

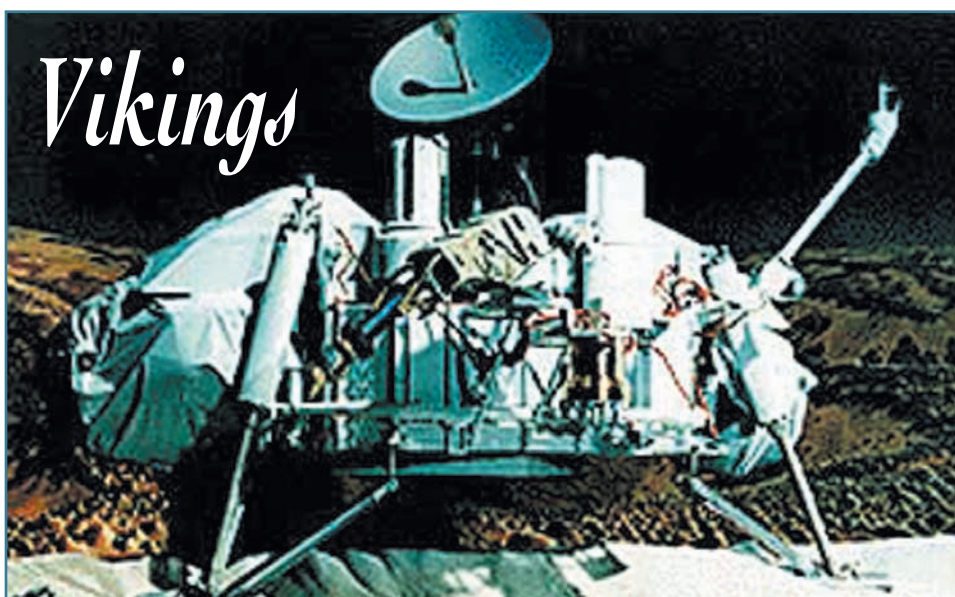
MOUNTAIN ECHO ONLINE

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

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In 1975, NASA sent a space probe to Mars appropriately named the Viking 1. It landed the following year, on July 20, 1976. It was meant to land on July 4th, in conjunction with the bicentennial of the United States, but it took a little longer to make a safe landing.

I say “appropriately named” because the original Vikings were perhaps the world’s greatest explorers, which is no doubt why this name was chosen. Viking 1 was followed by Viking 2, and then by the land-rovers, Spirit, Opportunity, and Phoenix.

In 2007, a no-longer functional wheel on the Spirit rover provided scientists with the best evidence yet that Mars once held water. Dragged along by the rover, the wheel unearthed a soil deposit composed of about 90% pure silica.

Doug McCuiston, Director of NASA’s Mars Exploration Program, said, “This unexpected new discovery is a reminder that Spirit and Opportunity are still doing cutting-edge exploration more than three years into their extended missions. It also reinforces the fact that significant amounts of water were present in Mars’ past, which continues to spur the hope that



Top photo shows the Viking 1 land rover on Mars. At bottom left is the moment the land rover, Phoenix, landed on Mars. Dr. Doug McCuiston is shown in the background, behind two of his celebrating co-workers at the time of the successful Phoenix Mars landing on the Martian Arctic, May 25, 2008. At a cost of \$420-million, the Phoenix Mars Lander flew 422-million-miles after leaving Earth in August 2007. Bottom right, Dr. McCuiston holds a news conference, on May 24, 2008, to announce the upcoming landing of Phoenix the following day.

