

The Darcys of Ireland

The Darcys of Ireland trace back to either of two sources. They may be descended from one of the twelve tribes of Ireland, specifically the O'Dorchaidhe; or they may be descended from the Norman (French) D'Arcys, who accompanied William the Conqueror to England in the eleventh century. We simply don't know which is the origin of our Dorcy family. If our origin is from the O'Dorchaidhe, then William and Mary Durning in their 1986 book *A Guide to Irish Roots* will show you the lineage all the way back to Adam; but our research leads us to presume ancestry among the Norman D'Arcys.

A great deal has been written about the Norman D'Arcy family in England and Ireland, their castles, the coats of arms, and their dozens of pedigrees. There is also a lot of information about their origin. Among the sources we have looked at are "Irish Pedigrees" by John O'Hart, Burke's Peerage, The Irish Genealogist (a periodical), and many others. We can not trace our Dorcy family directly to any of the many families mentioned in the numerous accounts, but we think it is of interest to the family to know something of our possible lineage.

The Norman D'Arcys are said to have originated from a family who lived at "d'Arques-la-Bataille", which is a castle about thirty miles from Paris, France. According to one account this family traces directly to Charlemagne or Charles the Great. One of the members of this family is said to have gone to Palestine in the Crusades and from him came the D'Arcy motto "Un Dieu, Un Roi", or "One God, One King".

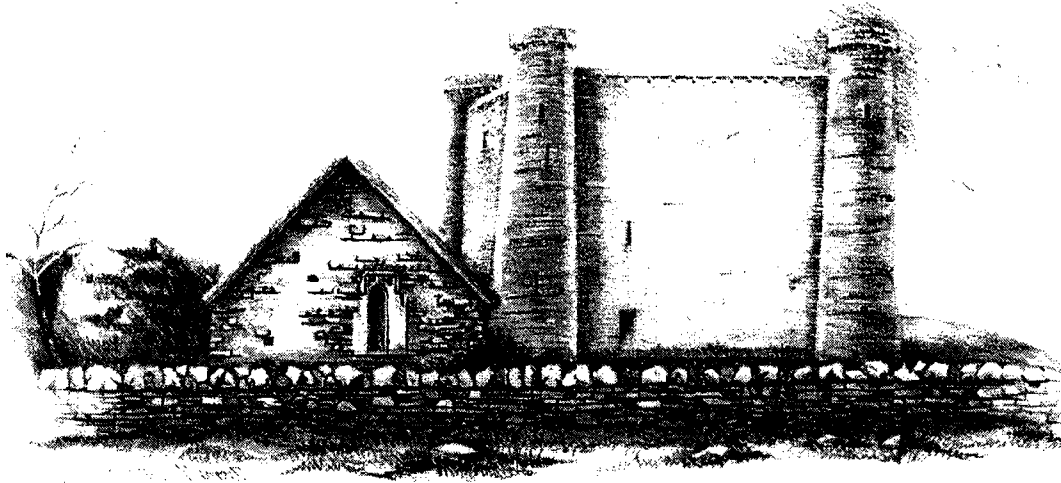
Another member of the family accompanied William the Conqueror to England in the eleventh century, and it was there that William defeated the Saxon King Harold in 1066 at the battle of Hastings. As a result of his service this distinguished D'Arcy ancestor was awarded lands in Lincolnshire. This award is recorded in the Domesday Book, a survey of all England made at the behest of William shortly after conquering the Saxons and gaining control of England.

The D'Arcy family in England sent representatives to Ireland at a very early date. Some accounts say the D'Arcys were there about 1200-1300. They and other English and Norman families gained estates in Ireland and we presume that our Darcy family of Ireland is descended from some line of this distinguished family.

The Norman D'Arcys occupied many areas in Ireland including Meath and Galway. The Dunmoe Castle ruin on the River Boyne near Navan was built probably in the fifteenth century and was occupied by the Darcy family in the late sixteen hundreds. It is, or was, a beautiful example of the kind of castle of which dreams are made. It lays in a magnificent setting on a curve of the River Boyne. Cromwell is said to have used it for target practice when he had his gunners fire on it from across the River Boyne, although why he would do so defies reason! The ruins of the old chapel on the castle grounds still exist and the gravestone of John Darcy (died in the 1600's) is still intact. We wish we could trace our family from Tipperary directly to some family such as this, but the possibility of doing so is rather slim at best. The custom then provided that the elder son inherited the bulk of the estate; so who is to say that one of the younger sons of this

The Descendants of John Dorcy, Civil War Soldier

noble family didn't hit on hard times in one or more generations and eventually end up as a simple tenant farmer as was our ancestor, John Darcy, Sr.



