

MOUNTAIN ECHO ONLINE

McQuiston, McQuiston,
McQuesten, McQuestion,
McCuiston, McCuiston,
and other related names



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Dunscraith



It can be fairly stated that the history of the families stemming from one Hugh of Sleat, clan chief of the McDonalds of the Isle of Skye, *Clan Uisdean*, had their beginning at a castle named Dunscraith. This castle was built on the peninsula of Sleat (slate), on the lower portion of Skye, located off the west coast of Scotland.

The word Dunscraith has been said to mean “castle of the shields”, “castle of the shadows”, “castle of doom”, “castle of dread” and most commonly as “castle of Sgàthach” an Amazonian-type female warrior who, according to ancient Celtic mythology, trained the Irish hero, Cuchulainn, in the art of war at the castle on Skye, shown above.

Cuchulainn, was a 17-year-old Irish warrior from the house of Conn of the Hundred Fights, sent to Scotland to learn the art of war from Sgàthach, a name pronounced as “Sky-Ah”, and meaning “wing”.

It was for this warrior queen that the Isle of Skye, and Dunscraith Castle, are sometimes said to be named. The Coolin Mountains, seen in the distance from Castle Dunscraith, are thought to be named for Cuchulainn.

The Sgàthach and Cuchulainn story comes principally from an ancient manuscript known as *The Book of the Dun Cow*, which was written in the 11th or 12th century, itself being a compilation of much older Irish histories.

Dunscraith is usually pronounced as it appears, although other early accounts have it said as Dun•skee, Dun•sky, and Doon-na-Skee.

One Skye legend claims that a witch raised the castle overnight for Sgàthach, in this way –

All night the witch sang,
And the castle grew
Up from the rock,
With the tower
And turrets crowned;
All night she sang,
When fell the morning dew
Twas finished, round and round.

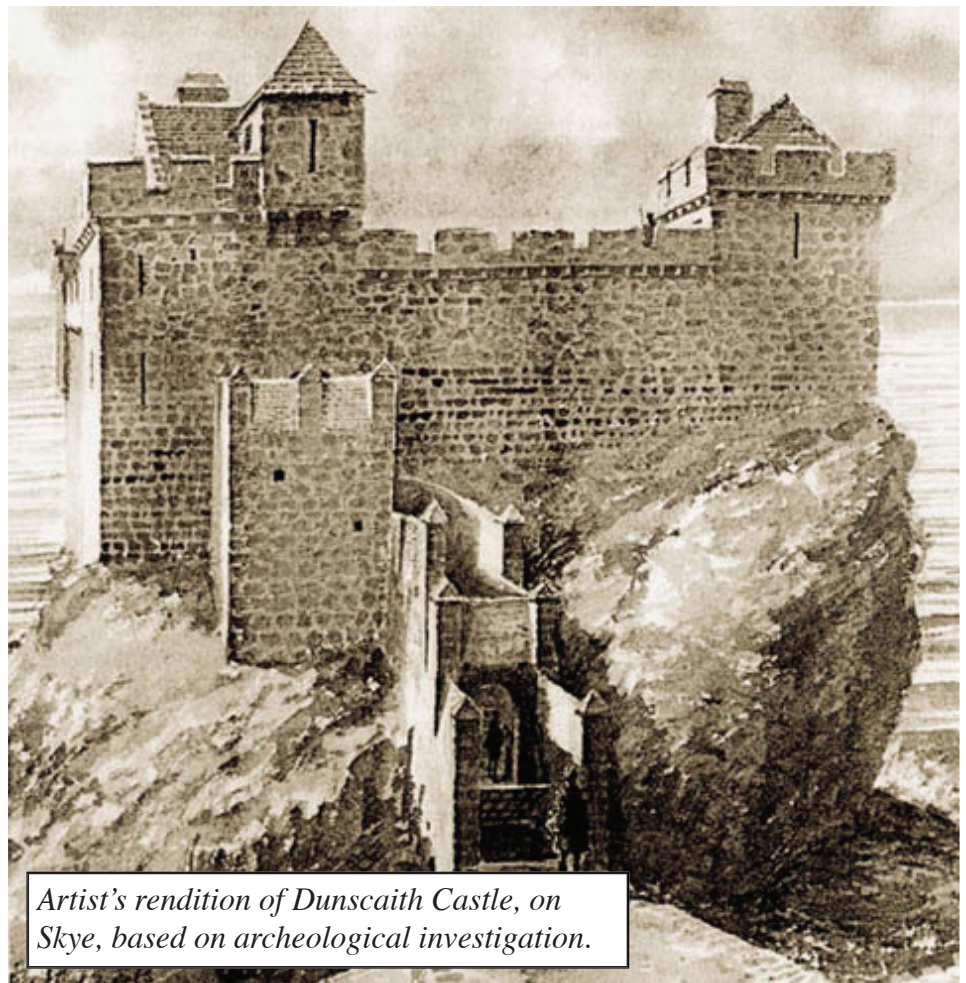
At one time there was a large stone nearby Dunscraith Castle, in which there had evidently been bolts, or links of iron, to which, as tradition says, Cuchulainn chained Luath, his favourite hunting dog.