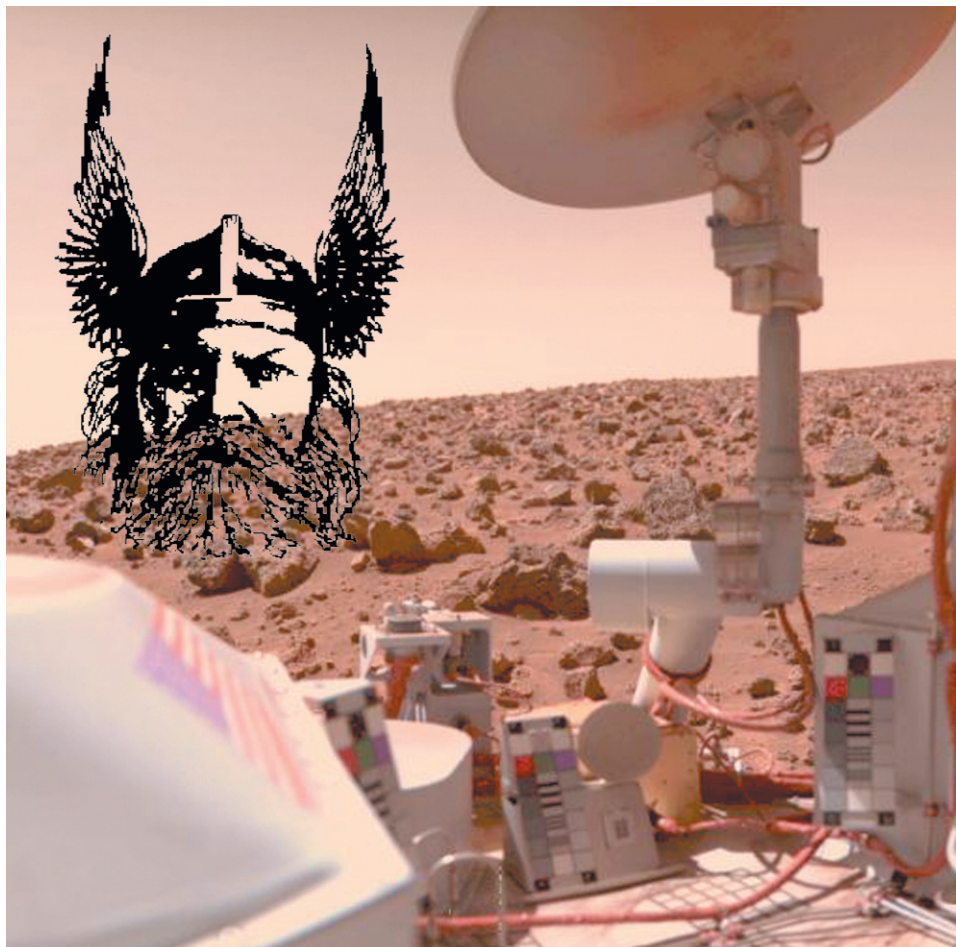
we can show that Mars was once habitable and possibly supported life.”

This announcement, by a member of our family, carried a wave of excitement across the scientific community, and the world. Plans were then laid for a Mars Science Laboratory, a souped-up, nuclear-powered rover and, as late as October 11, 2008, Dr. McCuistion addressed concerns over dwindling funding, stating, “our intent is to keep our eye on the ball and keep pressing” (for a 2009 liftoff.)

This can-do spirit of Director McCuistion harkens back to that of early Viking explorers who traveled across the world.

Whether as colonizers, traders, or warriors, Scandinavians reached almost every part of the known world and discovered many new lands. From the Nordic kingdoms, their ships penetrated the west European coast, sailed through the Straits of Gibraltar into the Mediterranean Sea and, from there, journeyed to Italy, Spain, Morocco, and the Holy Land. Of course their best known explorations include Greenland, Iceland, and, as many believe, even North America.

The word “Viking” is a collective designation of Nordic peoples - Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, and Icelanders - who ranged abroad during a period of dynamic Scandinavian expansion in the Middle Ages, from about AD 800 to 1100. Called the “Viking Age”, this period has long been popularly associated with unbridled piracy, when freebooters came swarming out of the northlands in their predatory long ships to burn and pillage their way across civilized Europe. This, however, is now recognized as a gross simplification. Modern scholars emphasize the



achievements of the Viking Age in terms of Scandinavian art and craftsmanship, marine technology, exploration, and the development of commerce, viewing the Vikings more as traders, and less as raiders.

