



his work is an attempt to record the story of the widow Ellena Mulcahy and her four children, Patrick, James, Ellen and John, who came to Australia from Ireland in the 1850s. Unfortunately, by the time this history was begun the Irish pioneers and the first generation of Australian-born children had all died, leaving behind relatively few written records of their lives. Their descendants who might now trace their journey from Melbourne, where they first set foot in Australia, through Kilmore and in to the Goulburn Valley can, however, find many reminders of the early settlers. The quietly prosperous and quite closely settled farmlands we now see in the Goulburn Valley were, a hundred and thirty years ago, thick forests of red gum and box. Horsemen travelled with difficulty through trackless country, which the axes of the pioneers gradually cleared for settlement and farming. Where the Hume Freeway now sweeps to the east of Kilmore, where the Goulburn Weir and its irrigation channels now skirt Highway No. 39, and where the village of Byrneside dozes in the sunshine, the early Mulcahys cleared the land, built their lóg cabins, raised their children

The Widow Mulcahy: From the Golden Vale to the Goulburn Valley

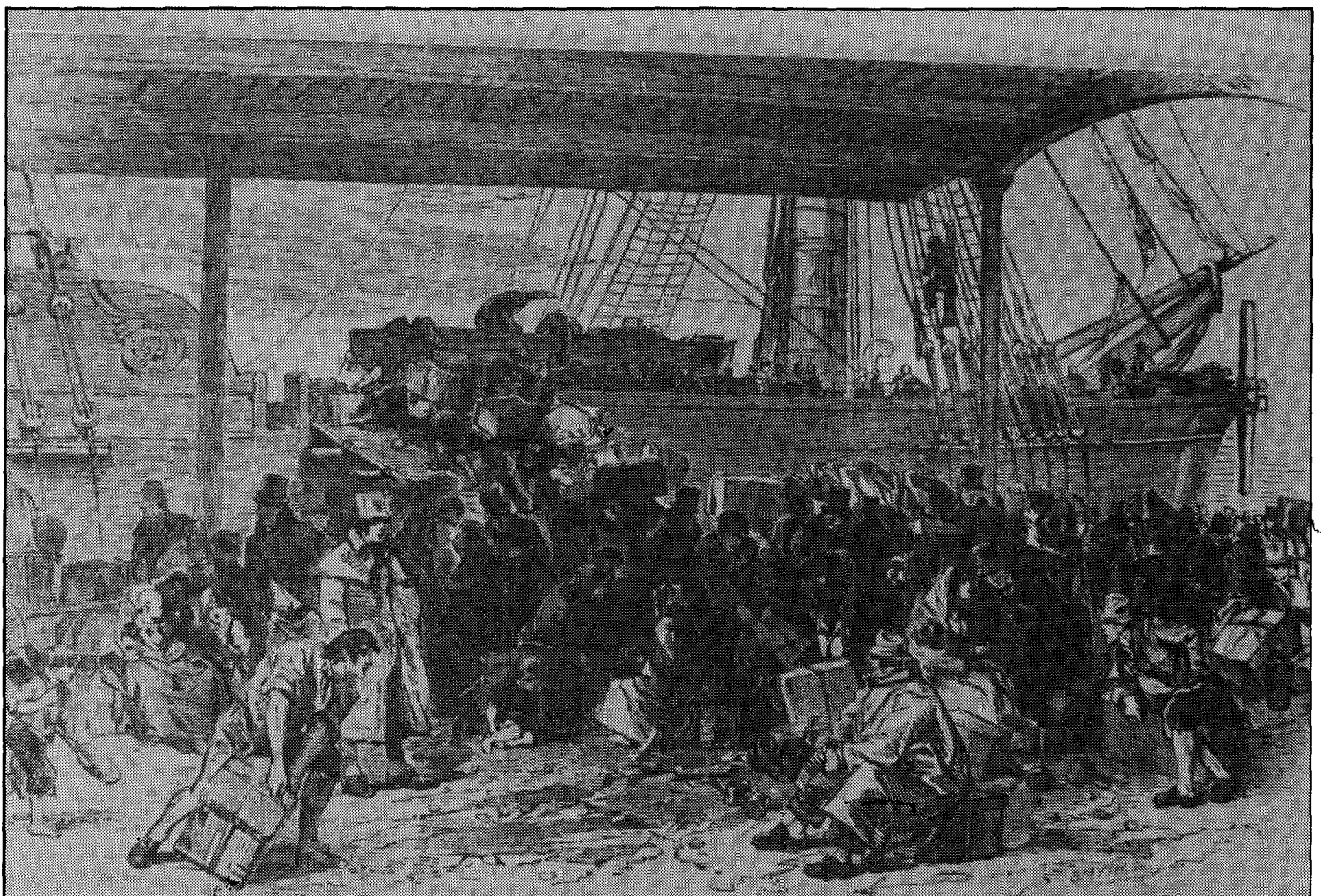
by **Thomas Patrick Flanagan**
and
John Stanislaus Mulcahy

