



## ANCESTORS

By Monroe S. Miller

Traffic was light and yet it seemed to take forever to make the relatively short trip to Chicago. I swung into the parking lot at O'Hare's international terminal and took the nearest parking space.

Clear weather practically insured my flight would leave on time, and the high pressure centered over the eastern U.S. made it likely this trip to Scotland via Washington D.C.'s Dulles Airport would make good time. Arrival schedules don't always give enough credit to strong west to east tailwinds.

The Air Scotland flight left O'Hare at 12:30 p.m. and landed Dulles at 4:30 p.m. An hour and a quarter later we took off for Glasgow. The plane was full and I had a window seat. I watched the airline crew load the luggage of our D.C. passengers—it seemed about a third of them were accompanied by their golf clubs.

Who could be surprised? Scotland, after all, is the ancestral home of golf.

Curious. Ancestors inspired my trip - family ancestors and a career ancestor and an ancestral ground.

I lost track of time on the transatlantic flight. Glasgow airport clocks showed it was almost 6:00 a.m. when I walked from the plane into the airport. My watch still read Wisconsin time—12:00 midnight.

Not long after our departure from Dulles my excitement subsided and I slipped into thoughtful reflection about this long planned and even longer dreamed about pilgrimage. What coincidence that an individual could make one voyage and return to the places, so close in proximity, where family—the Clan Munro—and work—Old Tom Morris—lived.

I recalled the sentimental moment, the exact moment, I promised myself I would travel to Scotland and see where my seven-great grandfather lived and worked before coming to America in 1652. I was at the foot of his gravestone in the Lexington, Massachusetts, flushed with emotion at finding this ancient relative's resting

place. It was so long ago when he died—January 27, 1717—and so much had happened in all the years since.

William hadn't come to Boston from near Tain in eastern Ross-shire, Scotland by choice. He had been a soldier fighting for the interests of King Charles I and was captured by Cromwell. Along with other prisoners, he was shipped from London on November 11, 1651 for banishment in America.

Who could miss the twist in life's events? William's decedents—grandsons, great grandsons, nephews, grand nephews and more—would take the first stand *against* the King, only a little more than a half century after his death, right there on the Lexington green and a short couple hundred yards from his grave. The 77 minutemen who confronted the British on April 19, 1775 after warnings from Paul Revere included seven Munros.

Much to my surprise the Scottish customs area wasn't staffed, so we hustled right through to the baggage claim. Thank goodness my one suitcase had arrived with me. I grabbed it and headed to the car rental desk to get keys to my reserved car. With some luck I'd get out of the airport and in front of the Glasgow morning rush hour.

The civility of the Scottish people I'd dealt with so far impressed me. Even the gent who corrected my pronunciation—"it's Glaz'go, matey"—did so with politeness. I'm not sure you'd experience the same at O'Hare at six in the morning. He even laughed when I suggested "you guys talk funny."

I pulled the rented Sierra out of the airport and onto Highway M8, heading for the A80. Glasgow, from its highways, looks pretty much like big cities in our countries. Its ancient cathedral rose up from the city in the early morning light, stark and dignified. Admittedly I couldn't pay too much attention; my hands were full trying to

maneuver a car with the steering on the wrong side of the dash along the wrong side of the highway. The signs for the A80 came up quickly and I left the heavy traffic behind and turned northeast toward Stirling.

Traffic thinned dramatically and that gave me a chance to give attention to the landscape I was moving through. It was mostly flat, with some rolling hills interrupted by slag heaps, ugly signs of civilization.

At Stirling I first started seeing the beauty Scotland is known for and the Scotland seen in photographs. Quickly the colors green and purple dominated. Youth on a farm and a career on a golf course have highlighted my love of the landscape. Stirling is set in lovely fertile farmland, along the River Forth. I saw the first castle here, sitting high on a volcanic cone that thrusts above the plain below. It had been there since Roman times, between A.D. 80 and A.D. 410.

The temptation to stray and explore around Stirling was great and not unlike that calling me to find the old golf courses I'd read about that were

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so near, no matter where you were in Scotland. I resisted because I had a reservation at the Ben Wyvis Hotel, many miles and hours north.