Dunmoe Castle near Navan, Ireland "As it might have been" sketch by Gary Lyscio

There are other Darcy castles in Ireland. One is in County Galway built in the early 1800's. It also has a beautiful setting overlooking the water near Clifden in the west of Galway. The builder of this castle, John Darcy, was also the founder of the town of Clifden, but this family is too late to be our ancestors.

Some of the Darcys of Galway are said to be of the Irish O'Dorchaidhes and adopted the Norman spelling of D'Arcy presumably to gain status. We can't be sure from which group our Darcy family came - Norman D'Arcys or Irish O'Dorchaidhes.

We don't know where our particular Darcy family came from prior to about 1830 since very few early records exist of common folks, especially Catholics, and our family in Tipperary was Catholic. As a matter of fact the Catholic church in Ireland was prevented from holding religious services from about 1703 until about 1829, although some priests continued to conduct secret masses at the risk of their lives. Because of this ban on Catholic Church activities, virtually no Catholic church records exist for that period. So in the absence of any confirming records we can only guess that the Darcys are descendants of one of the Darcy families of Norman origin who had been in Ireland for the previous four or five hundred years.

Variations of the name are a natural outcome of the variations in dialect - how the name was pronounced - and of the widespread illiteracy of the times. While John Darcy, Sr., could read and write (per the 1860 census) and would probably write his name with some consistency of spelling, record keepers in general would put various interpretations on what they heard when they asked John his name. So we will see Darcy, D'Arcy, D'Orsay, Dorcy, Dorsey, and others. Add to that the variations in script and people's ability, or lack of same, to decipher other handwriting and it is not hard to come up with many spelling variations of the name. Therefore, when searching records of various vintages, one has to search for every possible spelling, and many times the name may be spelled more than one way in a single document.

The Descendants of John Dorcy, Civil War Soldier

We find the earliest John Darcy to which we can truly connect our family, in the following location in Ireland: County Tipperary (North Riding), the Barony of Lower Ormond, the Civil Parish of Kilbarron, the Townland of Lisquilabeen. He is there between 1834 and 1852, according to the birth records of his children and tax records. The political divisions of Ireland as used above haven't changed in hundreds of years. The townland is the smallest division. The townland of Lisquilabeen is 384 acres and is irregularly shaped. The shape of a townland is determined by natural boundaries such as creeks, hills and hedgerows. The individual fields within the townland are defined mostly by hedgerows and often haven't changed boundaries in many, many years. Some fields carry the same name generation after generation. An example is "Hogan's Field" in Lisquilabeen, still called that according to the locals even though no Hogans have lived there for years.

The village of Coolbaun, which is on the edge of Lisquilabeen, is only a crossroads with a post office, a very small shop, a telephone kiosk and a couple of houses. One group of buildings a hundred yards south looked old enough to be from the 1850's. Many of the farm houses of the area are quite old, but there are some modern houses, also.

The land of this area is hilly but mostly good farmland, fields and pasture. There are some low spots - swampy in April - and some forest, especially on the hills. Three old castle ruins stand in the area perhaps a half mile apart which are said to have belonged to the Kennedy brothers in ancient times.

The tenant/landlord system had existed for several hundred years in Ireland before we find our family. Fields were leased from the owner by tenant farmers who were obligated to pay the owner a yearly rent, perhaps in grain or other commodity. The tenants may have been given a long lease, perhaps even a lifetime lease, but could never own the property. When the lease expired they were always in danger of having to move out, depending on what the landlord planned to do with the property, or perhaps of having the rent raised to some impossible amount. Sometimes this resulted in eviction and tearing down the house; and since the tenants had no rights to the property or to improvements they might have made, they all too often had no place to go. It wasn't until the late 1800's that the Irish were allowed to buy the property on which they may have lived for several hundred years and may have even previously owned.

