

William James
McKnight
American Immigrant
Duchess of Atholl
Decmeber of 1932



In December, 1932, William James McKnight emigrated from the U.S.A. when his father and mother (my Grandparents) died. He was living in a house with 15 people in Chicago, Illinois after he was orphaned, with his Uncle Jim and Aunt Sara Hamilton. It was the peak of the depression and things were tough. His brother and sister were older and had jobs. He was young and needed a better environment.

He was sent to live with his Uncle Jim and Ma (Jane Caldwell) McKnight in Belfast, Northern Ireland. His Uncle Jim McKnight was a type setter with the Irish News and earned a relatively good living during the depression.

He was accompanied to Ireland by his Aunt Sara Adair Hamilton on his journey from Chicago to St. John's, Canada to Liverpool, England to Belfast, Northern Ireland (Ulster). He said the journey across was cold, stormy, and miserable. It must have been a frightening journey for a ten year old. He was without his sister and brother and going to a strange land at ten. He went third class. As a memento of the trip, he was given a pin which he still holds. The ship, "Duchess of Atholl", stopped at the entrance to the Belfast Locks and discharged Bill and Aunt Sara for a journey up the locks to Belfast in a motor skiff, slightly larger than a passenger ship life boat. Aunt Sara called back to Chicago from the Belfast Post Office (no one had phones in Ireland) to tell them they arrived. It would be months before Aunt Sara could return. The passage (a one-way) was payed for from the net proceeds of Grandma Hamilton's (Grandma McKnight's) life insurance after the funeral. Uncle Jim would have to save and send money to secure Aunt Sara's return. It was the height of the depression and money was tight! It would be 28 years before William James McKnight would return on a DC-8 United Airlines flight to Chicago's O'Hare Airport. Along the way, he became a type setter and a Bombadier/Navigator in the RAF.

The ship had it's own story. The Duchess of Atholl was one of four Duchess class steamers built for Canadian Pacific in 1928. She was built by William Beardmore & Company in Glasgow, Scotland. She sailed the Liverpool - Canada route and in 1939 was requisitioned as a troopship. Duchess of Atholl's war service lasted only 3 years. On October 10, 1942 she was torpedoed and sunk by a U-178 German

submarine in the South Atlantic with the loss of 4 lives. Of the four "Duchesses", two were sunk during WWII."