The geography changed dramatically around Perth. Farmland was less frequent north of Perth as Route A9 now led a little northwest. It followed Glen Gary through the Pass of Drumochter to Glen Truim. I allowed one side trip just past the town of Pitlochry in the Grampian Mountains. At that point you are well aware that you are in the Scottish Highlands. A few miles west of the Pass of Killiecrankie is the "Queen's View", a breathtaking spot over Loch Tummel. I bought a cup of hot coffee and relaxed there for a bit.

The push for Inverness on the way to Strathpeffer and a needed rest at the hotel took me through Spey River Valley. The excellent malts from here made the area around Kingussie the best whiskey making region, not only in Scotland but in the world. I wished for an appreciation for Scotch this once, a taste I'd never developed.

Dusk had fallen when I reached the Ben Wyvis Hotel at Strathpeffer. What a relief! It seemed so long ago that I'd left Middleton. Fact was, this was my first chance since leaving to get showered and a long night's rest. I was exhausted, not just from travel but from the tension associated with driving on the left-hand side of the road.

The hotel was old and a little worn but very clean and comfortable. It was carpeted by beautiful woven tartan carpets that had been made even more beautiful with time. I think I was asleep before my head hit the pillow.

The morning dawned sunny, a pleasant break from the dreary cloudy weather of the previous 24 hours. I had a little breakfast before stepping outside. When I did I was treated to the immaculate grounds around the hotel. The lawn was a deep green, healthy and thick. Far off was Ben Wyvis, namesake of the hotel and one of the highest mountains in the British Isles. Its snowy top was ringed by forests of spruce, a calendar picture scene. The fresh air and my refreshed body made me anxious to get started with a few days of exploring my ancestral home.

The friendly elderly gal at the hotel desk was helpful when I inquired about directions.

"What toons er ya lookin' for, lad-die?" she asked.

I went through my list of villages and churches significant to our Clan Munro

history—Tain where William was born and raised, Ainess, Tarbot, Evanton, Avoch, Fortrose, Cromarth. She told me how to get to the summit of Ben Wyvis. I inquired about Culloden, where the Munros and Mackenzies ended their centuries of fighting over control of this area of Scotland in one big battle. The Munros lost their chief, but the Mackenzies lost their land.

"And how do you get to Foulis Castle?" I asked her. I penciled her reply with the other instructions she

had given me.

With notes in hand I left. At every stop for the next two days, as I roamed the Black Isle and areas surrounding Cromarty Firth, I felt awe and pride. And gratitude for the good luck of making this trip.

While I was in Tain and the countryside near there, I made my first visit to an ancestral home of my profession. As the crow flies, Tain is only five miles from Dornoch, home of the Royal Dornoch Golf Club. To get there

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I drove A9 from Tain across the bridge over Dornoch Firth to Evelix, turned right and drove the two miles to Dornoch. The course had been used for golf since 1616. The village was charming and small, a picture perfect for a postcard from Scotland. The club was a long walk up from the center of the village. The setting was breathtaking. It was steep in some places, rolling in others. It was craggy in some corners, gentle and smooth in others.

If one place held everything about my Scotland trip in its hands, this little village was the place. Dornoch was at the heart of where my family began and it was a significant golf venue. This old course was Donald Ross' course—he had been a greenkeeper and clubmaker here. He left with ideas and attitudes that created 500 golf courses in his life. History has it Ross became interested in course design as a teenager, when Old Tom Morris visited Dornoch from St. Andrews in 1886 to work on the Dornoch golf course. Yes, our Old Tom Morris. THE Old Tom Morris. Our ancestor.

I saved the best until last. Foulis Castle had been the home to the Munros for the past 600 years. The residents of Foulis today, still Munros, make family members from the world over feel welcome. Fields of oats and barley and forages surrounded the castle, located near Evanton. It faced south, overlooking Cromarty Firth. I drove to the front of the castle, parked and got out of my car, pausing long enough for a long look. A formidable stone and wrought iron fence surround Foulis. A flag with the Clan coat of arms fluttered above the castle in the wind, yellow with its familiar red eagle.