According to an ancient Celtic legend called, *The Courting of Emer*, the warrior Cuchulainn, on approaching the castle – “leaped upon the end of the bridge and made the hero’s salmon leap, so he landed on the middle of it, and he reached the other end of the bridge before it could raise itself fully up, and then threw himself from it, and was on the ground of the island where Sgàthach’s sunny house was, and it having seven great doors, and seven great windows between every two doors, and three times fifty couches between every two windows.”

According to legend, the castle was surrounded by seven ramparts crowned by iron palisades, spiked by nine human heads. A hidden trap in the castle was a pit full of snakes in which Cuchulainn soon found himself. After killing the snakes, Cuchulainn was set upon by hundreds of vicious beasts described as “malevolent toads with sharp beaks”. He fought them off at the same time that he was attacked by dragons until he finally became victorious and reaped the treasures of the castle.

Cuchulainn’s trip to Dunscaith was full of strange and magical happenings. Although filled with fear and wonder, he acquitted himself with honour, and on his third attempt managed to cross the perilous bridge of Dunscaith using the “salmon leap”.

The castle itself sits on an off-shore rock. The rock rises 40 feet above sea level and there is a gap of 20 feet between the rock and the mainland. The gap was once spanned by a walled bridge with arches 6 feet apart. This stone walled bridge then



Artist's rendition of Dunscaith Castle, on Skye, based on archeological investigation.

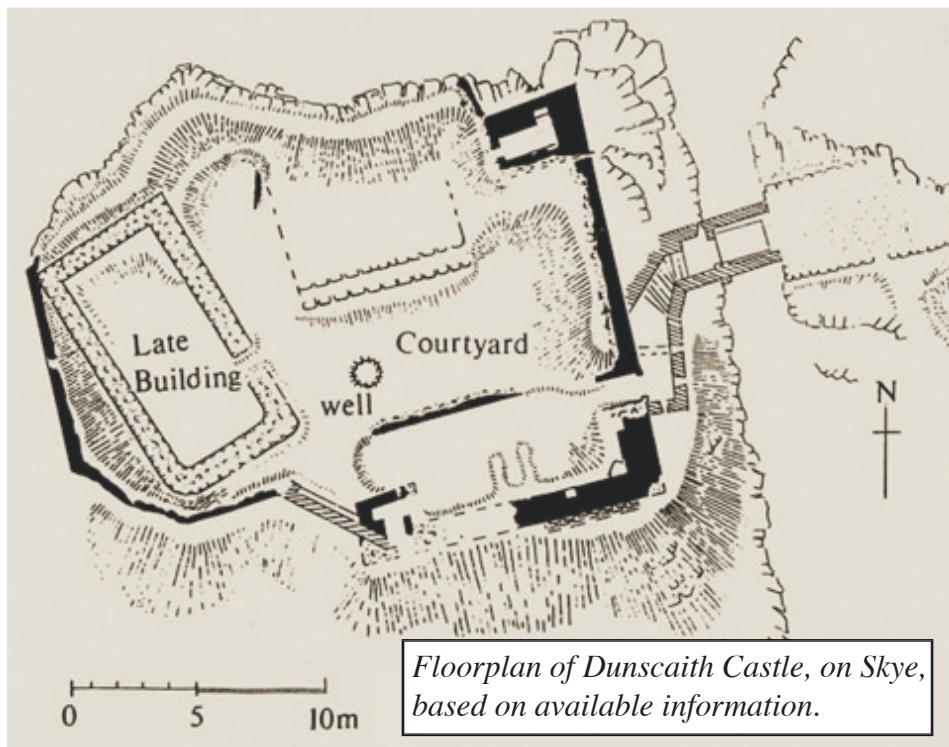
led onto a drawbridge, the pivot holes for which are still visible on the far side. Once on the other side of the drawbridge, a door opened

to a flight of stairs which was also sided by two walls. The flight of stairs led up to the castle.