The Trotternish Peninsula, on the Isle of Skye, where stands Caisteal Uisdean and the town of MhicCuithean, comes from the word “trader”, as Vikings used the calm bay nearby the castle as mooring for their trade ships. Trader became Trotter.

Recent DNA evidence and recent historical research, especially into Somerled’s ancestry, has shown that the McDonald clan had a substantial amount of Viking blood in it, and, since we know there were at least some early members of our family that took to piracy, it is fair to say that we were a part of this Viking Age in its waning years, at least to some degree.

The Gallowglass Warriors of Ireland were named this as “young foreign warriors” pertaining, at least in part, to their Viking blood. Hugh of Sleat’s grandson, Alexander, led Gallowglass for Sorley Boy and so we are again tied to the Viking tradition.

The derivation of the word “Viking” is disputed. It may be from Old Norse vik (a bay or creek) or Old English wic (a fortified trade settlement). Not every Scandinavian, however, was a professional warrior or a Viking, and not every Viking was a pirate. The motive causes of Viking Age expansion are complex. Land shortage in Scandinavia, improved iron production, and the need for new markets probably all played a part.

The first recorded Viking raid was a sea borne assault (793) by Norwegian marauders on the island of Lindisfarne, just off the northeastern

coast of England. Growing evidence indicates, however, that considerable overseas Viking migration, west across the North Sea and east across the Baltic, occurred long before that. Swedish entrepreneurs penetrated the hinterland of Russia, pioneering new trade routes down the Volga and the Dnepr, founding city-states such as Kiev and Novgorod, and opening the way to Constantinople and the exotic markets of Arabia and the Far East. In Constantinople, Vikings formed the elite bodyguard of the Byzantine emperors, the feared and famous Varangian Guard.

Danish warriors hammered at the cities of the crumbling Carolingian Empire - Hamburg, Dorestad, Rouen, Paris, Nantes, Bordeaux - until one of the armies in 911 accepted, by treaty, huge tracts of land in northern France (now known as Normandy, “Land of the Northmen”) and settled there. Robert The Bruce, or DeBrus, one of our many illustrious ancestors, was of this Norman blood.

Briefly, under King Canute (Knut) II in the 11th century, a Scandinavian empire of the North Sea was established, comprising England, Denmark, and Norway. Norwegian adventurers joined Danish Vikings in subjugating much of northern England (the Danelaw) before settling there as farmers and traders and developing great mercantile cities such as York, while gradually extending their settlement into unconquered northern areas such as Cumbria. They also took over the Northern Isles of Scotland (Shetland and the Orkneys), the Hebrides, and much of mainland Scotland as well. In Ireland they played a part in the squabbles of rival Irish clans, and they founded Ireland’s first trading towns: Dublin, Waterford, Wexford, Wicklow, and Limerick.



I found this great map on Wikipedia showing the many voyages of Viking explorers around the known world.

Viking exploration brought the discovery and settlement of uninhabited lands in the Atlantic—first the Faroes, then Iceland, then Greenland. From Greenland the Vikings launched ambitious expeditions to settle on the eastern seaboard of North America (Vinland), but these attempts to colonize the New World 500 years before Columbus were soon abandoned in the face of hostility from the indigenous peoples.

Stories of the abortive American venture are recorded in the medieval Icelandic sagas, but little authentic evidence of the Viking presence has been found, apart from substantial traces of a Viking Age settlement at L’Anse-aux-Meadows, in northern Newfoundland.

A climactic change in the 1400’s caused temperatures to drop and eventually, the settlements in Greenland ceased to exist. Whether overrun by Eskimo, or simply abandoned we do not know, but before 1500, the settlement was gone. Some of these Vikings are thought to have moved with the

Eskimos to Alaska and the Yukon. Early explorers reported finding “white” Eskimos, tall, with long, light faces, blue eyes and yellow hair. It is surmised that these were the last remnants of the early Viking settlers of Greenland.