Since the Dorcy family came to America at about the time the great potato famine of Ireland ended, a brief description of the famine and the conditions in Ireland at the time is of interest. The book *The Great Hunger*, by Cecil Woodham-Smith, from which the following was abstracted, is a study of the times in Ireland, the attitudes of the administrators of relief efforts, and of the pain and suffering of the Irish people during the famine period.

The Irish were simply the poorest of the poor at this time. The German traveler Kohl wrote "...no mode of life in Europe could seem pitiable after one had seen Ireland". Nearly half the rural families lived in windowless mud cabins of one room. The evicted and unemployed lived in roofed over ditches, burrowed into banks, or existed in bog holes. These were the wretched conditions *prior* to the famine.

The Descendants of John Darcy, Civil War Soldier

In the early fall of 1845 it was discovered that the potato crop in Ireland was suffering from a fungus which caused the potatoes to rot in the ground or shortly after they were dug. The Irish peasants of that time lived almost exclusively by the potato. It was said that the average person ate several pounds of potatoes each day. Any other crops they grew, corn or other grains, went to pay the rent to the landlord. If tenants didn't pay the rent, they were evicted! Therefore, the landlords took the grain as rent and exported it, even as the Irish tenants were starving. The winter of 1845-46 was a bad one for the peasants; and although the British government tried various relief efforts, there were many deaths by starvation and, worse, many more from sickness such as typhus and relapsing fever. Scurvy was also present since the relief efforts provided Indian corn, which contains no vitamin C, as a substitute for potatoes.

The famine carried on through 1849 and beyond with total failure of the potato crop in 1846 and 1848. The somewhat misdirected efforts of the English relief agencies, soup kitchens and public works to provide employment, gave little real respite. The miseries of the people, the disease, the evictions, the "tumbling down" of the evicted tenants' houses, and the attempts at relief are well described in the above mentioned book and in other books. It is a tragic story. The loss of population in Ireland during this time from starvation, disease, and emigration was about 2 1/2 million people - about a quarter of the original population.

We found an interesting fact about the population of the townland of Lisquilabeen, the home of John Darcy and his family. The census records of this area for 1841 and 1851 were destroyed in the public record office fire as a result of fighting in Dublin in 1922. But a census summary still exists which shows that the population of Lisquilabeen went from a total of 212 in 1841 to 136 in 1851. The total number of houses went from 39 to 26 in the same period - a really significant reduction. I think we can safely assume that this reduction in population and houses was a result of the famine, evictions, and emigration and that it must have been a terribly difficult time for the Darcy family of Lisquilabeen.

John Darcy, Sr., lived as a tenant farmer under these conditions when first we find a record of him in 1834 in the Kilbarron-Terryglass parish records in the Catholic diocese of Killaloe. He is also listed in Griffith's Valuation, a census of sorts which was taken for the purpose of determining how much tax was to be paid to the Poor Law Union, an agency to take care of the poor and indigent. John and



The Darcy House as it appeared in 1936.

his wife, Bridget Casey, lived in Lisquilabeen and according to the records leased 40 acres of land from the landlord, John Minchin. Minchin lived in a grand house up on the hill a short distance away, and John and the other tenant farmers lived down near the fields in small thatched cottages with stone walls and a fireplace on the end. The house in which

The Descendants of John Darcy, Civil War Soldier

John and Bridget lived is still there on the side of a hill, still known as Darcy Hill. A second story was added to the house some fifty years ago and the thatched roof is gone, replaced by a more modern one.

The Catholic chapel, at which he and his family probably worshipped, was a mile or so away across some fields. It has been replaced with a modern church building, but was shown on a map of the area in 1852. A mile or so west of their home is the ruin of Kilbarron Abbey with its graveyard. In it are five Darcy stones with dates of 1765, 1767, 1774, 1812, 1813, and 1850. This last stone says

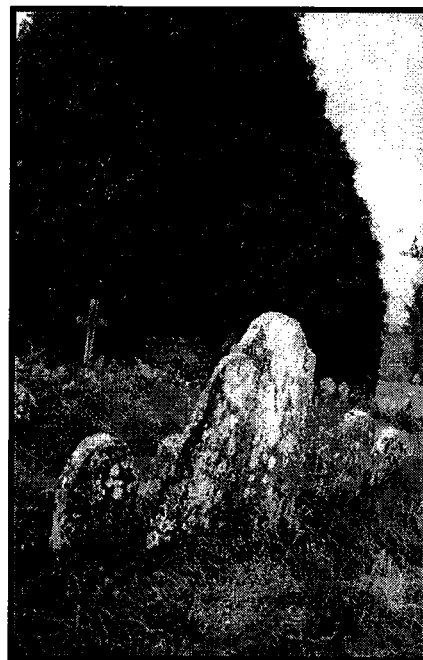
“ERECTED BY JOHN DARCY OF LISLIN LANE, IN MEMORY OF HIS FATHER, MICHAEL DARCY, WHO DIED THE 16th OF JUNE 1850, AGED 48 YEARS”.