Parts of the castle curtain wall still survive on the cliff edge but most of the inner buildings have gone. The curtain wall was about 5 ft thick. In the courtyard is a well and the remains of a stairway which once led up a tower.

The castle was, in fact, a great deal larger than the remaining fragments seem to indicate, but even these serve to show what an impregnable fortress it must once have been. It is built on a rock with precipitous sides, and approached by a causeway, partly natural, which leads to the bridge over a gully in the rock. The floor of the bridge is now missing and Dunscaith is usually viewed from the mainland.

On a 2007 trip of five family members to Skye and Dunscaith,



Floorplan of Dunscaith Castle, on Skye, based on available information.

Mark McCuistion crossed the thin ledge which spans the chasm of about 20 feet, and at one time held the drawbridge. Mark was able to ascend to the very top of Dunscaith.

Some legends credit Cuchulainn with building the castle and others say it is a Danish or Viking fort. The castle was once in the hands of the Viking king of the Isle of Man, and many historians believe it to be a Norse castle.

Although a fortification of some type has probably occupied this site from an early date, the present walls and drawbridge seem to date from the 16th and 17th centuries.

Dunscaith was constructed in the “vitrified” style, where the walls are fused together by intense heat. This method helped the stones adhered to each other, but also caused them to become brittle. Once the age of the ship’s cannon reached these castles, they fell easy to prey to its destruction.

The castle complex is now in ruins but some facts are known of its layout. The rock on which the castle sits was approached from the east by the drawbridge. Two arched stone walls were built to carry the bridge. Behind the drawbridge are supports for a stout door which, when opened, gave access to a rising flight of stairs.

At the head of the stairs lay an entrance passage through the “curtain” wall, or outside protective wall, of the castle. The wall of the castle follows the very edge of the small island rock and at the ends are remnants of towers, each containing a “privy”, or crude restroom, on the ground floor. The wall encloses an area of only 300 square meters most of which was taken up with buildings except for the north side which faced the glorious view of the Coolin Mountains.

The courtyard contains a small well and there is a sunken entrance against the south wall which may well have been an escape route. This castle is in ruins but when I toured Eileandonan Castle, there was also an escape route that allowed the inhabitants to walk a stone stairway to the sea.

In 1549, Dean Munro refers to the “castill of Dunskey” and on January 16, 1595 the castle is referred to as “Dounsceiche”. In a description of the Isles compiled between 1577 and 1595, Dunscaith is noted as one of “twa (two) strengthie castells in Slait”, hardly a description of the now abandoned stronghold.

The other definitions of the name Dunscaith are worth looking into. *Scaith*, with various spellings, is a Celtic word for “shield”. Sometimes it is said to mean “shadow” and Skye was sometimes known as the Isle of Shadows.

As surprising as it may seem, there were at least four castles with names very similar to Dunscaith, and three can be directly tied to our family history. One of the other Dunscaith castles was thought to be named for its role as a deterrent to, or *shield* from invaders.

This Dunscaith was built on the Cromarty Firth, an inlet on the east coast of Scotland. On the other end of this same waterway is Dingwall Castle, where Hugh of Sleat was most likely born.

This second Castle Dunscaith is said to have been fortified by the king of Scotland, William the Lion, around 1179. It was William who adopted the lion rampant that we use on our clan shield.

William had come north to build fortresses in the area of Ross as a buffer to protect Edinburgh and Stirling, the typical seats of the Scottish throne.

The site chosen for this castle was on a promontory called North Sutor, at the mouth of the Cromarty Firth, where it connects with the much larger Moray Firth. The castle stood on the brink of a ravine which intersects the high ground behind the site of the old town of Cromarty.

This Castle Dunscaith was still in existence as of 1456, when revenues were paid to King James II from the “vill” or village of Dunscaith, which included funds for the upkeep of the Dunscaith ferry, which crossed at the mouth of the firth.

This year was well within the lifetime of Hugh of Sleat, whose father and brother were each styled Earl of Ross, the area where the castle was located. Hugh’s father, Alexander, ruled from, and died at nearby Dingwall Castle. His brother, John, surrender the title, Earl of Ross, at Dingwall.

Hugh was given land grants from his brother, John, when their father died in 1449, at which time John became the new leader of the McDonalds. In 1469 Hugh was given Sleat and Castle Dunscaith, on Skye. This Dunscaith was the seat of *Clan Uisdean* from 1469 until 1531, or perhaps longer.

