

Ó Siotháin



Sheehan

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The SHEEHAN family is of Milesian origin. They belong to that group of clans known in genealogical records as Dalcassians, that is, families who trace their descent from Cormac Cas, son of Olioll Ollum, King of Munster in the second century, A. D.

The ancient Gaelic name was O'Siodhachain. Scholars usually derive it from the word "siodhach" which signifies "peaceful". The prefix "O", now very rarely used with the name, means "descendant of", so that Sheehan or O'Sheehan means "the descendant of the peaceful one".

Today the majority of the SHEEHANS live in County Cork and in the districts and Counties Kerry and Limerick bordering on Cork. Their ancestral home and possessions were located in the barony of Connello, County Limerick.

As the O'Briens were the dominant clan of Dal Cas, and were most frequently elected Kings of Thomond, the fortunes of the SHEEHANS and other lesser Dalcassian septs followed the historical vicissitudes of the O'Briens. Thus the family story tends to become overshadowed in annals of Thomond by that of the O'Briens. But like most of the noble Celtic families of Munster, the SHEEHANS lost their possessions, power and influence in the confiscations that followed the Williamite Wars.

The name SHEEHAN is frequently found in Galway also. The ancestors of these families were followers of the O'Kellys of Hy Maine whose ups and downs they shared through the ages when the O'Kellys were a power in the land.

Two very distinguished bearers of the name in comparatively modern times were priests. Canon Sheehan (1852-1903), beloved sage and pastor of Doneraile, is famous throughout the English speaking world as the author of "My New Curate" and a dozen other equally engaging novels and stories of Irish life. Most Reverend Richard Alphonsus Sheehan (1845-1915), Bishop of Waterford, was a great churchman as well as a noted writer and champion of the Irish language and Gaelic revival.

## What is a "Coat Of Arms"?

From the earliest times it was customary for warrior chieftains to display on the battlefield some emblem distinctive of themselves or of their family or tribe. These insignia were usually arbitrary, changeable at the whim or will of the chief; they were not necessarily symbolic nor were they always hereditary.

However, the introduction of armor in the twelfth century made the bearing of such definite distinguishing marks a military necessity. Since the helmet usually covered the face, and the body was encased in armor, it became essential for the knight to wear on his shield some appropriate colors or markings by which in the melee of battle he might be plainly recognized by friend and foe alike. During a campaign or at the tournament these differentiating emblems often appeared also on the helmet crest and the lance pennon as well as on the shield. Hence the entire device was referred to as a "crest". Regularly they were woven into the surcoat, a garment worn over the armor on ceremonial occasions, and at times to protect the armor and its wearer from the blazing heat of the sun. This practice gave rise to the term, "coat of arms".

When the knight appeared in full panoply at a tournament, an official called a herald, announced to the spectators his identity and usually described for them his insignia. This identification was called "blazoning the arms". In time the whole art of identifying the arms, the interpretation and application of the rules and customs that governed the adoption, designing and registration of armorial bearings came to be called "heraldry".

Since the adoption of armor and the concomitant use of heraldic devices became widespread in Europe within the space of a few generations, there was danger that two or more knights might choose the same identifying symbols. To obviate this confusion, in the course of time the sovereign gradually appropriated the right to approve, through official heralds, the particular distinguishing marks to be used by those entitled to display a coat of arms. And thus the right to use specific and distinctive heraldic devices came to be recognized as a mark of nobility or honor in the realm. The right was also granted as a reward for or in recognition of some outstanding achievement or patriotic service.

*Certain heraldic devices, when originally chosen by their wearers, were meant to symbolize some attribute associated with the knight or the family. For the most part, however, the original meanings of the symbols have been lost. In the vast majority of cases, the designs appearing on coats of arms were chosen merely as differentiating marks, and carry with them no special significance, historical or other. At the present time, the interpretation, if any is attempted or given by authorities, is at best traditional.*

Your family crest, however, is more than an interesting memorial of a colorful past. It enshrines something of the best traditions on which our civilization is built, and, even in our matter-of-fact day, can provide an incentive to preserve our heritage.