Captain Patrick Munro welcomed me at the top of the stairway at the double entrance. "Welcome to the home of all Munros," he said to me while offering his right hand.

After some pleasant conversation, this distant relative of mine allowed me to wander at my leisure through what was his home. I looked through the high ceiling rooms. I climbed into the four story tower with its barrel-vaulted chamber and 16th century gun ports. From there I could look across the blue water of Cromarty Firth and see the crops and pastures of the Black Isle on the other side.

Once satisfied with my self guided tour, I rested on a bench in the substantial courtyard, admiring the lawn and the gardens. I wondered if old William Munroe had been here at any-

time, before being banished to America.

Reluctantly, I rose to bid my hosts farewell. I needed to move on, east, toward my next stop on the east coast of Scotland.

The discovery of oil in the North Sea was a major find, and it was evident by an offshore platform in the Cromarty Bay. I expected to see more as I left Inverness and headed for Nairn and Elgin. The highway would take me close to the North Sea.

At Elgin A96 turned to the south-east toward Aberdeen. The city for generations had been known for its fishing and distilling industries. Now oil had brought unheard of prosperity. I asked an old fellow about it when I pulled into a petrol station outside Aberdeen for fuel.

"Fit are ye talkin' about, man? The oil's bin fine—it doesna' interfere wi' oor whiskey an' oor fish."

He laughed and added "Naehin' interferes wi' fish an' whiskey!"

I told him I wasn't really interested in any of them. I was focused on finding the Aberdeen Golf Links.

I had little time but was driven to see the golf course and maybe inquire about the great irony I had discovered years ago. I hoped to convince course officials to let me peruse old records.

The irony was this: the greenkeeper at Aberdeen Golf Links in the early 1820s was Alexander Monroe. It took little imagination or convincing for me to believe that he probably was an ancient relative. Aberdeen was really close to the towns and villages and farms of those known to my relatives of old. The spelling of his name had likely changed as mine had—from Munro to Munroe to Monroe. In the 1820s people with the same name from area most likely were related. There was no doubt for me. At some future trip I would investigate the genealogy of Alexander and find the shared relative.

For now I was struck by the coincidence that so long ago such an uncommon profession was occupied by a Monroe. Who knows—if Alexander had lived near Tain where William Munroe was raised, he was only a few miles from Dornoch. He could have learned his craft there, even if it was before the days of "Royal".

Club employees were gracious although far less outgoing than the same people at my club would be. I was allowed to look at the documents

recording Alexander's pay for 1820—four pounds! He was employed for "taking charge of the links and providing accommodations for the members' boxes." He was also to pay special attention to keeping the holes in good order. Don't ask me how to interpret the fact that in 1822 his pay was docked to three pounds. He must've had a terrible year in 1821!

I left the old Granite City and headed south along the coastline, on A90, travelling through quaint fishing villages along the way. Off the coast the skyline was punctuated with huge drilling rigs, harvesting the North Sea underground oil. I stayed at a small place, on the water, at Thornyshire Bay.

Morning fog slowed my departure, but it was the perfect excuse to sleep a little later after a busy day previous. Although it was tempting to stay on

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A90 for the sake of time, I continued along the coast on A92. The going was slow, but the beautiful scenery was worth it. It also took me within a few minutes of Carnoustie, another of Scotland's famous links.

There was wisdom, as it turned out, for staying on the coastal route. Slow travel and an easy pace gave me thinking time and time to feel a part of the land where golf began. The Scots call this linksland, an old word for the land at the edge of the sea. The land was always considered worthless, except to shepherds and their flocks. And to the early golfers. What I saw for miles was sandy shorelines and beaches, dunes large and small and grasses of all kinds. I felt the ever present northeast wind and saw the multitude of green shades in contrast with the blue water and the sand. It was an experience that is difficult to really describe. It has to be seen and felt in person.

Carnoustie interested me for any number of reasons—Ben Hogan's British Open win here in 1953, the course reputation as one of the world's greatest and toughest, and others. But mostly I wanted to see it because Old Tom Morris had laid out the last eight holes, years ago, completing the job began by his mentor, Allan Robertson. I noticed there the tolerance of the Scottish golfers—Carnoustie was a haven not just for the golf players but for joggers, walkers, fishermen, kite fliers and anyone else it seemed. Such is not the case on my home course—too much worry about lawsuits and vandalism.