Lislin Lane according to the locals is almost certainly the lane which leads up to the Darcy home from the main road. We don't know exactly who this man named on the stone is or how he relates to the family, but he is certainly related somehow. These stones are evidence that the family lived here in the seventeen hundreds and who knows how long before that. I'm sure that many more of the family must have this same cemetery as their final resting place without benefit of any marker.

The Darcy farm is now a dairy belonging to Tom Casey and his mother who was age 88 in 1990. She says the farm has belonged to the Casey family since the Darcys left for America in about 1850-1860. All the land records we could find and the earliest census available, 1901, bear this out. So these Caseys are almost without question related to John Darcy, Sr.'s wife, Bridget Casey. She is named as the mother in baptismal records for Michael, Patrick, William and Timothy. She is probably the mother of John, Jr. the Civil War soldier, born about 1832. We can't be sure of that, however, since John, Jr.'s baptismal record was not found in the Terryglass-Kilbarron parish records, nor was that of his two sisters, Sarah and Mary.

Lislin Lane, the lane that runs from the main road up to the Darcy farm (now the Casey farm), runs alongside of a ruined house which is said to be the Hogan house. One of John Darcy's children, Mary, married Pat Hogan and she and her baby appear in the 1860 Michigan census with the D'Orsay family. Their marriage, along with the baptism of their child, Bridget, is in the Kilbarron-Terryglass parish records and they are from Lisquilabeen. The Hogan family is known to have been in this same area for hundreds of years. The remains of an ancient Hogan castle are at Ardcroney nearby.

On the west side of the main road going south out of Coolbaun is a large house set back about 300 yards up on a hill. This was the estate of John Minchin, a major landowner and the landlord of John Darcy in 1850. His holdings probably resulted from



**Some Darcy stones,
Kilbarron Abbey, Tipperary,
Ireland.**

The Descendants of John Dorcy, Civil War Soldier

Cromwellian times, but we have not established this in any records. We found several Minchin graves in the Protestant Church of Ireland graveyard near Coolbaun.

A search for the Minchin estate records in Dublin found only records pertaining to other Minchins of the area and nothing related to Lisquilabeen or to the Darcy family. One of the Minchin descendants, however, was one of the first people to fly the Atlantic Ocean, crashing in Ireland at the conclusion of the flight.

The Irish Settlement in St. Clair County, Michigan

St. Clair County, Michigan, where the John Dorcy family first settled when they came to America, may have been somewhat unique in its Irish character. In 1833 the Catholic diocese of Detroit was created. This meant that parishes could be organized and even if the priests were only temporary or "circuit riders", the Irish Catholics of St. Clair County, Michigan now had a church.

In about 1850 Patrick Kennedy was organizing Emmett township (named after the Irish patriot, Robert Emmett) in St. Clair County. It is said that Patrick, a correspondent for the New York newspaper, *Irish World*, envisioned a "Little Ireland" in St. Clair County. He became land agent and divided four townships into sub-divisions so that those immigrants from County Clare lived with neighbors from County Clare, and the same with those from Limerick, Tipperary, Kerry, and Waterford. The area grew rapidly. The Erie Canal at this time provided a quick and inexpensive way to travel west and the area around Emmett quickly became an Irish settlement. Mary Ellen Carroll's family arrived about 1850 and the Dorcy family shortly thereafter. No doubt some of the family relatives came earlier than that.

Our family lived in the area at least until 1884 when most of our immediate family had moved to Mason County, Michigan. We have been unable to trace some descendants, so some remnants of the family probably live there still. A restaurant called *The Dorcy House* operated there until it was closed a couple years ago. We have been unable to establish a connection between our family and the restaurant.

