

MURTHA John J and BOYLE Mary Ann

The birthdate of John Murtha, the ancestor of a large branch of the Murtha clan, has been variously recalled; his death certificate gives it as October 1, 1858. John himself apparently did not know the exact date of his birth. He left Ireland at age 16 to find work in England--working in coal mines and on the docks in Liverpool. In 1882, in his mid-20s or early 30s, he came to the U.S., crossing the Atlantic in steerage.

John did not have much use for Ireland, and said that after his parents died he never had any desire to go back. (His mother had died, in fact, in 1881, which may have encouraged him to leave England for the United States.) "Why would I want to go back?" he used to say. "There wasn't any work there." Or has he often put it: "It's no greener in Ireland than it is right here."

He had only six months of school in Ireland, and supposedly couldn't read when he came to this country. There's a family story that he learned to read when he wanted to apply for a job as a firefighter or police officer, and found he couldn't take the test.

He was a tall, thin man, about six feet tall and 160 pounds. He had blue eyes, a small mustache and smoked a corn-cob pipe. He was an avid gardener but "not handy." A devout Catholic, he was remembered by his family as being "hard-working, good-humored and a model of honesty." "He worked so hard and complained so little," his daughter Adeline later recalled of the man she always referred to as "m'Dad."

Perhaps following their aunts who had emigrated a generation earlier, John and his siblings Mary and Patrick headed for Western Pennsylvania. John worked in the coke yard at Standard, doing "the hardest kind of work"--leveling the coke. (His granddaughter Kathleen Naureckas remembers hearing that on hot days, he used to take a bottle of unsweetened tea with him to work.) In 1882, he lived in a small town called Buckeye, near Bridgeport, boarding with a family called the Boyles. Two years later, on April 30, 1884, he married the Boyles' daughter, Mary Ann. Family tradition recalls her age at the time as 16, but she seems to have been at least two weeks shy of her 16th birthday.

Mary Ann Boyle

Mary Ann Boyle was 5'2" and weighed about 90 pounds when she married, though in later life she was stocky. She was very bright and talkative--a trait she passed on to many of her descendants--and remembered as having a sharp tongue: Once when her daughter Adeline made some remark about her mother's weight, Mary Ann retorted, "I was thinner than you ever thought of being, m'girl." In a dispute once with the manager of the Frick company store at Standard--one Morris Pigman--she remarked to him, "Pig by name and pig by nature."

She liked to crochet and was an excellent seamstress and cook, noted for her pie-baking. When her sons were grown and working, they would still come to her house for lunch if they could. Mary Ann was a devout Catholic; Adeline credits her with teaching her to value "my religion, the good home we always had, the value of an education."

On March 5, 1890, John Murtha became a naturalized citizen of the United States. Felix Boyle stood as his sponsor, along with a James Boyle, who may have been Felix's brother (perhaps named for James Meehan); they were cited as witnesses that John "had behaved as a man of good moral character, attached to the principles of the Constitution of the United States, and well disposed to the good order and happiness of the same." John was required to declare that he "did absolutely and entirely renounce and abjure all allegiance and fidelity to every foreign Prince, Potentate, State or sovereignty whatsoever, and particularly to"--here there was a blank

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to be filled in, which reads, "Queen Victoria of Great Britain." This was presumably a small sacrifice to the Irish immigrant.

John does seem to have taken his citizenship seriously: There is a voting record on the back of his Certificate of Citizenship, which shows that in the three years covered, he voted in every primary and general election. The first presidential election he voted in was the one in which Grover Cleveland won his second term (probably with the support of most Irish-Americans).

John was a member of the Ancient Order of Hibernians, a Irish-American secret society with a sometimes radical history--they were linked to the Molly Maguires, an underground labor army active in the Pennsylvania coal fields. It is said that some of the people hanged as Molly Maguires were convicted mainly on evidence that they belonged to the AOH. The Hibernians seemed to have settled down by the time John Murtha was a member; at least, they were respectable enough to have donated a stained glass image of St. Patrick to St. Joseph's Church in Mount Pleasant, a church that John helped build (and where he served on the church committee). Kathleen Naureckas recalls seeing "elaborate green robes in our attic, very much like a priest's vestments."

John and Mary Ann seem to have continued to live with Mary Ann's parents for several years. About 1885, they had James, the first of their twelve children, named for John's father. He was followed by Rose (named for John's mother), Mary (presumably named for Mary Ann, but called Min), Margaret (after Mary Ann's mother), Felix (after her father), Ellen (known as Nell), John (getting his father's name), Thomas, Harry, Adeline, Frank and Joseph.

Three of the children died very young. Rose and Margaret lived to be only one year old, and Thomas died at six months. There is a story that one of the children, perhaps Thomas, became sick and had to be taken to the doctor in Mount Pleasant in a horse and buggy. Coming back, he was supposedly well enough to sit in his father's lap and hold the reins, but afterwards he died--of measles or diphtheria.

They bought their first house of their own in 1890, a white two-story house on the east side of Mount Joy Road in Mount Joy, Pennsylvania, a small hamlet outside of Mount Pleasant. When John borrowed the money to buy the house from the Mount Pleasant State Bank, he told the banker, O.P. Shupe, "With luck, I'll pay off the debt before the due date."

