

Simon Murphy's Story (1858-1894)

By Carol Murphy
with Kate Murphy

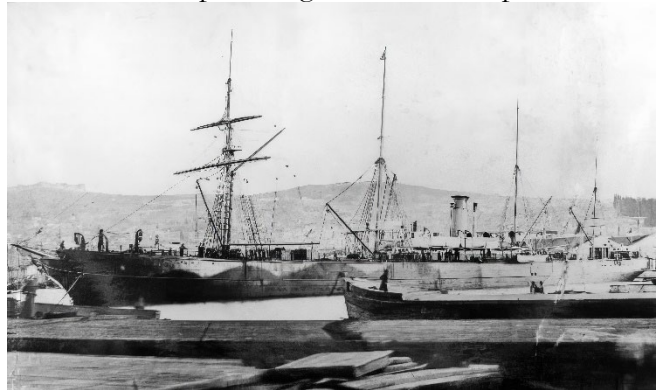
Simon Murphy was my father's grandfather. He originally came from the town of Wexford in County Wexford, Ireland. He died when he was 36, just 7 years after he married, so there were few in the family who remembered him. At least we know that he died in 1894. Maybe he was 36 when he died. His gravestone says 1859-1894. There is a baptismal record in Wexford of Simon Murphy, son of Mathew Murphy and Mary French Murphy, June 5, 1854, and another from the same couple for a second son named Simon on March 20, 1858. We think that there was a son who died young and another who later was given the same name. Perhaps Simon found it easier to gain employment



Wexford, Ireland Main Street 1880s

using a birth record that made him several years older. The family stories say that he was an orphan who went to sea as a merchant marine when he was 14. Records in Wexford, however, show that his parents went on to produce several more children after Simon. Years ago, my cousin faxed me copies of a few of his shipping records as a young man, giving his place of engagement as Liverpool and his place of birth as Wexford. Several of these records show him on the same ship, the *Agia Sofia*. In the place for a

signature on the forms we retain, there is an "X" and then a lovely signature done by a



The *Agia Sophia*

Dis. 1. CERTIFICATE OF DISCHARGE			
FOR SEAMEN DISCHARGED BEFORE THE SUPERINTENDENT OF A MERCHANTILE MARINE OFFICE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM, A BRITISH CONSUL, OR A SHIPPING OFFICER IN BRITISH POSSESSION ABROAD.			
Name of Ship	Office Number	Port of Registry	Register Number
England	29996	Liverpool	3111
Home Port or Port of Call	Description of Passage or Employment		
420	New York		
Name of Seaman	Age	Place of Birth	Rank or Position
Simon Murphy	23	Wexford	Fireman
Date of Engagement	Place of Engagement	Date of Discharge	Place of Discharge
25/7/58	Liverpool	14/8/80	New York

W. J. Murphy

Simon Murphy Discharge Certificate

clerk. The dates and ages that he gave are no help in determining his actual birth date. They are inconsistent. He worked on steamships as a fireman, which means that he shoveled coal into the furnaces that

made the steam. His travels took him to places such as Alexandria in the Mediterranean Sea, to Bombay India and to New York.

When my husband and I visited the genealogy center at the main library in Dublin in 2002, we were



Wexford, Ireland Main Square 1880s

told that it would be unlikely that any records could have survived the burning of the churches in the Wexford area. We might find records if we knew Simon's parents' names, but we didn't at the time. Murphy is a popular surname in Ireland. We were told that Simon was a common first name in the Wexford area and not as common in other parts of Ireland. When we stayed at a bed and breakfast near the town of Wexford, the hostess told me, "You look not unlike the Murphys still around here." That was my claim to Wexford as ancestral homeland. We later found that there were people who were busy in Wexford keeping records. Some particular folks were

keeping special track of the numerous Murphy families in the area.

Simon originally came to live in America through the port of San Francisco. He moved to Painesville, Ohio, where he met and married Winnifred O'Rourke in 1887. In the family bible in Sligo, O'Rourk was spelled without an 'e'. The common spelling in America had the final 'e' and was adopted by the family.

Winnifred O'Rourke was the fifth child born to Patrick and Margaret O'Rourke. She was the first of their twelve children to be born in America. Some family stories say that she was born on the boat. The older children, Farel age 5, Mary age 3, Patrick age 2 and baby Michael, were left behind in Sligo, Ireland, to be sent for later. When we visited Sligo, we saw their baptismal records on microfiche. Michael's godmother was named Winnifred. One story that remained in the family was about how, when the children arrived in Ohio, they had to be put behind the house, stripped down, hair shaved off, scrubbed vigorously and their clothing and hair burned.

Apparently, Patrick and Margaret with their 12 children had a family farm that was prosperous. Patrick was able to become part owner of the Parmly Hotel in Painesville. He had started there as the bartender. The story goes that he was a teetotaler, and when invited to join someone in a drink, he would pour himself a cup of tea from a pot he kept under the bar.

Simon and Winnifred moved to Newbury Heights, now part of Cleveland, where Simon got a job in a steel mill. They were only married for 7 years when he died from something involving his lungs. There



Parmly Hotel, Painesville, Ohio

are reports of the flu and pneumonia. Undoubtedly, his occupations were hazardous to his health. His death left Winnifred a widow with three young children, Francis, Harold, and Genevieve. She tried to run a boarding house but was having great difficulty. She was offered a job with a wealthy

family. Mr. Alva Bradley and his wife wanted Winnifred to be their housekeeper. She would live with them and could bring her son Francis since he was the same age as their son. She would need to make arrangements for her other children. So, Harold and Genevieve were sent to an orphanage. When her older sister, Mary, heard about the orphanage she immediately rescued the children. Mary was the oldest of the O'Rourke sisters, a widow with no biological children. She also claimed her sister Margaret's three young children when they were put in an orphanage after Margaret's death. Mary O'Rourke Heinz raised five nieces and nephews to adulthood, mostly on her own. One of them, Genevieve, stayed with her for her entire life.



