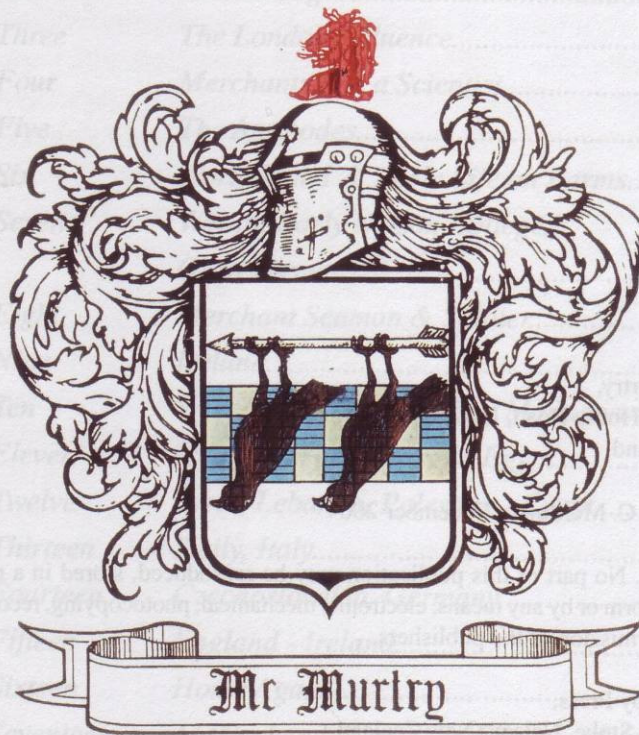


by George McMurtry

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Foreword

This book is a miscellaneous collection of family history, autobiography and biography. It is for limited publication, mainly for members of my family and extended family and was written in response to requests from young family members for details of our history. Part of the autobiography is a response to persistent questions from my youngest sister, Doreen, such as "what did you do during the nine years you were overseas?"

Regular requests for me to write an autobiography also came from Graeme Spencer, former editor of *The Nelson Mail*. When I told him I was not autobiographic material he said, "take the word of a hardened old journalist, many of those who write autobiographics, can't, and those who could - don't." I deeply regret that I procrastinated and he died before I finished this work.

My good friends at Nelson Institute, Jill Blechynden, convenor of the Institute's 'Coffee & Books' meetings, together with Max Lash, Christopher Vine and Nelson authors, gave their support. Also my father and cousins Ted McMurtry and Bob Sanders, who gave me family documents.

The first chapter contains early history taken from Irish records. I was fortunate to access these in Dublin, Belfast, Oxford and London, and take extensive notes from them. Books consulted included 'The Annals of Munster', 'Annals of Leinster and Ulster', 'Chronican Scotorum', 'Annals of the Four Masters', and 'The Book of Invasions'. More modern records relate to the histories of Bute and Island Magee and genealogical works by the Rev. Patrick Wolfe, Messrs Black and McLysart, MacDougall and others. American records date from approximately 1730-45. Modern family genealogists include Richard McMurtry from Berkley University, California, Maimie Thompson (nee McMurtry) Mass USA and Samuel McMurtry, Elizabeth McMurtry and Mrs Curry of Australia.

I am again indebted to my friend Justine Wallace, for typesetting and proofreading, layout of the book for the printer and cover design. She was endlessly patient during these time-consuming tasks.

Coat of Arms

The McMurtrys who settled on Island Magee were seamen and farmers with no claim to aristocracy except by tradition of descent which was extinguished by new comers on their land. The patrynomic from which their surname is derived, Muircheartaigh, is spelt in a variety of ways and in modern gaelic is McUradaigh. It originated in Munster and was adopted both as a personal name and surname in Ireland and early Scotland.

An early book housed in London Museum and called 'The Patrynomica Brittonia' lists Muircheartaigh as the name was earlier recorded, as a family of Celtic aristocracy. Dr. David McMurtry of Kentucky University inherited from Alexander David McMurtry, a Canadian, a genealogical collection on the early history of our family. He enlarged the collection and on his death it went to Richard K. McMurtry of Berkeley University who in turn has added greatly to the work. Dr. David gave the title to it - 'MacMurtrie-Clan Family Historical Records Worldwide'.