and grew their crops. The churches at Kilmore, Nagambie, Byrneside and Numurkah saw their weddings, baptisms and requiems: the cemetery at Tatura shelters the graves of 24 of them, along with those of many other Irish pioneering families who shared the labours and rewards of those early days.

Pallasgrean, County Limerick, is a locality comprising two tiny villages, Old Pallas up in the hills, and New Pal-

las, down on the main road, between Limerick City and Tipperary Town.

About 1798 a son, Thomas, was born to one of the Mulcahy families in the Pallasgrean area. Pallasgrean at the time consisted of 62 small thatched cottages, the ruins of the Augustinian church, the Norman castle, and the 'Big House', Linfield House, now in ruins, which the English landlord family, the Apjohns, had built in 1790. In 1806 a daughter, Ellena, was born to the Real family, who lived in nearby Knockanerough. On 3rd May, 1831, Thomas and Ellena married in the newly built Pallasgrean Catholic Church and the record of the marriage is in the parish register.



Leaving Liverpool: emigrants boarding ship, 1850.



Thomas and Ellena had four children. The first three, Patrick (1832), James (1833) and Ellen (1837), were presumably baptised at Pallasgreaun, where the family apparently continued to live, although only the baptism of James is recorded in the parish register. The fourth child, John (1842), was apparently baptised at Golden, some 20 miles east of Pallasgreaun, near Cashel. It appears that sometime between 1842 and 1854 Thomas died, probably due to the Famine of 1845-47.

The family's contact with Australia began on 20th March, 1854, when the daughter, Ellen, sailed from Southampton on the *City of Manchester*. Why she travelled first we do not know. She was accompanied on the ship by Anastasia Mulcahy, presumably a cousin, and about whom we know no more. The ship's records describe both as being aged 21 (Ellen was probably only 18), farm servants, from Co. Limerick.

The voyage to Australia lasted until 11th July, 1854, some four months, and, as Michael Stammers says in *The Passage Makers*, such voyages were usually uncomfortable, tedious and occasionally hazardous:

Life at sea had some pleasant moments but, judging by the surviving diaries and letters, the happy events were outnumbered by the unpleasant ones. A sea voyage lasting several months and passing through the stormy seas of the Roaring Forties was a new and terrifying experience for most passengers. Many thousands were prepared to endure the overcrowding, the poor diet and even the risk of losing their lives in the hope of finding a new, more prosperous life at the end of the voyage. The knowledge of the great opportunities awaiting them in Australia may have made their sufferings at sea more bearable. Perhaps the poorest of the passengers even found that the ship's accommodation and food were of a better standard than in the towns and villages they had left, but they still had to cope with the unfamiliar motion, noise and working of a sailing ship.

After entering Port Phillip Bay the *City of Manchester* was piloted to Point Henry, near Geelong, where her passengers disembarked. The ship's papers show that Ellen Mulcahy accepted employment with the Moloney family of O'Connell Street, Ashby (part of today's West Geelong).