Two medieval Icelandic sagas tell the story of the Viking exploration and attempted settlement of North America from Greenland. “The Graenlendinga Saga” is one. “Erik’s Saga” is a later product, more sophisticated with its material arranged in much more tidy and logical form. Both of the authors (unknown) were primarily interested in the people involved in the action. They saw the explorations as tests of character, maturing some of the characters and bringing out fatal flaws in others.

Evidence unmistakably points to Viking exploration and settlement in the new world, but the saga geography and sailing directions are vague enough so that the land they called “Vinland” has been located by various people from Hudson Bay to Virginia.

Outside of the sagas, there are several contemporary sources that refer to Vinland.

A description of the history and geography of Scandinavia is contained in the *History of the Archbishops of Hamberg* (1075). The author, Adam of Bremen, relates information he received from the Danish king Sven Ulfssen, who was called Estrithson, in English sources. He writes, “King Sven related that there was another island in that ocean which had been discovered by many and was called Vinland because vines grow wild there and yield excellent wine, and moreover, self-sown grain grows there in abundance.”

Ari Thorgilsson’s vernacular history of the Icelandic people, *Islendingabok*, contains a second reference. It is worth noting that one of the bishops connected with commissioning Ari’s history was Bishop Thorlak Runolfsson, whose mother was a granddaughter of Thorfin Karlsefni mentioned in the “Groenlendinga Saga”.

In his reference, Ari takes for granted that Vinland itself needed no elaboration. Speaking of Greenland, Ari says, “They found there human habitations, both in the Eastern and Western parts of the country and fragments of skin boats and stone implements; from which it can be concluded that the people who had been there before were of the same kind as those who inhabit Vinland and whom the Greenlanders call Skraelings.”

The “Icelandic Annals”, for the year 1121, record that Bishop Eric of Greenland set out in search of Vinland. The other non saga evidence is archaeological. Working from a 16th century Icelandic map showing part of North America, Dr Helge Ingstad and his archaeologist

wife Anne Stine Ingstad discovered the remains of a small 11th century Norse community at L’anse Aux Meadows on the northern peninsula of Newfoundland.

The long houses excavated at the site resemble those of the eastern settlement in Greenland. In addition to long houses, a building believed to be related to ship repair and a smithy with a hearth for a forge, a stone anvil and hundreds of slag and iron fragments were found.

Artifacts discovered at the site confirm the Norse origin. Radio carbon analysis of samples from the site yielded dates from about 700 AD to 1000 AD.

Of course, we have no evidence that any of our direct descendants were part of this group, despite our considerable Viking blood. However, we do have an interesting link through our Gunn blood.

You may remember that Donald Gallach McDonald, also recorded as Donle VicHuiston, and Domhnall gallach mc huisdiuin, is the second person of our name in history.

Donald’s mother was Elizabeth (possibly Mary Elizabeth) Gunn and her forefather, James Gunn, is perhaps the first European ever buried under a marker in North America, while accompanying Henry Sinclair on a voyage to America long before Columbus.

Born in Scotland in about 1345 A.D. Henry Sinclair became Earl of Rosslyn and the surrounding lands, as well as Prince of Orkney, Duke of Oldenburg (Denmark), and Premier Earl of Norway. In 1398 he led an expedition to explore Nova Scotia and Massachusetts. This was 90 years before Columbus “discovered America”!

Sinclair was the subject of historian Frederick J. Pohl’s *Atlantic Crossings Before Columbus*, which

was published in 1961. Not all historians agree with Pohl, but he made a highly convincing case that this blond, sea-going Scot, born at Rosslyn Castle near Edinburgh in 1345, not only wandered about mainland Nova Scotia in 1398, but also lived among the Micmac Indians long enough to be remembered through centuries as the man-god “Glooscap”.