The meaning Muircheartaigh etc. is Sea Ruler and Dr. David claimed for this ancient family a coat of arms which depicts a 'Sea Eagle on a White Shield with Helmeted Head of Armour Bearing a Bowed Arm Holding a Dagger with Sea Snake Curled Around.'

My research suggests this Emblem precedes the emergence of Heraldic Coats of Arms by several centuries. It traces back to 9th century emblems painted on the sails of Irish boats which belonged to branches of the Muircheartaigh. Cores descendants in Scotland, took the patrynomic to Arran, Bute and Kintyre where the inhabitants spoke Gaelic until the end of the 14th century. The 1506 Charter which granted Baronies to the freeholders of Bute resulted in the patrynomic being transformed to a variety of Anglicised spellings.

An influx of Stewarts on the Island of Bute resulted in their purchase of the land belonging to the Muircheartaigh and consequent extinction of the Baronies; a large proportion of the Baron's descendants left the island. Those who remained under the names MacKirdie and MacMurtrie, by virtue of being the original inhabitants of the land, became septs of the Stewarts and adopted the tartan and arms of the Stewarts of Bute.

Those who left Bute sailed as galloglass of the MacDonalds (later McDonnells of Antrim) under the names McCurdy and McMurtry. A smaller branch (settled in Kintyre) adopted the name Curry, a sept of MacDonald of Clan Ranald.

Some if not all of the Barons of Bute may have adopted coats of arms. It is possible that the Coat of Arms of a McMurtry depicted in 'The World Book of McMurtrys' is one of these. It is illustrated in 'Burke's General Armory' and depicts 'ar. A Fesse Chequay AZ. And Of the Field, over all Crows SA. Pendant On An Arrow Fesseways PPR'.

Translated the Blazon also describes the original colours of McMurtry Arms as: 'Silver. A Horizontal Band Checkered Blue and Silver, Over All Two Black Crows Hanging Horizontally on a Naturally Coloured Arrow'.

Above the Shield and Helmet is the Crest, described as: 'A Red Lion's Head, jagged. On scroll below is 'McMurtry'.

Survey, ordinance reports on Island Magee contain a number of references to ancient Coats of Arms carved on oak furniture and early grave stones. When our Grandad and Gran visited the W in the 1880's they learned of our forebears in Bute and the Barons. Unfortunately, Gran did not recall the carved armchairs and probably four or five hundred years after they were made they have become lost.

Apart from those of the Anglo-Normans, Heraldic Arms were adopted by Irish families after the establishment of a Heraldic Office in Belfast about 1600 AD. The English forced our very distant Muirheartaigh cousins in Munster to anglicise the Gaelic patrynomic. One such family, now known as Moriarty adopted the ancient Sea Eagle emblem for their Heraldic Arms.

The McMurtry one with the Crows and Red Lion's Head etc. conjures up a fantasy. Did James IV, who went to Bute on hunting trips, in the place of deer stalking, shoot crows with a bow and arrow on one of the Barons' properties? And were both these coats of arms among those carved on Magee Island furniture? Personally, I prefer the Sea Eagle.

Editors Note of 2008: Alexander David McMurtrie of Sarnia, Ontario, Canada created the MacMurtrie Clan Family Historical Records Worldwide in 1938. Upon his death in 1959, the records passed to Dr. David C McMurtry of the University of Kentucky, Lexington, Kentucky. In 1995, the records passed to Richard K. McMurtry of Berkeley, California who had the entire collection microfilmed by the Mormons (LDS Church) to be made available to interested parties through their branch library loan program.. In 1999, the records of the Scottish, Irish, and English McMurtries passed to Sam McMurtry of New South Wales, Australia. In 2007, the original records concerning the American families were disbursed to various libraries throughout the United States.