About two months after Ellen sailed from Southampton, Henry Wade, a 45-year-old farmer from near Nenagh, in Co. Tipperary, arrived in Liverpool with his wife, daughter Bridget, aged 15, and sons Patrick (13), John (8) and Daniel (6). They embarked as full fare

paying passengers, rather than as assisted emigrants, on one of the crack ships of the day, the *Mermaid*, and sailed for Australia on 3rd May, 1854, arriving on 17th July, having made a passage of 74½ days.

Other Wades had already arrived in Melbourne from Ireland, and "Wade and Gowan, auctioneers, of 80 Collins Street" frequently advertised their business in the *Age* and *Argus* at the time. It therefore seems probable that Henry and his family were met by friends or relatives when they disembarked from the *Mermaid* and left their ocean racing days behind them.



James Mulcahy, 1833-1895.

Three years later, on 10th June, 1857, another Black Ball line ship, the *Saldanha*, sailed from Liverpool for Australia. Among the passengers were Patrick Mulcahy, aged 24, single, farm labourer from Ireland, travelling to Melbourne, and his 11-year old brother, John. They were undoubtedly the eldest and youngest of the four children of Thomas and Ellena Mulcahy, and were on their way to join their sister Ellen who had travelled out three years earlier. The *Saldanha* had an uneventful voyage, arriving in Melbourne in September.

Six weeks after the departure of the *Saldanha* from Liverpool, on 28th July, 1857, a third ship, the *Melbourne*, carried the widow Ellena Mulcahy and her second son, James, then aged 21. We do not know why the family travelled on three different ships, but such arrangements were quite common at the time, reflecting the difficulty of obtaining a passage to the gold rush colony, the fear of entrusting an entire family to one ship for such a hazardous voyage – and probably reflecting the confused arrangements at the time for assisted passage emigrants.

On 3rd November, 1857, the *Melbourne* anchored off Williamstown.

Thus Ellena Mulcahy, her three sons Patrick, James and John, and her daughter Ellen, had all safely arrived at the other side of the world, some 13000 miles from their home in Ireland.

Ellena and James Mulcahy disembarked. The ship's passenger list says of Ellena that on disembarking she 'went with friends at Melbourne'. We can only guess that these 'friends' included her daughter Ellen, sons Patrick and John and some friends or relatives from Ireland. The ship's records state that on disembarking James was engaged by an employer at the rate of £52 p.a., with initial rations for one month being provided. The next certain reference to James is that a few months later, in the early part of 1858, he was working for the Hamilton family of 'Richlands', Upper Plenty, about halfway between Whittlesea and Kilmore. When James married in June, 1858, he still gave his address as 'Upper Plenty', but by April, 1859, when his first child was born, he had moved to Kilmore itself, where he was working both as a farmhand and in the carting business.

Kilmore was one of the earlier inland towns to be established in Victoria, and being a day's travel by horse-drawn vehicle from Melbourne along the road to Sydney and to the goldfields at Bendigo (via Heathcote), or in the Ovens Valley (via Wangaratta), it quickly became an important staging post with a large number of hotels and livery stables. In *The Tale of a Century*, John Maher describes Kilmore's early days and refers frequently to the teamsters, carriers and coachlines passing through the town: Cobb and Co., Green's Royal Mail Coaches, Trainor's Coach Lines, the Ovens Stage Coach Company, etc. One line which he does not mention, but which advertised in the *Age* and *Argus* in 1858, when the Mulcahys were in the Kilmore district, was the "Erin Go Bragh Line of Coaches" ('Ireland for Ever'). Did James's carrier business operate under such a nostalgic and patriotic name?!