Hugh’s family occupied the castle before that date but 1469 marks the year that he officially became Hugh of Sleat. However, the confirmation of his Sleat deed does not mention Castle Dunscaith, on Skye, by this specific name.

Hugh’s great grandfather, Good King John of Islay, was not in control of Skye when he took the title *Lord of the Isles*. It was actually the king of England that granted the island to him, at a later date. Being located in such a remote area of Scotland it most often took brute strength to hold Skye, and some of the other distant islands.

Good King John's son, Donald, grandfather of our Hugh, invaded Skye in 1395, and his half-brother, Godfrey, occupied Sleat and was a resident of the Skye Dunscaith from 1389 until 1401.

King James seized this Castle Dunscaith in 1431, only a few years after Hugh's father, Alexander, had helped James eliminate his Stewart rivals, the Duke of Albany and family. After the death of James, Alexander was reinvested in the title, Earl of Ross, and presumably retook both Dunscaith castles.

It is highly likely, and most probable that Hugh of Sleat, for whom we are named, was born in 1436, or slightly afterward, at Dingwall Castle, within the shadows of the alternative Castle Dunscaith of Cromarty Firth. Once he received Sleat he moved his residency to the Skye Dunscaith, where our family name began with the birth of his first son, John.

The castle on the Isle of Skye is first mentioned by name in Scottish history when John Makhuchone, or MacHuistean, first son of Hugh, sells it.

This appears to be the first mention of this Castle Dunscaith in official Scottish records and it directly involves the very first person to use our name, so it is more than fair to say that our name began at Dunscaith Castle, on Skye. It was, at the time, called "castro et fortalicio de Dunskahay".

The sources for the Dunscaith name, given as "castle of the shields" and "castle of the shadows" are closely related. One translation gives "sgàth" as meaning "shelter;" "slight fear or dread" and as "shade or protection", but not as "shadow".

In fact the Dunscaith name has been translated as "castle of dread" and "castle of doom".

It appears that the definition of "shade or protection" was confused, somehow, with "shadow" and that "Dunscaith" literally meant a shelter or place of protection – a shield against invaders, causing them dread and doom.

This would make sense for both Dunscaith castles. One was designed to protect the mouth of the Cromarty Firth and the other to protect the shoreline of Sleat.

Two more castles with a similar name were known as Dun-na-sciath. One of these was located very near the hill of Tara, where Conn of the Hundred Fights ruled from, at the location of Mullingar, on Lough Ennell.

This castle was built to protect Tara from invaders. Our family comes from Conn's bloodline and that of the kings of Tara.

Dunscaith at Cromarty, and Dun-na-sciath, at Lough Ennell, both featured mottes or rings made of an earthen bulwark for the defense of the castle. In each case part of the motte is still visible.

Another Dun-na-sciath Castle was located in County Tipperary, and the old site of the castle is now the town of Dunaskegh.

Also, in County Galway is a site known as Lios-sciath, or "fort of the shields". In County Waterford was Magh-sciath, or "plain of shields". In County Kildare was Sciath-Nechtain, or "Nechtain's shield"

It is obvious that names similar to Dunscaith were used many times by the Celts to denote a protective castle meant as a shield against an attack by invaders.

Both of the Scottish castles of Dunscaith were significant in the life of Hugh of Sleat, and the one on Skye is where our name took root. Each of Hugh's first two sons ruled from Sleat. They were recorded

as John MacHuistean and Donald Gallach McHuiston. John was likely born there.

Donald's son, Donald Grumach (the Grim), was also recorded as Donald McAuchin, a form of our name, and also ruled from Castle Dunscaith.

In 1498, shortly after his father's death, John turned over Castle Dunscaith and Sleat to Clan Ranald, no doubt under extreme pressure from warships sent to the Isles by King James.

The usual reason given for the deed transfer is that, since he had no children of his own, John decided to keep any of his half-brothers from inheriting the land when he died.

Now this could have been half true. If he knew he had no one to leave the land to, he may have felt that it was his right to unload bits and pieces of it to maintain his lifestyle. Nothing really wrong with that.

One book conjectures that, even though he held some of this land by deed, he did not actually control it, and selling it to those who did was an easy way to gain a little profit and avoid a big war. Nothing wrong with that either.

Clan Donald records, in fact, say, "(John's) actions may be interpreted as a practical approach to the facts and rights of actual possession."

There may have been another reason that he was anxious to unload his inheritance.

John lived in a very volatile time. Not only were some of his half-brothers interested in his land, but the king of Scotland, himself, was making trips to the Highlands and Islands to gain the submissions of the chiefs of that region.