Chapter 1

Barons of Bute

Notes on some branches of the Irish family, O'Miurcheartach, Mac Muircheartach, McUradaigh Muirhertaigh, (sea ruler). In modern Gaelic, McUradaigh. Myths, legends & History

Barons of Bute

The Greeks gave the name 'Keltai' to people of Indo - European origin who formed one of the great movements of people from the East into Northern Greece via the Danube. The social characteristics of these people varied but they spoke a more or less common language. In early Greece when that country was split into many city - states, Ionia was occupied by a branch of these people who were described as temperamental, imaginative seafarers, merchants; and a cosmopolitan people who were intellectual, fond of finery and invented the drama. They joined another Celtic people who also arrived by the Danube and probably were originally Seythian horsemen. At a later date these people were called Goidels by the Romans, or Picts.

The Keltai were tall, fairskinned, blue eyed , lymphatic of temperament, with elongated heads. The Goidels were shorter and round headed. Invasions of both branches eventually moved into Ireland - The Goidels, known later as Cruithne or Irish Picts, possibly 200 years before the Keltai who, at the time of entering Ireland, were variously known as the Milesians or Scots.

Celtic culture was dominated by the power of Druids who passed on through the generations by word of mouth, the history of their people. Christianity brought a decline in the power of the Druids and the introduction of the written word as collected by early Irish Monks from the 4th Century and recorded in illuminated manuscripts. These stories are a collection of myths, legends, and history, unique in Europe.

The books are stored in The Royal Irish Academy and Trinity College, Dublin, the Bodleion Library, Oxford, and the British Museum. One of the oldest copies of these is `The Book of Leinster.' Also are `The Book Of the Annals of

Armagh" The Book Of Munster, the Book Of Ulster, 'Annals Of The Four Masters,' 'The Circuit of Ireland' by Muirheart MacNeill (a poem of the 10th Century A.D.) 'The Book of Invasions' and "The Patrynomica Britannica" which includes families of Muirheartach in a list of Celtic Aristocracy.

When the Irish monks compiled their early manuscripts they added to the genealogies passed on to them by word of mouth to give them a Biblical Origin. The result is a curious blend of legend and history carried back to Adam, Adam, Seth, Enos, Cairdhionen, Mahalel, Jareth, Enach, Matusalem 9. Lamheach 10. Noe 11. Japeth 12. Magog 13. Boath 14. Feinus 15. Faisdh 16. Gathalus 17. Asruth 18. Sruth 19. Eibhear Scot 20. Beoghaman 21. Agnan 22. Lambjionn 23. Eibher Gluinphionn 28 Archaidh 29. Dephatha 30. Bratha 31. Breohan 32. Bile 33. Miled Of Spain, 34. Eibhear Fionn 35. Conmhaol 36. Eochaidh Faobharghlas 37. Nuadha Deaghlumh 38. Glass 39. Rossa 40. Raitheachtaigh 41. Airerea Arda (or Owen Mor) 42. Cas Clothach 43. Muirmlamhon 44. Faildeargod 45. Cas Ceadchaingreach 46.52. Seadna Ionnaoraidh 53. Duch Fionn, 54. Eanna Dearg 55. Lughaidh Ianhen 59. Aida 60. Muirm Lanhen 61. Lughaidh Laighdle 62. Readtaidh Righdheag 63 Cabthach Caomh 64. Mogh Corb 65. Fear Corb 66. Achamair Faltchain Faltchaoin 67. Niodh Seighamain 68. Ionnadnhar 69. Lughaidh Luadhne 70. Cairbre Lisc 71. Duach Dallta Deaghardh 72. Eachaidh Fear Aine 73. Mureadhach Muchla 74. Mo Feithus 75. Lock Mor 76. Eonna Monchaoin 77. Deargthine 78. Dearg 79. Mogh Neid 80. Eugenius Manus (or Owen Mor) 82. Cormac Cas 83. Mogh Nuadat 84. Oilill Olom 85. Eoghan Mor.

