

Below is the Preface to a privately printed family tree. The tree covers several pages and many families and generations. From internal evidence it was completed around 1940. An amazing amount of work went into producing this tree but there is not a single citation or reference to a historical document. The family history, as described in this Preface, is historically correct.

PREFACE

In the early summer of 1914 I was staying in Glengarriff with my father, the late William Martin Murphy. He mentioned one day that his grandparents were buried on Bere Island in Bantry Bay, and that a tomb had been erected over their grave. He added, however, that he supposed that the tomb and its inscription, placed there nearly sixty years before, had by then disappeared. I suggested that we should go and see and before many days we sailed down the bay, landed at Ballynakilla jetty and walked up to the graveyard. After a little search the tomb was found; it was in excellent repair, and the inscription on it, clearly legible, ran as follows:-

TO THE MEMORY OF
WILLIAM MURPHY
WHO DIED 8TH DEC. 1826
AGED 41 YEARS
AND HIS WIFE
MARY DOWNEY
WHO DIED 31ST DEC 1854
AGED 73 YEARS
MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

As we stood in the little churchyard, William Martin Murphy told me that his grandfather, William Murphy, had lived on a farmland called Derrymihin near Castletown Berehaven, and that he had undertaken some building contracts, not in a very large way. Beyond this, William Martin Murphy knew little of his grandfather but, on the other hand, he remembered his grandmother very well. She had lived in Bantry until he was ten years old (1854) and he had often heard from her lips stories of the old days before the terrible famine years.

And then in his quiet undramatic way he told me something rather remarkable. He said: "I recollect that my old grandmother, who is buried here, told me shortly before she died, that when she was a 'slip of a girl' (he remembered her exact words) she had gone up on the hill above her father's farm on Bere Island, and had seen the French Fleet in Bantry Bay." That was in 1796. My father's memory and hers had bridged the gap of 118 years.

Denis William Murphy (eldest son of William Murphy of Derrymihin) lived first in Castletown Berehave, whence he saw his three younger brothers, John, William and Charles, depart to settle in America. In 1846 Denis removed to Bantry, where he records that he built himself a house on the Square. He started a saw-mill and timber-yard and developed a successful business as a building contractor. Among the buildings which he constructed are the present Convent of Mercy in Bantry and the Convent and other buildings at Kenmare. His services were engaged by the 3rd Earl of Dunraven (who had become a Catholic) for the rebuilding of the Catholic Church at Sneem, Country Kerry, which threatened to fall into ruin. While seeing to the progress of this work Denis William Murphy was staying in Lord

Dunraven's house on Garnish Island near Sneem when he became seriously ill and died before he could be removed to his home (1863)

William Martin Murphy, only son of Denis William Murphy, was then nineteen years of age. He took on the contracting business and developed it in many directions. His subsequent career as tramway and railway contractor, as a Member of Parliament, as a pioneer of electric traction in Ireland, England and Scotland, as a member of the Irish Convention, and as a newspaper proprietor, are perhaps matters too recent and too well known to be repeated here.

I had always thought it a great pity that people in Ireland did not keep better notes of their family connections. Doubtless the titled and land-owning families did so, but there is no reason whatever why others, even those who, as in this case, make no pretensions whatever to noble ancestry, should not do the same. Such records are of great personal interest and certainly make for a feeling of solidarity with the land we live in. I was once told in France that in some parts of that country there are peasants who form a "*vraie aristocratic paysanne*", for they can trace back their ancestry for 400 or 500 years, so steadily did their families live in the same district and so well did the Church keep the lists of marriages and baptisms in spite of wars and revolutions. There were many reasons why such complete records failed to be preserved in Ireland – wars, penal laws, insecurity of tenure, famine, emigration all did their part in breaking the continuity of occupation and preventing the keeping of satisfactory family histories. Outside Dublin there are very few churches in Ireland with registers going back to the year 1800 – those, for instance, in both the Catholic Church and the Church of Ireland in Castletown Berehaven begin about the year 1818, and even then they are not very complete.

When, after the war of 1914-1918, I visited Bere Island again I was reminded once more of the desirability of keeping family records and I realised that a pious opinion was not enough, - I must set myself to discover, if possible, and make a list of all the descendants of the old couple, William Murphy and his wife Mary Downey and of their nearest collateral relations.

The tables here printed are the result. All the facts stated have been carefully checked and verified. In collecting and collating the material I was greatly helped by some notes of marriages, deaths, etc, made by my grandfather, Denis William Murphy, beginning with his own marriage in November, 1841. Still more information was gained in long talks with my father's eldest sister, Margaret Cullinane, who was possessed of a wonderful memory, and who lived to the great age of 93 (b. 1843-d.1936). Others who have kindly sent dates and details are my cousins, Margaret Lavinia Murphy of Kingston, State of New York; William Murphy and Raphael Murphy of New York City; George, Walter and William Dwyer of Cork; Lieut-Colonel E. V. Martin of Abergavenny; Brendan Tuohy of British Columbia; and my nephews and nieces of the Murphy and Chance families. To all these my very best thanks are due; without their help the tables could not have been compiled.

It will be seen that the tables are printed on the right-hand pages only. I hope that some of those who are mentioned here will undertake research into their own family connections and will fill up the blank pages with notes which cannot fail to be of interest to future generations.

W.L.M.