The Mulcahys had several links with early Kilmore. A block of land comprising 161 acres at the northern end of the now main street and on the southeastern bank of the Kurkuruc or Kilmore Creek where it is crossed by the main road was first sold by the crown in 1855 to one Thomas Mulcahy, who had arrived on the *Martin Luther* on 9th July, 1842. The passenger list of that ship records him as being aged 27, unmarried, and a labourer from Co. Cork, Ireland. On the same ship was Ellen Mulcahy, aged 20, unmarried, a house servant, from Co. Cork, and presumably his sister.

This Thomas may well have been a kinsman of our family, and he and his sister may well have been the 'friends'

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who met Ellena and James when the *Melbourne* arrived in 1857. This supposition is strengthened by the address which Thomas Mulcahy gave when purchasing the Kilmore land in 1855; in the documents on file in Melbourne he is described as 'Thomas Mulcahy of River Plenty'. Was 'River Plenty' the locality referred to as 'Upper Plenty' in 1858 by James Mulcahy on signing the marriage register? It would seem likely, as it would that Ellena and her children were not only met by friends, but were taken by them to the Plenty River or Kilmore district. Thomas Mulcahy sold the Kilmore land in September, 1858, to John O'Connell).

Our family's first emigrant, Ellen, drowned on 17th February, 1858, and was buried at Kilmore the following day. She was 21 years of age.

A small slab and shingle Catholic Church had been built at the northern end of Kilmore in 1850, and in 1855 a small but solid stone church and separate school had been built on the present church ground. It was in that early St. Patrick's that another family link with Kilmore – the marriage of James Mulcahy and Bridget Wade – took place.

They were married on 24th June, 1858, James giving his place of birth as 'Pallasgrean, Co. Limerick', and Bridget giving hers as 'Mineha, Co. Tipperary'. How James and Bridget met we do not know, but it seems unlikely to have been mere coincidence that (as we know from family stories) the Wade family's best friends had included the Hamilton family – and James Mulcahy had been employed by the Hamiltons at Upper Plenty! James's best man at the wedding was Bridget's eldest brother, Patrick Wade (two years her junior), and the Hamilton, Wade and Mulcahy families maintained close ties for many years thereafter.

The Kilmore Parish was one of the first established in Victoria and included what subsequently became the parishes of Gisborne, Woodend, Kyneton, Castlemaine, Eaglehawk, Echuca, Mansfield, Seymour, Nagambie and Tatura – and the cathedral city of Bendigo. Thus, as the Mulcahy family moved further inland and into the valley of the Goulburn River, they remained for many years in the Kilmore parish.

The Kilmore Gap in the Great Dividing Range, through which the road and railway between Melbourne and Sydney pass, explains the strategic location of the town, as far as the selectors of the 1850s and 1860s were concerned. South of the Great Dividing Range lay Melbourne and the early settlements of the Port Phillip District. To the north lay the heavily timbered valleys of the Victorian tributaries of the Murray River – the Mitta Mitta, the Ovens, the Goulburn, the Campaspe

and the Loddon. The Ovens and Bendigo goldfields saw the rapid growth of townships in the Bendigo and Beechworth areas, but the land was otherwise very sparsely populated when the Mulcahys arrived in Kilmore.

Just north of the Kilmore Gap the road to the Heathcote and Bendigo goldfields traverses hilly country known as High Camp Plain. The two main squatter families here were the Mollesons and the Hamiltons, of 'Glenaroua' (76,000 acres, 18,000 sheep) and 'Pyalong' (60,000 acres, 20,000 sheep) respectively.



John Mulcahy, 1842-1916.

Pyalong village had been surveyed in the 1850s when the Selection Acts of the Victorian Parliament began to break up the squatters' vast holdings. A number of Irish families took up selections, and a Catholic school was opened in 1859 (there were no government schools in Victoria until 1872). The Mulcahys appear to have moved north from Kilmore to High Camp Plain in the early 1860s and James 'selected' Block 99, close to Pyalong village, and later bought the freehold (for £47). Pyalong is on Mollisons' Creek, a tributary of the Goulburn, and the Mulcahys spent only a few years there before moving down to the river itself. There they were close to the Wade family, as Bridget's brother, Patrick, was already farming at Tabilk and, later on, further down the river at Warring. In 1867 James applied to select a block of land near the river at Warring. A local squatter, Hugh Glass, objected but was overruled by the Government, and the lease to James was approved soon after the Minister's con-

sideration of a letter from James.