John died in 1505. The year 1502 is also given but that is proven to be wrong as there is a deed transfer in 1505 with John's name on it.

In 1505, the king, busy elsewhere, sent his forces into John's land to force the submission of those few holdout clans still resisting domination. Some of John's cousins had made their own attempts to reclaim the *Lord of the Isles* title and the king was not happy with any of the McDonalds at this point.

Since there is no explanation as to how John died, and he seems to have died reasonably young, it is quite possible that he died at the hands of this band of thugs sent by King James.

John Makhuchone, as he is referred to, in 1494, would have probably been born around 1458 or 59, making him less than 50 years old when he died. At that age he could well have died of old age too, considering the times. Hugh lived to approximately 62 years old and seems to have died of old age at Paisley Abbey.

Hugh may also have died of the plague of 1498, or from a 1498 fire at the Abbey. We are unsure of how he passed away, only the year and where he was buried.

Regardless, John died in 1505. He is mentioned as John MacHuistean, and also as John Makhuchone in 1494, and as John Huchosoun in 1497. He is mentioned as John Hucheonsoun in a record dated August 23, 1505, which proves he was still alive at this time. This record was most likely the confirmation of the transfer of Sleat and Dunscaith.

In 1505, John officially sold Skye's Dunscaith to Ranald Ban (Alansoun), of Clanranald, a wing of Clan Donald. Perhaps if he knew he would die soon, he may have sold the land to the next most legitimate heir (at least in his mind).

Clan Donald records say John's deed was the first mention of the name of this castle as Dunscaith.

I believe I have found a reason John might have given up his land, castle, and title.

The king of Scotland at the time of John was James IV. He was the first to establish a royal navy. In 1498, the year of Hugh's death, James made a trip to the Isles.

On August 3rd of that year he issued a charter to Ranald MacAlan, Chief of Clanranald, the same man John had relinquished land to just shortly before this. Ranald was working for the king and the land charter was given "for services rendered". We can only imagine what those services were.

The official charter to Ranald was to confirm what John had already turned over to him. Very likely there was considerable pressure on John, from 1498 through 1505, since his father had just died, and he was faced with the forces of the king of Scotland. By 1505, the same year John dies, he is found giving up the charter to Dunscaith Castle, held by his father since 1469.

Just two years before, Donald Dubh, a descendant Hugh's brother, John, last *Lord of the Isles*, finally escaped 40 years of captivity and was heralded as the new leader of Clan Donald, probably usurping any claim John MacHuistean may have had to the title.

Donald Dubh raised an army and ranged over the old territory of the lords. He was finally defeated and in 1505, King James prepared to take the Isles, once and for all – be sea.

I have always wondered why so many castles were in a terrible state of ruin in the Isles. They are everywhere lying crumbled near the shore. Only a few aren't in this shape - Caisteal Uisdean, EileanDonan, and Armadale Castle, which, although in a state of ruin, is not so totally decimated as the others.

The obvious reason, I believe, is that many castles were bombarded from the sea. They were built to withstand arrows and spears, not cannon shot, and those with vitrified walls were especially vulnerable.

Caisteal Uisdean was built much later, about 1601, and although it is in ruins, it is not crumbled down like so many others. Its walls actually stand pretty straight.

Armadale is too far from the water to be hit with cannon shot. EileanDonan would be a likely candidate for bombardment and has been rebuilt, but I found, in Clan Donald records, where the King's man "asked for ships and artillery to reduce the strong fortresses of Strome and EileanDonan. This aid does not seem to have been forthcoming."

This passage tells us that, indeed, ships and artillery were intended to be used to bombard island castles, and that EileanDonan just seems to have escaped this fate.

The records speak of James' attempt at "daunting the Isles" - "by sea" - with a "massive expedition". All of this took place in 1505, the year John relinquished the castle and the same year he died.

It would seem pretty obvious that he could not compete with a massive lowland force under sail with fire power and so he likely relinquished the castle in lieu of coming under bombardment. He may have, in fact, been killed at the castle, since no record exists of where he died, only that it was after August 23, 1505, the day he signed it over.

There are few records of the expedition, itself, although Clan Donald says, "he (King James) saw that an attack by sea was the best way to make progress against the Islemen, and a naval force was dispatched under Sir Andrew Wood

and Robert Largo. Few details of this campaign exist, but it was obviously a success." That success, it seems, most likely involved John relinquishing his land, castle, and title, and dying shortly thereafter.

The idea put forth that John simply gave up all he had to keep his brothers from gaining it, pales in comparison to the story of a man faced with an incredibly larger force, wielding ship's cannon, and hell-bent on destroying the fortresses of the Isles.