According to Pohl, by inheritance from Prince Henry’s mother and confirmation of the King of Norway, Henry became the first Sinclair Earl of Orkney. This made him the premier Jarl of Norway and the crowner of its king. He held Orkney from the King of Norway, yet was also a leading Scottish noble. This dual loyalty and the geographical position of his jarldom of Orkney with its 200 islands and 5,000 square miles on the sea lanes between the two countries made him in effect all but an independent king.

The title of Prince has been alleged for him, although it is not clear that he ever used it or that it was applied to him in his lifetime.

Not content with successfully bringing Orkney, Shetland, and perhaps Faroe under his control, Henry built a fleet of ships larger than the navy of Norway. He gained adherents from the princely Zeno Family of Venice, who were great sailors and who made available to him the new invention of cannon.

He and the Sinclair family have often been associated with the Knights Templar, who were also great sailors.

It is believed by some that Henry used many of his ships and his Italian expert to sail to Nova Scotia in 1398 and Massachusetts in 1399.

He may even have gone to Rhode Island, where evidence suggests that he built Newport Tower.

Newport Tower is built in a similar style to the Norse/Scottish buildings of the Western and Northern Isles. More importantly, every single measurement within Newport Tower is based on the Scottish “ell”, which equals three Norse feet. When Narragansett Indians were asked who built the Newport Tower, they replied, “They were fire-haired men with green eyes who sailed up river in a ship like a gull with a broken wing.”

Henry Sinclair’s party traveled southward, perhaps carried by a “northeaster”, to the New England Coast, just north of Boston. The party landed and spent the winter, living peacefully with the Indians. To the west they could see a hilltop from which the Indians frequently sent smoke signals. Accompanied by his 100 men, Henry marched inland to the summit of this hill, now called Prospect Hill, located in Westford, Massachusetts. It is 465 feet in altitude and afforded a good view in all directions.

While at this area, one of Prince Henry’s loyal attendants by the name of Sir James Gunn, also from Scotland, died. In memory of the lost companion, the party carved a marker on the face of a stone ledge. It consisted of various sizes of punched holes, which depicted a Scottish knight, with a 39 inch long sword and shield bearing the Gunn Clan insignia.

James Gunn was the Scottish/Viking ancestor, or at least a forefather, of Elizabeth Gunn, mother of Donald McUisdean. So it is very likely that we carry a wee bit o’ the blood of the very first European buried in the New World under a grave marker.

From Scotland, our family was among the first Scots to settle in Northern Ireland and were also



Two relics thought to be from the Viking incursions into North America. At left is the Newport Tower; above is said to be the grave of James Gunn of Caithness, Scotland.

among the “others” mentioned in the oldest known coining of the words “Scotch-Irish”, by Queen Elizabeth, in 1573, when she referred to “Sorley Boy and others who are of the Scotch-Irish race.”

When the first ship loads of Scotch-Irish settlers left the Bann Valley of Northern Ireland, among their group was William McQuesten. These people were at Portland, Maine, before it was even named that, and the same for Litchfield, New Hampshire.

But William wasn’t the first of our family to set foot in the Western Hemisphere. John McCuistion, father of the 1735 immigrants to New Castle, came over to Jamaica in 1702. There is evidence of other family members at Jamaica, too.

After 1735, Robert, Thomas, and James were among the frontier people living along the Susquehanna. Thomas and James were among the first settlers to go to Guilford

County, and their deeds are some of the oldest in that area. Robert’s son, James, went over the Alleghenies while it was still considered Indian Territory. Descendants of the NC group were among the first in Tennessee, Missouri, Texas, and even California.

Also in California, Captain Jack McQuesten was a Forty-Niner at the young age of 14. He went on to be the first white man in many areas of Alaska and the Yukon, becoming known as the “Father” to those two places.

Members of our family have been proven to be some of the earliest explorers in many places and now, Dr. Doug McCuistion leads the Mars probe. Oh, by the way, the name “Houston” also comes from Uisdean, and the very first word ever spoken by a human on a planetary object, other than earth, was spoken on the Moon. That word was “Houston”!