The Ancient Gaelic version of this list varies from the above as follows:- 4. Cainan 5. Malahaleel 6. Jared 8. Methusalem 9. Lamech 10. Noah 11. Japhet 14. Feinus Forsa 15. Niulus 16. Galathus 18. Asmith 19. Heber Scot 20. Ogamain 21. Agnan 22. Lamhfionn 29. Areach 30. Brathus 31. Brigus 33. Milesus 34. Heber 35. Connabis 36. Achanus Frobhanglas 37. Ennus Airgtheach 38. Glassius 39. Rossius 40. Rathaeutus 41. Ferard 42. Cassius 43. Muiremanius 44. Faldergodius 45. Cassius 53 Duoghus Fiach 54. Ernaius 55. Lugadius Iardoun 56. Archaius 57. Lagedius 59. Olill Fionn 60. Eochaidh 61. Lughaidh Laighale 62. Reachtus 63. Cabetacus Ceomh 64. Mogh Corbus 65. Fearcorbus 66. Adamanus Falt Cheenn 67. Nuadhachamen 68. Inna Timores 69. Lugadius 70. Cairbre Lueg Leathan 71. Duachie Dealta 72. Achaius 73. Mureadhach Muchna 74. Mafeahus 75. Loich Mor 76. Enneus 77. Deargthaina 79. Mogh Noir 80. Eugenius Magnos or Owen Mor 82. Cormac Cas 83. Mogh Nuadat 84. Oilill Olum.

In these pedigrees, Oilill Olum is probably the first historical character. His defeat of Conn, sometimes attributed to Mogh Nuadat, established the Munster line of Cashiel which ruled for 1000 years. His successor was Oilill Olum meaning ear cropped, a result of his rape of Aine, the daughter of Eoghathal, (whom he killed).

As a result she bit his ear off while he was asleep. Her more general name was Oengus or Angus. According to the genealogies, one branch of the family of Muirheartach was descended from Angus's branch of the Milesians or Goidel Scots. This occurred about the beginning of the Christian era.

The events which led to this branch of the Celts to move from Greece to Ireland were due

to the exploits of a young Prince in a Grecian state who after several spells of imprisonment by his father was finally banished by the king for his wild ways.

The name of this Prince was variously spelt as Galthus or Gathalus. He sailed with a shipload of friends to Egypt and offered his and services of his friends, to the Pharaoh. The Pharaoh was hard

pressed at that time by enemies and willingly accepted the offer. Galthus was a brilliant soldier and rose to command the Pharaoh's armies. The latter, in gratitude, offered the hand of his daughter, Scota, to Galthus. It was a love match and out of respect for his wife, Galthus called his followers, "Scots". These people grew powerful and the Pharaoh built a special city for them to live in. They continued to grow in power and wealth and aroused envy and resentment amongst the Egyptians. Rather than cause open warfare with his former Allies, Galthus decided to build a fleet and ship his people to a new home in the West. These events are believed to have occurred about 1200 - 1400 BC. The Scots sailed and eventually landed in Spain. After some initial hostility from the Spaniards, the the Scots were able to convince them they wished to live in peace and were granted land in Brigantia. They lived in peace with the Spaniards but from time to time pushed into Italy and sacked northern Roman towns. When Hannibal invaded Italy with a highly trained army and elephants which struck terror in the hearts of his enemies, he was assisted by some of the Scots who by then were well acquainted with the mountain passes into Italy via France.

By this time the Scots had once again gained power and wealth which excited the envy of the local people and in a repeat of events of earlier times in Egypt, their leader decided to seek a new home for his people. This leader was known as Miled of Spain and by that time the Scots became known as Scots or Goidels in Latin, or Milesians after the name of their leader. Miled had heard of a green island to the North West and assembled a fleet of forty Scots Captains to explore and establish new settlements on this land.

At that time Ireland was peopled by a mixture of four Celtic races. 1. The Cruithne (Picts) -who settled there between 1000 and 700 B.C. 2. A number of tribes collectively known as Belgae Celts who arrived from England about 600 B.C. They were led by Lugaid and were later termed in Irish legends as Firbolgs, Nemedian's or Ernainn. These Indo European people pushed the Picts northwards. 3. The Lagen and related Celtic tribes from Gaul. These were Dommainn, Galioin and Lagen. The Dommainn settled in Leinster and at the same time, about 300 BC, in Cornwall, North Wales and Galloway. The Lagenae led by Labraid Lainsech (the sea invader) settled in Leinster but the Dommainn were early regarded as one of the three warrior races in Ireland (the others being Clanna Dedad and Clama Rudraige). Lagen tribes drove into Connaught and dispossessed the Firbolgs who then settled the islands of Man, Arran, Islay and Rathlin.