"Don't say that," Shupe replied. "You make your own luck in this world." On his way home, John swore off drinking until the mortgage was paid off, and he kept his pledge.

They were living in Mount Joy when Adeline was born, on November 6, 1900, weighing five pounds, six ounces. John Murtha described how, going to the hospital after work, he "kissed my wife, kissed the baby, and went off to vote" (for either McKinley/Roosevelt or, more likely for an Irish Catholic immigrant, William Jennings Bryant). Her mother suggested the name: "I wasn't consulted and I've managed to live with it all these years," Adeline said.

Late that year, the family moved to a town whose name would mean "home" for generations of Murthas: Mount Pleasant.

The Murthas in Mount Pleasant

The Murthas first place in Mount Pleasant was a rented house on Spruce Street in Mount Pleasant, where they moved to be closer to the Bryce crystal factory, where John and Mary

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Ann's son Jim walked to work. About six months later, they bought a house on the northeast corner of Washington and Silver streets, where they lived for about five years.

They then moved to the house at 111 Diamond Street, buying it for \$3,000 from the Gemmel family. Twenty years later, it would be sold for twice as much to the Simon family, who owned a clothing store. "Mr. Simon couldn't read or write, but paid the \$6,000 for the house in cash," Adeline recalled.

Mary Ann considered 111 Diamond Street to be her "dream house." Years later, Adeline would regularly reminisce about the grape arbor behind the house, where the family would sit and relax in the evenings.

With such a large family, there was much work to be done, and everyone was expected to pitch in. Adeline Kearney remembered her parents as being very strict about "coming home at a decent hour, doing our chores and being good and kind with each other." Mary Ann Murtha in particular set high standards: It was her mother that Adeline remembered insisting that she stay to do her chores, like shelling peas or "stringing" beans, rather than going off with her friends.

John and Mary Ann Murtha moved into the house at 767 West Main Street about 1925, along with the children still living at home, Adeline, Frank and Joe. It had been bought about a year earlier by John and Mary Ann's son John and his wife Maude, who purchased it from the Walker family. The younger John asked his parents to buy half the house, which at that time was divided into two halves. Mary Ann was reluctant to move out of her beloved Diamond Street house; she saw the Main Street place as a "big barn." (At the time, it lacked central heating.)

This house--which served as a home for Murthas (many of them named Kearney) for more than 60 years--was built sometime in the mid-19th Century. It appears on a map dating from 1867 that was reprinted in *A Town That Grew at the Crossroad*. It had served as the home and offices of Dr. James McConoughy, a 19th Century Mount Pleasant physician described in that history as "probably the town's first academically trained doctor." It is just up the street from the building where Henry Clay Frick, for whom most of the Murtha family worked, had had his first job. Today it houses an antique store and bed and breakfast known as The Town House.

The Murtha Children

Over the years, the Murtha children grew up and had families of their own. John Murtha's daughter Adeline credited him with teaching her to value "a good home and a family worthy of the respect of one another," and he must have passed that love of family on to his other children as well, since they nearly all had many children. John and Mary Ann Murtha had some 47 grandchildren, 159 great-grandchildren, at least 212 great-great-grandchildren and at last count 31 great-great-great-grandchildren. Their descendants have included eight people named Mary Murtha, and 11 people called John Murtha--these often going by "Jack." The most common name in the clan, however, is James Murtha--there are 14 of these, eight of whom are James Patrick Murthas.

In his classic study of Irish immigration, *Emigrants and Exiles*, Kerby Miller could have been writing directly about the Murtha family:

Within heavy industries such as iron-making, steel-making and mining, Irish-Americans dominated blue-collar managerial positions such as foreman and pit boss; for instance, between 1890 and 1910, Slavs, Hungarians and Italians largely displaced Irish workers in Pennsylvania's

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anthracite mines, steel mills, iron foundries and railroad yards, pushing the latter up the occupational scale into better-paid skilled and supervisory posts.

Jim Murtha, for example, was the manager of a coal mine--the Mount Pleasant Journal referred to him as the "genial superintendent of the Carpentertown plant of the Mount Pleasant Coal and Coke company." The story goes that he got his break when his father turned down an offer of a management job, saying, "Give it to my son." Jim was under 30 when he moved into that job.

As the oldest son, Jim seemed to take on the mantle of patriarch of the Murtha clan. He had married Nell McElroy in 1908, and eventually had eight children. (McElroy is the same name as Kilroy or Gilroy--meaning "son of the red-haired boy"--and originates in Co. Fermanagh.) They used to live in a large brick house that was on the site of the mine, a stressful situation that was thought to have contributed to the bleeding ulcer that ended up killing Jim, in 1947 when he was about 62 years old.

