

GURTADERRA

(A County Clare Townsland)

- by Martin Nugent

THE FENIANS AND I.R.A.

During the Fenian times a number of rifles hidden in Aile Near the Alley bridge were discovered and seized by the police and a British Army detachment built a hut and remained there a year or so.

During the land war, the Sheriff and police made many raids on Gurtaderra in an attempt to seize cattle for non-payment of rent, but they usually failed as they traveled on horses and sidecars, people shouted and blew horns so those in danger usually had time to move their cattle to the land of someone else who did not owe rent.

Gurtaderra backed Parnell and remained loyal to him at the time of the Parnell split.

During the war of Independence, all the young men joined the Volunteers. They cut trenches in roads and knocked trees and bridges to prevent or at least delay the British lorries. I remember Coolagoree Bridge (the Guardbridge) Sean Boher Bridge (Padneens Bridge) being down and trenches cut in the line at Bill McGraths ray. Enough of the bridges were left standing to enable a horse and cart to pass. The local young men acted as sentries when the flying column which carried out the ambushes and attacks on barracks were in the area. Son McMahon, Mick Guilfoyle, Paddy Dalahunty, John Noonan and Johnny Moroney got I.R.A. medals in recognition of their services. Joe Nugent and John Moroney of Gurtavrulla were members of the Active Service unit, that is the flying column of the East Clare Brigade of the I.R.A. and took part in ambushes and attacks on barracks all over East Clare and even went as far as Kilrush on one operation. Two Black and Tans, who were captured by the I.R.A. were kept in Tom Noonan's cabin in Raywails for some weeks and were released when the Truce came. Gurtaderra always voted almost one hundred per cent for De Valera.

The 1901 census seems to show a healthy and optimistic outlook on life. The oldest unmarried women are - Mary Nugent 24, later Mrs. Sexton and, Mary Horan 23, later Mrs. Lynch. There are children under 12 years of age in 16 of the 21 houses. Micheal Riordan is the only unmarried uncle in any house. There are no unmarried aunts. All 21 marriages have been fertile. Only three of the 21 wives were over 30 at marriage, 9 were under 25; nevertheless these were the last families reared in 13 of the 21 houses.

It is not easy to explain what happened but a change of attitude to marriage seems to have come which was more disastrous in its effect than the famine. True, life was not very easy on a small farm of rather poor land. England was the only market and the Gurtaderra farmer had to compete with the American, Canadian, Australian and Argentinian farmers who had almost unlimited access to land, but still things were no worse than in the 1800s. In many ways they were better. The landlords had been got rid of, and the fear of eviction was a thing of the past. While the land annuities were, no doubt, a burden on many, they were not as high as the rents had been and they could not be increased. The trauma of the famine has been blamed but if it was the famine it had a delayed effect at least in Gurtaderra.

The rather Jansenist outlook of the Maynooth trained clergy has been blamed, but the clergy never refused to marry any pair that wished to marry nor did they ever preach that

people should not marry.

The reluctance of parents, especially mothers, to hand over while the son was still young has been blamed, but whatever the reasons and they were many - and more psychological than economic - an attitude which almost amounted to racial suicide took hold.

Gurtaderra, from whose stubborn soil the strong arms of the descendants of the Dal Cassians had uprooted the oak-woods three or four hundred years ago, which had survived penal laws and rack rents, which had increased from 32 families to 60 in the 16 years before 1841, which had come through the famine and sent hundreds of emigrants to America and to every part of the English speaking world, was at the end of the last century as the 1901 census shows still a vigorous and healthy community. From the beginning of this century for reasons which are not at all clear it seems to have lost the will to live and of the 111 children of the 21 families in the 1901 census less than half ever married.

These were the last families reared in thirteen of the twentyone houses. Only Tom Jones, Neddy Nugent, Tom Mungavin, Tom Haron, William McGrath, John Malone, Johnny Moroney and Mike Riordan reared families on their fathers land. Jack Bugler who had taken over his uncle James Crotty's land in Gurtaderra also reared a family there as did Michael (son) McMahon and Frank Noonan, who with a courage exceptional for Gurtaderrrs, married without any land. In the next generation only Jacko Jones, Tom Nugent, Tommy Haron, Willie McGrath and Timmy Malone reared families on their fathers lands.