All these groups were known as P Celts. The Goidelic Scots were Q Celts. 4. In Leinster the Midland Goidels dispossessed Lagen and Dommainn and many of these two tribes resettled in Cornwall, Wales, N.W. England and S. W. Scotland.

The second half of Miled's forces invaded Munster and peacefully absorbed the Ernainn. The commanders of the two wings of Miled's 40 ships of invading Scots were Eber his elder

son and Herimon.

Ireland was unique in that it carried an indigenous Celtic civilisation, institutions, art and literature right across the chasm which separates the antique from the modern world. In the early Christian era. Ireland's contribution to the culture of the Western World was a notable one. From about AD 500-900, Ireland was the refuge of learning and source of literary and philosophic culture for half Europe. The verse forms of their early Celtic poetry have probably played the main part in determining the structure of all modern poetry. 9

"The Celts thinking and feeling was essentially lyrical and concrete. Everything impressed or stirred him profoundly and though he had not the gift for seeing things in their more far-reaching relationships and little gift for the establishment of institutions and service of principles, he was, and is, a never failing assertor of humanity as against the tyranny of principles, the coldness and barrenness of institutions. The Celt has always been a rebel against anything which has not in it the breath of life and against any unspiritual, and purely external form of domination. Though over eager to enjoy the fine fruits of life without the long and patient preparation for the harvest, he has done and will do, infinite service to the modern world in insisting that the true fruit of life is a spiritual reality, never without pain and loss, to be obscured and forgotten amid the vast mechanism of a material civilization." (Rolleston).

For some centuries there were large sections of the early population of Ireland which retained a measure of independence and their importance led early annalists to enlarge on the invasion stories and bring in additional pedigrees of the descendants of Eber and Herimon. These related to Lugaid, Eber son of Ir and the sons of Herimon. Thus the Laginae ancestral leader of the Erainn was made Goidelic. Sections of the leading Leinster tribes were all grouped as Laginae descended from Eremon and others from the sons of Herimon, namely three of the invading 40 captains, Muinhne, Laighne, Palopnalso Irial Faidh, (born in Ireland, who ruled Leinster and later all Ireland for 20 years).

The Goidelic invasion resulted in the defeat of Lagan by the sword, the midland Goidels being aided by their vassals of North Lagan descent, ui Muiredaig and Garlenga. In South Leinster war against the Ernainns continued. In 160 AD Tuathal, of the midland Goidels, defeated Firbolg, Dommainn, Galiain and Laginae, gained possession of Tara and imposed the Boranna tribute on Leinster - not finally remitted until 721AD.

The older branch of the race of Miled, the South Goidels or Eoaghanachts, established themselves peacefully in Munster and their kings married the daughters of Ernainn nobles. After various struggles, between 150 and 200 AD. Mogh Nuadat regained Munster and established a dynasty based, on Cashiel which lasted 1000 years.

The history recorded by the monks from Mogh Nuadat's time records the inter-relationship of Irish families and stories of the Muirheartach. For some centuries the name was adopted as a personal name by the O'Neills, O'Donnells, O'Loughins, O'Briens, O'Meaghers, O'Carrols, MacMurroughs and MacGuinnes. Two stems of the Munster branch of Scots adopted the name as a patrynomic. The Irish genealogist, Father Woulfe traced the name of Muircheartaigh from the O'Carrolls back to Cian, grandson of Mogh Nuadat. According to Woulfe, from Cian arose indigenous McMurtry in Louth, Down, Antrim, Kilkenny and Tipperary.

The second stem descends directly from Corc, King of Munster and great-grandson of Mogh Nuadat. As the result of intrigue by an uncle, Corc was banished from his kingdom and went into exile at Turin Hill, the court of Feredach, 21st King of Picts, who had spilled over from Ireland to form a kingdom in South West Scotland. This branch of Picts were Cruithne, distinct from the

Caledonians, who were also called Picts by the Romans and lived in the North and East of Scotland. The latter people were Celtic but differed in appearance from the Cruithne. They were described by the Romans as large, raw boned and blue eyed with red hair and probably entered Scotland from Belgium.