The biggest centre of population in the area when the Mulcahys arrived in 1868 was Graytown, previously known as Spring Creek, and the centre of a gold rush in 1868. Within months, Graytown had a population of 20,000, and in, 1869, it was declared a borough. The boom soon failed, and by 1871 the population had dropped to 1,500 – still a sizeable little town and the centre of local government for some years.

In 1870 James obtained the lease of a neighbouring block fronting on to the Goulburn itself, and in 1871 his brother Patrick applied for the block in between, pegging out his claim. Again a local squatter, this time Henry Furze, objected.

Again the objection was dismissed, and the two Mulcahy brothers had between them some 200 acres of good land.

By November, 1873, James was applying for the freehold, explaining that he had met the conditions of the Land Selection Acts: he had surrounded the entire block with log fences, had cleared 28 acres which he had sown with wheat (the rest of the land remaining heavily timbered), had built in 1868 a weatherboard and shingle cottage 24' x 10', a barn 26' x 15' and a cart shed 24' x 12'. He had planted a vegetable garden, and his son and brother (presumably Patrick) resided on the land. Purchase was approved at £1 per acre. Two years later Patrick applied to purchase his block of land, and declared that he resided on the adjoining block, had fenced the entire holding, had cleared much of it and was growing crops of wheat and oats. The purchase was approved, again at £1 per acre. The third brother, John, had selected land further down the valley, at Arcadia, on the west bank of the Muddy Creek. In 1868 James and Bridget moved their family from High Camp Plain to Warring, which they made their home for nearly ten years. When the Goulburn Weir was built in 1888, its eastern end was on Mulcahy land.

In between taking up residence on this land in 1868 and actually purchasing it in 1873, James acquired an additional 220 acres on the river bank about a mile downstream, at Dargalong. This was the land originally selected by Patrick Wade in 1865. James bought the freehold of it in 1874, again at £1 per acre.

Patrick Wade went from Dargalong to 'Mooroopna West', where he was joined by his younger brother, Daniel, and in 1873 each selected blocks of land. The Wades were soon followed by the Mulcahys.

In 1873 John Mulcahy selected the land which eventually became 'Berrigan Park'. In 1874 Patrick Mulcahy selected the adjoining land at block 97