Mary O'Rourke Heinz with Geraldine Murphy (Busher)

Mary decided to get a job for Winnifred that was closer to where she was living in Cleveland Heights. When Winnifred left the Bradley home, her son Francis stayed on in his role as companion to their son. He graduated from a private high school and apparently even attended some college with him. This was Francis Murphy, my grandfather.

The job that Mary found for Winnifred was with her parish priest, Father John Mary Powers, who needed a housekeeper. Winnifred was a good fit. She kept his house and apparently functioned as an administrative assistant in running the parish. She worked for him for 30 years. Father Powers is noted in the Cleveland Historical Organization for the unique work that he did as he built a new parish in what was then the developing outskirts of Cleveland, Ohio. He had

an exceptional eye for secondhand bargains. He found oak woodwork in mansions, marble from the Ritz-Carlton Hotel in Manhattan; and chandeliers, choir loft railing, columns, and brass and bronze doors from the First National Bank in Cleveland. The church was dedicated in 1952. It now has landmark status, a testament to thrifting.



Interior of St. Ann Church, Cleveland, Ohio

I knew Winnifred O'Rourke Murphy, my great grandmother, her daughter, whom we called Aunt Genevieve, and her sister, Aunt Mary. When I was between the ages of 8 and 16 my family lived close enough to visit the large and formidable house occupied by these 3 elderly relatives on Lambertson Road in Cleveland Heights, Ohio. Mary O'Rourke had married Philip Heinz and been left as a childless widow. At the time I knew them, both Aunt Mary and Grandma Murphy were bedridden but sound of mind. They were said to enjoy brief visits from the children, one at a time. Of course, we had been scrubbed clean before the visit and dressed in our Sunday best. We were instructed to speak up and be clear, but not to shout. We were not to touch anything unless we were asked to.

Upon leaving we could approach the bed for a handshake or perhaps be invited in for a kiss on the cheek. I was afraid of Aunt Mary. Her room was massive and dark. She had a problem with her eyes. I found the adults in the family sympathetic about my fear. My Great Grandmother was much more



Winnifred O'Rourke Murphy

fun. Her room was brighter, and she had a radio on her bedside table. During the season, it was always tuned to baseball games. She knew about all the players and their stats. I was impressed. I later learned that the wealthy man that she had worked for and who had allowed my grandfather to live as companion to his son, was the principal owner of the Cleveland Indians. My father said that knowing about the team gave her something to talk about when the priests came to visit. Since Mary and Winnifred

could not attend mass on Sunday, a priest visited the house every week. It wasn't exactly a mass that was said, it was the last rites, a sacrament that includes confession and communion for someone who is near to death. Since both ladies were in there 90's, they found this comforting.

Our family occasionally attended mass at St. Ann's and then were invited to lunch. This usually involved some other relatives helping Aunt Genevieve with the food. Any teen or preteen children were put on clean up duty. This needed to be carefully supervised due to the very fancy gold rimmed plates and crystal glassware that must not be broken.



2322 Lamberton Road, Cleveland, Ohio

Aunt Mary's house was amazing in my young mind. My family had just moved into a brand-new, suburban housing development in Sheffield Lake, Ohio, where everything was modern, quickly, and economically built. But this house was traditional, stalwart, and robust, much like the lady who built it. Various accounts had Aunt Mary mixing the concrete for the foundation, on the roof hammering in the shingles, and

planting the rose garden, perhaps all on the same day. She functioned as building contractor and supervised every detail. The inside of the house was furnished in heavy and elaborately carved furniture, lots of velvets and tassels, doilies, and embroidered pillows everywhere. There were pictures on the walls of flowers and one of the Sacred Heart. I remember the enormous Boston fern and a bowl

filled with hard candies that we were not allowed to touch or ask for. We needed to wait for Aunt Genevieve to invite us to have one.



My Aunt Genevieve was a 6th grade Science Teacher. When I was 9 years old, she gave me a beautiful book. It was “The World We Live In,” a Time Life Special Edition. I thought it was the best book I had ever seen. It wasn’t my birthday, and she didn’t have presents for anyone else. I was stunned. My mother told me later that she had mentioned how much I was interested in nature and playing outdoors. I was always bringing home strange insects and creatures to study and try to care for. She just wanted to encourage my interest.

My Great grandmother, Winnifred Murphy died when I was 12. I was preparing to receive the sacrament of Confirmation in the Catholic Church. Attending her funeral made a huge impression on me. St. Ann’s Church seemed more like a cathedral than a humble parish church. The altar was decorated with all of the best candle sticks, banners, and dressings. There was nothing that looked like a funeral. Even the casket had a pretty cloth covering it. There were many flowers and lots of people. All the cousins, aunts, and uncles were there, as well as many people who were just members of the parish who remembered her. There were at least 6 priests on the altar participating in the mass and the service. The vestments they wore were dazzling with embroidery. They had traveled from afar to speak from their hearts about what a wonderful, kind, caring and sometimes funny woman she was. I thought that, if ever someone got a pass to go straight into heaven it was Winnifred Murphy. I decided that day that my confirmation name would be Winnifred. I felt incredibly special to be a direct descendant and be seated near the front of the church. My father was a pallbearer. I wondered what Aunt Genevieve would do now. She would be all alone in that big house that she grew up in. We saw her a few more times at weddings and family gatherings. She lived in the house that her Aunt Mary had raised her in until she died in St. Vincent Charity Hospital of heart failure.



**The Altar at St. Ann Church,
Cleveland, Ohio**