Turin Hill was a ring fort placed inside an older oval structure of the vitrified fort type. Corc arrived there between 400 AD and 420 AD and shortly afterwards married Mongfinn, daughter of King Feredach. Four sons were born to the marriage. Two of these were Cairbre Cruithneach from whom was descended the MacFarlands and Scottish Lords of Lennox and Cairbre Luachra, progenitor of the MacMuirheartach (Cairbre means charioteer and this branch of the Picts were known to have used chariots in battle). They were described by the Romans as 'Vigorous Folk'.

The descendants of Cruithneach moved to the Loch Lomand district and those of Luachra, true to their 'sea-ruler' patrynomic, moved up the West coast of Scotland and Galloway to the islands Arran and Bute. According to tradition, the Muirheartach in early times were pirates and they may well have banded with the pirates of Galloway who raided coastal towns of Ireland and Scotland, killed the men, carried off the women and adopted the children as their own. Known as the Gallgoidel, they were more feared than the Norsemen of Norway and Denmark.

Corc was in exile for ten years and during this time, aided by Feredach, he founded the Eoghanacht of Mog Gerginn between the Tay and Dee. Pictish descent was through the line of the wife and Monfinn's and Corc's grandson was Oengus Mac Nad Fioich (died 490 AD). Some centuries on, his descendant, Oengus mac Fergasso, the most powerful Pictish King in history. About the time of Corc, Neill Noigailloch visited Alba or New Athol - that is a new Kingdom of Irish in Scotland. He was the first to give the name Scotia to Alba on condition that she be called Scotia Minor and Ireland be called Scotia Major. This arose out of veneration for Scota, daughter of the Pharaoh Nectonibus. Into that part of Scotland which became known as Argyll, four tribes from Ireland settled.

Most of them were Dal Riada, the tribe of Muirheartach the Great, High King of Ireland, Muircheatach's brothers, Lorn, Fergus Mor, Fergus Beg, Angus Mor, Angus Beg of Pictland. From time to time prior to the arrival of the men of Dal Riada, other small groups from Ireland settled Scotland. Early amongst these was Rothsay, also of Dal Riada, the present day name of a town in the Isle of Bute. The nearby island of Arran was occupied by Ernean (Belgae and Firbolgs) from Connaught and very early Irish annals record heroic stories of hunters on the island, probably relating to a time before the Christian era. Descendants of both groups were present in small numbers on the two islands when the Muirheartach reached them - that is probably about 700 AD. Meanwhile Corc regained his Kingdom in Munster and Cairbre Luachra appears to have taken up land in South West Ireland - the later territory of the Moriarty (also Muirheartach).

In Ireland periodic wars between the Clans broke out and from about 500 AD many of the disputes centred on Leinster. Two of the earliest Leinster clans were descendants of the Lagen - the ui Muirdaigh of the north Lagen and the ui Chinnaselaigh of the south Lagen. From the former were descended the O'Tooles from the tribe of McMurry and the M'Muirchadas. A third ruling family was

that of O'Byrnes. Clans subordinate to the above are listed as O'Kellys, O'Mores, O'Ryan, O'Nolans, O'Moores and O'Connors.

About 1000 A.D. Maolmorda mac Muirchada of west Leinster revolted against the overlordship of Brian Boru. Maolmorda was defeated and Boru then took Gorflaith as wife. She was Gorflaith, mac Muirchada, sister of Maolmorda, mother of the Danish king of Dublin, widow of a former Ard Ri and respected wife of Malachy, the existing Ard Ri. Apparently Boru had previous connections with her as he had a son, Donchadh, by her who was grown up by the time of the Battle of Clontarf fourteen years later.