It may be that the very first person using our name, John MacHuistean, was in fact a hero, who gave up his inheritance to save his people, and to save Dunscaith Castle from destruction.

Skye's Castle Dunscaith does not seem to have fallen to ship's cannons, but rather experienced its worst destruction in 1513 at the hands of the McLeods and McLeans.

Some or all of the land that John deeded back to the Chief of Clanranald actually had once belonged to that branch of the clan. The original Ranald (otherwise called Reginald) was the father of Donald for whom Clan Donald is named and he was the son of Somerled. Somerled had divided up his kingdom and Randall received most of the lands that somehow made their way into the possession of John MacHuistean, in 1498, through the death of his father, Hugh of Sleat. So John was actually returning these lands to the original owner's descendants.

The principal seat of Clanranald was Strome Castle, mentioned in the bombardment section of this story. It is located in Wester Ross which is reasonably close to the coastline across from Skye and not too distant from EileanDonan. It is also very close to Applecross, the home of

Hugh's mother's family. It is noted that Hugh's father had married a lady that allowed him to claim the lands of Lochalsh where Strome was located.

Lochalsh came under the rule of Hugh's brother, Celestine. When Celestine died, John McDonald, last *Lord of the Isles*, invested Hugh in the lands of Sleat, and may have also given him control of Lochalsh.

Celestine's son was known as Alexander of Lochalsh and he once made a failed attempt at claiming the *Lord of the Isles* title, attacking Inverness. He was assassinated by MacLian of Ardnamurchan.

Even though John MacHuistean gave his castle and land away to Clanranald, Donald Gallach McHuiston, his half-brother, took over the castle and the title Chief of *Clan Uisdean* upon the death of John. Donald was supported by the clan councils as head of the clan. He lasted only one year when he was killed by his half-brother, Archibald.

Archibald also had no children, so at least two of the legitimate sons of Hugh had no sons to carry on the name. The other three sons are described as "illegitimate even by the lax standards of the time" by Clan Donald records. Only one other is known to have had a son.

Donald Hearach (Harris) had a son, who would later turn his hand against Archibald, who had killed not only Donald Gallach, but also Donald Hearach.

Gallach's son, Donald Grumach McAuchin was in control of Dunscaith Castle, on Skye, by 1521 and was called "Donald of Dunscaith", until at least 1531.

Ranald Hearach used a sword to kill Archibald, at the urging of his cousin, Donald Grumach. Later, he went a little crazy one evening

and killed twelve of Grumach's in-laws while they slept at the castle, apparently because he just didn't like them. There is likely more to this story, as yet undiscovered. Donald's wife, Catherina, hired bounty hunters to track down and kill Ranald.

Dunscaith was the seat of Clan Uisdean from 1469 until 1531, however, the castle was almost completely destroyed by 1513. In that year, another McDonald, known as Donald of Lochalsh, son of Alexander of Lochalsh, was voted by the clan to be awarded the revived *Lord of the Isles* title.

Donald of Lochalsh had just fought at the famous Battle of Flodden Field, and on his way home he decided to attack Urquhart Castle, on Loch Ness, to revenge his father's death.

One old manuscript reports – "At that very time, in consequence of a long standing feud, Lachlan Maclean of Duart, aided by Alexander Macleod of Dunvegan, and other hostile chiefs, seized the stronghold of Dunscaith and eventually demolished it as a place of protection."

Note the use of the telling words "place of protection", "protection" being one of the translations of the Celtic word, *scaith*.

From 1395 until 1401, the castle belonged to Clan Donald. At some time in the 14th century it was taken from them by the Clan MacLeod and held briefly by the MacAskills, allies of the McLeods. It was recaptured by the MacDonalds sometime in the 15th century, most likely by Hugh of Sleat, when he was given title to it in 1469.

In much of the literature of the Isles, the MacAskill family members are referred to as "great or savage warriors", "notable for their strength

and prominent stature.” As the story goes, the MacDonald’s knowing of the legends surrounding the family, planned very carefully their raid. Not daring to confront “Black Donald” MacAskill in an open battle, they descended upon the castle under the cloak of night and fell upon the McAskills as they slept.

When the sun rose the next morning, Dunscaith was in the hands of the MacDonalds and the Black Donald was dead. The skirmish had been a bloody and terrifying affair, with the McAskill children running from the castle into the dark Woods of Torkavaig (the grove of the Druids) their screams echoing in the cold night air as they were ridden down by MacDonald clansmen.

