

The Murphys of Rathcore Rectory

Julia Turner

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The Murphys of Rathcore Rectory is a legacy-driven, period biography of an Irish family.

Julia Turner's family biography, *The Murphys of Rathcore Rectory*, covers professors, ministers, abusers, doctors, soldiers, and charmers living at the turn of the century in Ireland.

Centered on imposing minister and professor James Murphy, who lived from 1850 to 1919, the book also covers his immediate family—his wife, Emmeline Annie, and their ten children. The family settled at Rathcore, where Murphy was a harsh disciplinarian. He tutored most of his children, rectory boarders, and ministers to the Rathcore parish. He also taught at Trinity College in nearby Dublin. Five of his children became doctors, and one was among the first women to study medicine at Trinity. As they grew older, they scattered, settling across the British Isles, in America, and in Canada.

A traumatic account of Murphy's tirades begins their tale, though. It is recalled that he beat his children and wife on a regular basis. The book does not dwell on his treatment of them; instead, it elucidates the probable causes of his violence, and shows how his descendants carried on. It notes that Murphy himself grew up with abuse, and, under pressure to succeed as a leader in his community, at a time when all things British dominated, he became violent himself. The potato famine is a prominent theme throughout. Despite the hatred that some of his children harbored against him, Murphy was respected, and artifacts and memorabilia collected in the text highlight his cultural legacy.

The Murphy siblings are positioned as theatrical and charismatic, and are recalled to have formed a band and an acting troupe. Turner highlights them as athletes, adventurous travelers, and innovators in their fields, with funny family sayings and nicknames contributing to these pictures. Conversations between family members are resurrected; they speak as a tight-knit group, swapping tales that remember the good times and forget the bad. There are more sobering developments in their lives, too: one son became an alcoholic who had PTSD after WWII.

Turner traveled around Ireland to research the Murphys, and stories about the people she met in the process are flavorful. The family biography itself maintains a jocular tone as it shares maps, letters, poems, photographs, and family trees. Some of its resources are shared in Gaelic, and some stories repeat. Most of the narrative is chronological, with ancillary characters tacked on at its end; treatments of some of the family members are too swift.

The Murphys of Rathcore Rectory is a period biography of an Irish family that shows a clear devotion to their legacy.

MARI CARLSON (November 18, 2020)

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