Boru defeated Maolmorda at the Glen of the Gap near Dunlavy, the ancient fortress of the Kings of Leinster in Wicklow. He restored Maolmorda to the kingdom of Leinster, overcame Malachy, the Ard Ri and became Ard Ri in his place. He ruled wisely for some years. Late in 1013 Boru's wife, Gormfaith, instigated a conspiracy with her brother Maolmordh and his nephew, the Danish King of Dublin who was married to Boru's daughter. The conspirator mustered a large army of Leinstermen, Welsh and Danes but in 1014 were defeated by Boru at the Battle of Clontarf. All the principal leaders including Boru, his son Murchadh and 10,000 of Boru's men were killed, also the Danish king and Maolmorda. Boru was last in line of direct descent from the Munster Kings founded by Mogh Nuadat about 1000 years earlier. After a number of defeats in smaller battles, the Danes retreated from Ireland. Periodic unrest continued in Leinster. Diarmot M'Murchada, king of Leinster, was a tyrant and man of bad character. He outraged the Abbess of Kildare and in league with Turlough O'Connor dispossessed Tigernan O'Rourke, prince of Brefni and carried off Dervorgilla, the O'Rourke's wife. The O'Rourke, supported by the Ard Ri, led an army against him. Diarmot burnt his castle at Ferns and enlisted the aid of Henry II of England to regain his kingdom. This resulted in the arrival of Strongbow. Strongbow married Eva, MacMurchada's daughter, and a Norman wedge was driven through the plains of Leinster to separate the mountain clans from those around the Bog of Allan and Slieve Bloom. MacMurroughs, O'Byrnes and O'Tooles retired to the Eastern mountains. O'Connors and O'Mores retreated west.

Events in Leinster were to have a long lasting effect on the people of Arran and The Isle of Bute. A physical effect was that Danish raids along the Scottish coast ceased. The Political effect was the ascendancy of England over Ireland.

Cairbre Luachra's descendants, moving to the north and keeping west, probably entered the islands of Arran and Bute on the heels of Oengus mac Fergusso after his overthrow of the Dal Riada about 741 A.D. In the tradition of the Picts they built fortresses called Cranogs on the shores of the island lakes with access only by boat at one point or a narrow causeway. They gained a reputation as fearless seamen and warriors and were named Brandanes by other tribes. In later centuries they revived the Brandanes legend with pride and provided volunteer fighting units in the service of Stewart Kings.

Up to about the 12th Century the people of Bute and Arran consisted largely of closely interrelated descendants of the Muirheartach. They had not yet adopted surnames, still spoke Gaelic and were closely akin to the people of Kerry, Tyrone, Donegal and N.E. Antrim. Although surnames were

adopted in Scotland from about the 10th century onwards, it was nearer the end of the 14th century before they came to Bute. Pressure was exerted on the people of Bute and Arran from four quarters - the Scandinavians, Norwegians and Danes sometimes called the black and white gentiles, the Gall Goidel, the MacDonalDs and house of Knapdale, later the Stewarts. The Norwegians and Danes arrived about 794 A.D. and at times the former exacted tribute from the people of Arran, Bute and Kintyre. Brian Born put an end to Danish incursions. The Gall-Goidel began their raids about 840 AD. They were pagan worshippers of Woden and at times raided Arran. Their power was broken by Alexander II in 1294.

Somerled was the progenitor of the Mac Donalds. Muirheartach, high king of Ireland, hired ships from Galloway, Arran, Bute, Kintyre and Man and defeated the fleet of the Norwegian King, Godfrey. Godfrey then defeated Muirheartach at Dublin and re-gained Man. In 1256 Somerled went to the aid of the people of Man, defeated the Norwegians and drove them to the north. He married the Norwegian King's daughter, Ragnall, and from their union Randal, Ranald and other corruptions of Ragnall entered the MacDonald and allied families. (The Christian name Randal has cropped up in the McMurtry family for at least seven generations and no doubt much longer).

In 1156 Somerled occupied Bute and this later led to a hereditary claim by MacDonald allies, the MacRuries), to Bute. Somerled was ejected from the Island and the MacRuries claim rejected by king of Scotland. In 1164, after Somerled's attempt to usurp the King's throne, he was killed. He left his land to his three sons, the third of whom was Reginald, Lord of the Isles. John, the fourth Lord of the Isles over-reached himself in 1493 and the Lordship was forfeited.

The Lordship had been a great centre of Gaelic Culture where learning and poetry flourished. To return to the Norwegians, for a brief time in 1163 both Arran and Bute fell to King Hakon. He gave Arran to the Lord of Kintyre, Bute to Ruari, but King Alexander refused to cede those lands and in 1266 he retook them. That same year, Norway ceded all the outer Scottish islands to Alexander.