One of his grandsons, Jack Murtha, was elected to the U.S. Congress in 1974, serving a Pennsylvania district that includes much of Westmoreland County. Having rejoined the Marines to fight in the Vietnam War, he was the first Vietnam vet to serve in Congress. First voted into the House in a special election, he was also the first representative to take office after the Watergate scandal broke. A Democrat, Jack Murtha's voting record is fairly liberal on economic issues, conservative on military issues. Jack rose to become the chair of the defense appropriations subcommittee before the Republicans took over the House in 1994. He became nationally prominent when he came out in opposition to the Iraq War in 2005.

Mary Murtha--known as "Min"--married Michael Cronin in 1913, and had eight children as well. (Cronin is an Irish name, found mainly in Co. Cork, Limerick and Kerry, and comes from the name "Cron," meaning "saffron-colored." Michael's father, Dennis, was born in Co. Cork, but emigrated to the U.S. in time to fight for the Union at Gettysburg.) Michael died young, in 1935, and Min had to raise her youngest children alone. This family was notable for nearly all the children serving in uniform during World War II. Min lived to the age of 80, dying in 1967.

Felix Murtha married Irene Meagher in 1920 and lived in Uniontown with their four children. He died of a ruptured appendix in 1955, just before his 65th birthday.

Nell Murtha became a Sister of Charity at Seton Hill, and was assigned the name Sister Theodosia. "Sister Theodosia never liked her order name, and who could blame her?" remarked her nephew Patrick Kearney. She eventually became assistant mother at Seton Hill, a position of some prestige. A photograph of Sister Theodosia meeting the Pope was on display in our house, and I suspect in several other Murtha homes. She suffered from asthma, and was stationed for several years at Ajo, Arizona, in hopes that the dry climate would do her good. She died in 1974 of emphysema.

John Murtha Jr., who worked in the business office of a coal mine, wed Maude Eckman and raised five children. His nephew Patrick Kearney recalls him fondly, saying that he paid more attention to him than his other Murtha uncles. "When the family used to visit Maude and John at their home in Scottdale, Maude was always very concerned that the visiting children have enough good things to eat while visiting-- good as in cake and the like," Pat reports.

Harry Murtha, with his wife Phyllis Briercheck, had three children. Harry was the manager of the 999 coke ovens at Standard. "Everybody knows that there were that many, and not one more, because there would have been some adverse tax effect if there had been 1,000 ovens," Patrick Kearney noted. After Prohibition ended, Harry went into the beer distribution business

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with his brother-in-law, Christopher Kearney. All the Murtha brothers were great talkers, but Harry was said to be the champion. Phyllis died in 1932, just 28 years old, and Harry died only a few years later, on January 1, 1937.

Frank Murtha's wife was named Margaret Kearns, and they had six children. (Kearns is a variant of the name O'Kieran, a name found mainly in Co. Monaghan, Fermanagh and Cork, which comes from a name meaning "black or dark brown.") Frank's boy Jack grew up to take holy orders. Father John Murtha, as he was called, was a missionary in Taiwan, and later served as the president of St. Vincent's College for ten years.

Joe Murtha, who married Dorothy Maxwell, also had six children. Joe was a bricklayer, and very proud of his craft. His niece Kathleen Naureckas describes being "fascinated by Uncle Joe because he said 'Hell's bells,' which was the closest thing to swearing that I ever heard in our house. (Mother said 'dang' when she was really, really mad.)"

Final Years

In later life, Mary Ann Murtha was often sick, suffering from rheumatoid arthritis, and the strong medicines she was prescribed to combat it. Her daughter Adeline remarked on "how she suffered through prolonged illnesses with very little complaint," and "her cheerfulness when you knew she was miserable."

On January 18, 1927, Mary Ann died, at the age of 58. The doctors said that her heart had been weakened by the arthritis medicine. Mary Ann's death was a great blow to her daughter Adeline. She later recalled a streetcar driver in Mount Pleasant telling her, "You look like you've lost your only friend in the world."

Among the friends of the family who came to Mary Ann Murtha's wake were Thomas Kearney and his son Christopher. Christopher Kearney is said to have been impressed by the way that Adeline Murtha served the food--an observation that was the beginning of their courtship and eventually their 51-year marriage.

In his retirement years, John drew a small pension from the Frick Company. He also worked part time for the local government, doing jobs like spreading ashes on roads when it snowed. He lived with Adeline, Christopher and their growing family. Adeline recalled John Murtha's "patience with me and with our children when they were small." His granddaughter Marie remembers her grandfather teaching her to tell time with his pocket watch.

John Murtha died on July 30, 1936, aged 77 years. Not long before, he had had to stop and rest on his way home from downtown, and he said, "That's the last time I'll do that." And it was: After never being sick in his life, he suddenly took ill. "His heart has fallen apart," said Dr. Marsh, the family doctor. "This is what's terrible about being a doctor," he told the family. "You people are like my own family, and here I stand not able to do a thing for you."

John's daughter, Sister Theodosia, said to him, "You know you're sick. Do you realize how sick you are? Would you mind dying?" John replied: "Why would I want to die? I live like a king here. But if I have to die, I did the best I could, and for what I did wrong, I ask God's mercy."

As was the custom in those days, the wake was held in the house, and the family stayed up all night with the body. Adeline remembered her ankles swelling badly because she was pregnant with her daughter Kathleen at the time.