One of the few survivors was Black Donald’s youngest daughter, Mary McAskill, only thirteen at the time of the attack, but old enough to know of the horror of clan rivalry – and of revenge.

The legends says that Mary hid in a rotted out log in the woods for three days and nights before gaining the courage to join the rest of the surviving family in Glen Brittle. It is speculated that it was during those three days cramped and freezing in the wet stink of the dead tree that she planned her revenge on the MacDonalds. Some say that she was protected by the Sidhe (the fairies) and it was they that whispered the plot in her young ear.

Mary, a very patient girl, waited for three years until she turned fifteen, before setting the plan in motion. She had blossomed into a fine beauty with flaxen hair that swung to her hips while her eyes stayed the dark brown of her youth. In order to be successful she needed to change her appearance. So not to be recognized, she sheared her locks to above her ears and dyed it

the color of her eyes – the color of rotting wood.

According to the Clan MacAskill tradition, once ready, she journeyed back to Dunscaith, back thru the woods of Torkavaig, back to the place where her father had been stabbed repeatedly in his sleep, three years earlier. Knocking at the door of the castle, Mary advised she was there to apply for the position of housekeeper which the MacDonalds had advertised.

Mary dazzled the MacDonalds with her sweet smile and beauty and she was quickly employed.

Patient again, Mary worked tirelessly for the MacDonalds, going above and beyond her duties and soon endeared herself to them.

Before long, Mary had so gained their trust that she was promoted to work in the nursery, as nanny to the MacDonald children.

Years passed. Mary nursed and entertained the young MacDonald children day in and day out. With no one the least bit suspicious of the kind girl.

One day, the MacDonalds being in the thralls of yet another land dispute, gathered all the Clan (women and men) to fight in a nearby battle with the MacLeods.

Mary was left alone in the castle with only a few guards and the seven McDonald children.

As an encroaching storm gathered over the Isles and the sea began to churn under a cold wind, Mary awoke the children and escorted them to the tower, advising the guard that she was uneasy and felt they would be safer there, under lock and key.

Lightning and thunder erupted with the rain and the youngest of the children began to cry. Mary calmed them with stories and sung soft lullabies until they were all

steadfast asleep, a newborn cradled in her arms.

Softly, as not to wake them she walked to the east window, opened it and tossed the baby out of the window onto the rocks below.

Slowly, she picked up the sleeping children one by one and threw them from the tower into the storm to their inevitable demise. Not one of them so much as let out a sound, completely trusting the arms of their beloved nanny.

When the deed was done, Mary, walked out of the tower, passed the guards and out of the castle. One guard, curious that she should go out in such a storm followed her and watch as she walked barefoot into the woods and disappeared.

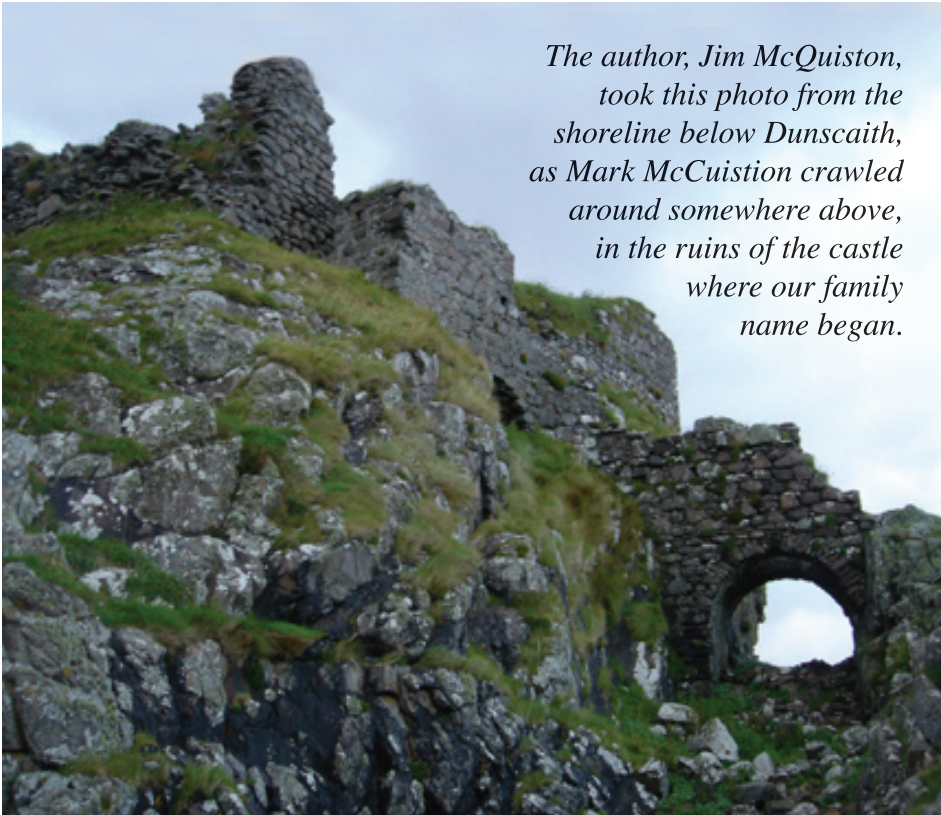
Mary, was never seen or heard of again.