During these turbulent times the Muirheartach kept a low profile and steadily bought up the lands of Bute. By 1400 they owned almost all of the island. In 1506 King James IV, by Royal Charter, granted the title of Baron to all free holders on Bute. Thus about twelve to fourteen heads of Muirheartach families became Barons at the same time. The titles were hereditary but subject to the lands being retained by the families concerned.

As ownership of the land and the titles were lost the members of the patrynomic Muirheartach left Bute. As Barons, they had begun to adopt surnames. This was a long time after Muirheartach, in some other parts of Scotland, adopted surnames. The name is occasionally cited in the Icelandic Myrakjarten (and in the Norwegian Codex Fagrskinna (P.158). About 873 Flaithbertach mac Murcetaigh was "princeps Duincaillden (Dunkeld). Amongst approximately sixty examples of early variations of the surname were 1506, Gilerist Makvreirdy who held lands in Bransor, Bute. Finlay Makureidy had sasine of Brothok. Makilwedy, Makwerich or Mac Morich held land in Baroun in Bute. In 1508, appeared Makwurtye in Edinborough. Again in Bute 1534, Donald Makwarty and McMuartys appeared as witnesses. In 1538 Robert MacMurtre was appointed Register of the Great Seal. Donald 1534, (above) was of Birgadulknak. Variations continued to be recorded for the

next twenty years but from about 1540, it was largely standardised as MacKirdie and MacMurtrie. The old patrynomic fell out of use and was replaced by modern Gaelic, McUradaigh.

1540 saw the beginning of acquisition of the lands of the Barons of Bute by the Stewarts and the movement of large numbers of the family to Ireland. Those who remained on Bute become a sept of the Stewarts of Bute.

From about the year 1300, MacDonald galloglasses sold their swords in Ireland mainly on the side of the Irish against the English. By 1533, English officials were complaining of the daily increase of Scots in Ulster. Their main activity centred around the Glens of Antrim. A Norman family, the Bissets, settled in Antrim by favour of Henry III about 1400 AD. MacDonald of Isla, second son of John of the Isles by Margaret Stewart (d. of Scottish King Robert II) married Margaret Bisset, heiress of the Glens. Through this marriage the MacDonalds of Isla became about 1520, Lords of Isla in Scotland and the Glens in Ireland. By 1551 they had become known as the McDonnells of Antrim.

From about 1540, the former families of Bute and Arran moved to Antrim and Mayo. At first, acting as mercenaries, many of them were rewarded with grants of land, both freehold and leasehold. Many sailed in their galleys up the Antrim rivers opposite Kintyre and from 1540, along the Antrim coastline they numbered about 2,500. A kindred people to the Irish, they inter-married with them. By 1556, there were about 9,000 Scots in Antrim and by the following year they occupied not only Antrim but also Clannaboy. In 1565, Shane O'Neill swept most of the Scottish settlement from Ulster but the next year he allowed them to re-settle. The O'Neill was a source of trouble to Elizabeth I of England. Alistair MacDonald threw off Shane's rule and in 1567, killed him. Soon after 1600, Randal MacDonell was granted the whole territory from the Cutts of Coleraine to the Curran of Larne. He was raised to the Peerage as the 1st Earl Of Antrim. Later his son, Randal, second Earl, was created Marquis of Antrim.

The two families of Muircheortach to settle in Antrim from Bute were known by the surnames McCurdy and McMurtry. Various records show that the latter name was sometimes written McMurtray or McMurtrey and in some cases this spelling was carried on as a surname. The McCurdys were a large branch and according to the Irish genealogist McLysaght, by 1659, theirs "was a principal Irish name in the northern half of Antrim, being exceeded in numbers only by MacNeils, MacCoys and the Scottish Stewarts."

The McMurtrys formed a much smaller group and settled along the Antrim coast between the Glens of Antrim, Cushendall and Island Magee.



*Anzac Day, 2004.
The Author with longtime friends,
Helen Hyatt and Cynthea Clouston.*

Photograph, Courtesy of Louise Hyatt.