The road to St. Andrews took me through Dundee, across the Firth of Tay, around the St. Andrews Bay and into the town. Excitement and anticipation filled me to the brim. I wasted little time in finding a room, unpacking the Sierra and getting cleaned up to look around and find something to eat.

I had an immediate love for this town. You have to, if you love golf. St. Andrews is taken over by golf, despite its university and cathedral and scores of interesting shops. St. Andrews has two courses, but the Old Course is the home of golf. You sense here that it really is a "royal and ancient game." The cold East Fife wind off the North Sea came up and I could see how Scotsmen of hundreds of years ago tried to keep warm by hitting round stones with sticks. "Where else would the game more likely have started than here?" I asked myself, now knowing the answer for sure first hand.

St. Andrews, golf course and town, have honored our ancestor, Old Tom Morris, for all the time during his career and after his death. His presence is everywhere. Residents talk about him as if he is still leaning on one of the rails at the 18th green, watching the players, moving them along or giving a word of advice. Old Tom won the British Open four times. So did his young son Tommy. Old Tom finished close in many other Open championships. I found myself on Tom Morris Drive in a newer part of town, close to the medical center. I shopped in the Tom Morris pro shop, now run by his descendants. And players on the Old Course finish their game on the eighteenth hole, a hole named for Old Tom.

I ventured to the cathedral ruins on the east side of St. Andrews, to the cemetery. In no time I found the grave of Old Tom Morris, close by the resting place of his son Tom. Young Tom passed away in 1875, at the age of 24. Old Tom lived until 1908, to the age of 87. I also happened upon the tombstone of Allan Robertson.

Old Tom Morris was born in St. Andrews and lived most of his life in the town. In 1851, not long after his marriage, he was invited by Colonel Fairlie to go with him to Ayrshire, south and west of St. Andrews on the west coast. Tom was 30 years old. He laid out the links of Prestwick and stayed until 1865. They were happy years for him. The course was known for its magnificent turf and became one of the champion courses of Great Britain.

The Royal and Ancient Club in St. Andrews invited Tom back in 1865. His duties were given to him like this: "To keep the putting greens in good order, to repair when necessary, and to make the hole." For heavy work, Tom was allowed help at the rate of one man's labor for two days a week. He was to work under the Green Committee. He was paid 50 pounds per year as custodian and 20 pounds a year for upkeep of the links.

The day was beautiful and there was nowhere in the world I'd rather be than where I was. Hanging out, soaking up the tradition, leaning on the railings outside the clubhouse at the 18th green, watching others making their own pilgrimage. The image of the clubhouse, the hotel, the Bay and Old Tom's Shop would never leave me, that was a certainty.

I had seen the nine holes he laid out at Dornoch, and only yesterday my feet were on Carnoustie. Here also

was the New Course, another of Old Tom's I could see.

It seemed likely that little had changed on the Old Course since Tom's departure, despite all that has happened in golf course management just during my own career. He was known to cry "Mair saund, Honeyman" to his assistant; some seem to think sand topdressing is something new to the past dozen or twenty years. Nowadays some courses have greens rollers, "new equipment for new times." Yet I would bet Old Tom Morris himself had rolled the greens at St. Andrews a hundred years ago, or more. Our solid tine aerifiers were Old Tom's pitchforks. We have low nitrogen programs, a relatively new approach to fertility. New? Old Tom Morris never had anything but low fertility programs for his course.

Some are working to get their golf courses closed a day a week in the U.S. Old Tom's saying about Sunday golf was well known: "If you gentlemen dinna need a rest on the Sawbath, the links does."

My time in St. Andrews had to end. I was sad as I walked to my car for the trip to the Glasgow airport and the flight home.

I promised myself to return to this country of ancestry. Every New Year's Eve we sing Rabbie Burns' song "Auld Lang Syne". The words mean "old by since" or "the days of long ago". They say a lot about Scotland and her people. The Scottish love the past and have preserved it for sentimentalists like me. The least I and others like me can do is visit. 🍷



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