When word spread through Skye of the horrible crime, the countryside were mortified. The McAskills, who were never known for being squeamish, were the most shocked. How could any woman care and love children as her own for YEARS, feed them and dress them only to murder them!? This was an evil even they could not comprehend.

For decades afterward, the McAskills and MacLeods were careful not to name any of their girls Mary, lest she grow up with the same inclinations.

This tradition seems to belie the fact that Hugh’s children tend to be accounted for. We know he had six sons by six different women. He also had daughter. If this tale is true he also fathered seven additional children. This is possible. My own grandfather fathered 16 children!

One tradition says that in “the 15th century, the castle was again captured by King James I of Scotland when the Chief of the Clan Donald, *Lord of the Isles*, was broken by



The author, Jim McQuiston, took this photo from the shoreline below Dunscaith, as Mark McCuiston crawled around somewhere above, in the ruins of the castle where our family name began.

King James. The MacDonalds were allowed to keep possession of the castle.”

The McDonald referred to would be John MacHuistean, the first of our family name. The report goes on to say that the MacDonalds abandoned the castle in the early 17th century.

We know by the early 1600s the seat of the McDonalds was at Duntulm, above Caisteal Uisdean, rather than at Dunscaith. When Duntulm was abandoned the family moved to Armadale, the current site of the Clan Donald Center and Museum of the Isles.

From a book called *Pont Text*, written by Timothy Pont in the 16th century, we read – “It is 40 myle in lenth viz betwixt Tronernes and the poynt of Slait. It is devyded in dyvers parts designed be severall names. Sleit, one of them lyeth toward the south, perteyning to Donald Gorum Mackoneil. It is fertil of cornis and pasture. Ther be therin two auncient castels, the one lyeth upon the east or southeast, ovir aganis Knodeort

called Castell Chammez, the uthir upon the nordwest syd of Slait cald Dunskaigh, thir Slait is 30 merk lands.”

In some reports, the last year given for Dunscaith being the seat of Clan Uisdean is 1632, and the year Carleen Daggett gave for the clans leaving Scotland for Ireland, with “all the coin of the realm”, is 1637.

Our family was very strong in Ireland by 1637 and it is conceivable that “the coin of the realm” of Clan Uisdean was taken to Ireland in 1637, five years after the abandonment of Castle Dunscaith.

In 1641, most of the Scots were driven back out of Ireland by the native Irish tribes and our family seems to have settled in the Wigton area.

It is conceivable that the gold was then transported to the nearby Paisley Abbey for safekeeping.

Clan Donald had a very long relationship with Paisley Abbey, which is a story for another time.

However, one last, and very interesting bit of history is that the forest that surrounded Paisley Abbey was known as Dunscaith Forest!

The abbey was first owned by the Stewart family and then by the Hamiltons. We had a close relationship with both families which included marriage and service in military campaigns.

In fact, Dunscaith Castle is credited with being the place where the battle cry of the clans went out to raise troops to support Robert the Bruce at Bannockburn.

Leona McQuiston quoted from Sir Walter Scott’s poem, *Lord of the Isles*. Another verse from that same poem reads –

Twas then that warlike
signals wake
Dunscaith’s dark towers and
Eisord’s lake,
And soon from
Cavilgarrigh’s head
Thick wreaths of eddyng smoke
were spread;
A summons these
of war and wrath
To the brave clans
of Sleat and Strath,
And, ready at the sight
Each warrior to
his weapons sprung,
And targe upon
his shoulder flung,
Impatient for the fight.

Hugh’s great grandfather, Angus Og, fought alongside Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn. Angus’ son was Good King John, typically called the first *Lord of the Isles*.

Dunscaith Castle, on Skye, still stands as a stark reminder of these great rulers of the Hebrides and of our wonderfully exciting and often tragic family history.