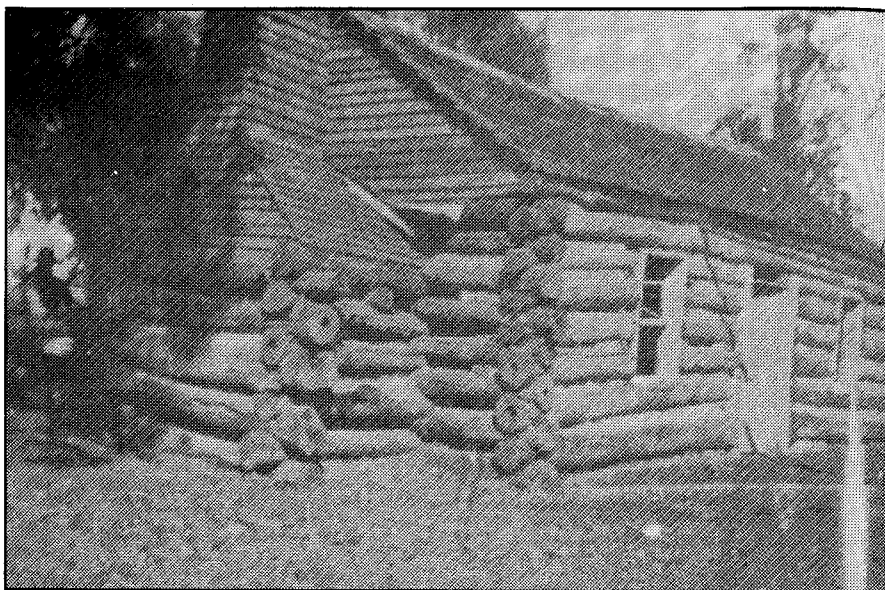


which later became 'Tara', the squatter then on 'St. Germain's', Mr. J. Bain, not objecting to either selection. James Mulcahy followed and selected the neighbouring block 96. John's wife and children continued to live at Arcadia and his application to buy his new selection at Mooroopna West was refused in 1876 on the grounds of 'un-sufficient residence'. John disputed this, saying he did intend to move his family permanently and that he did not wish to buy the land at Arcadia 'in consequence of the proposed railway'. His appeal was upheld in 1877, but in 1879 he transferred the lease of block 94 to his brother James, who subsequently bought the freehold of 'Berrigan Park' for £1 an acre.

James, by mid-1876, had built an 'American log hut' on this land which he described as 'heavily timbered': the hut was 21' x 12', made of logs and bark, and divided into two rooms. He and his family took up residence on their new selection (having bought the freehold of the land at Warring they were no longer required to reside there). In 1878 James had added 'a kitchen, 20' x 10' and a barn, 21' x 12', according to his report to the Lands Department. Patrick, on the other hand, had difficulties with the Lands Department, as the local agent reported that he was not living on the Mooroopna West land. Patrick explained that he and his wife were still living at Warring and that he had not been well enough to build a house or to make other improvements on his new block. His reasons were accepted, and the selection was approved, but in 1881 Patrick exchanged his block at Mooroopna West for one of James' blocks at Warring. As a result, Patrick consolidated his holdings at Warring and, when in 1884 John Mulcahy decided to move to the Numerkah district, James emerged with the entire 640 acres originally shared by the Mulcahys and Wades at Mooroopna West. He also held the 213 acres at Dargalong taken over from Patrick Wade and a further block of 114 acres he himself had selected on the Wormangal Creek near Warring and which he had purchased in 1876.

As a result of the Selection Acts, the Goulburn Valley was settled quite quickly in the 1860s and 1870s. The Aboriginal tribes had faded away, leaving behind them only a few names, including 'Warring' for the Goulburn River itself at Warring.

Obtaining some form of education for children in the bush was very difficult in those days. Even primary school education was not compulsory and it was left to the people of the district to establish and fund some sort of school. According to one story, while the family was living at Warring, James, using a single-furrow plough, marked a two-mile track through the



Log hut, built by James Mulcahy on his land in 1876.

bush from the family home to the Warring Catholic School, actually located at Bunganail. The children were enjoined never to stray from the furrow (their parents feared they would get lost in the bush), and James dinned the lesson in with an occasional 'ambush' when he would use his stick on any son who was not following the straight and narrow path!

In 1872 an Education Act was passed and the colonial government set out to make free and secular, primary schooling available to all.

In 1888 Ellena Mulcahy, the mother of Patrick, James, Ellen (deceased) and John died.

Perhaps the distance between Tatura and Mooroopna, where the *Yeoman* was printed, accounts for the inaccurate reference to Ellena's arrival in Victoria 'at an early age' and to a son 'Joseph' farming at Wunghnu!

1888 was an important year for the Mulcahys. On the debit side, it saw the death of Ellena, the 'Irish Mother of Us All', who had, as a young married woman in Ireland, lived through the stirring times of Daniel O'Connell and his 'Monster Meetings', and had with her young children managed to survive the Great Famine, the occupation of her native Ireland by the English and then the long journey to Australia. She had clearly been 'a valiant woman', and must have been sorely missed by her sons and their families.

On the credit side, 1888 saw the beginning of work on the Goulburn Weir at Warring, the construction of which was to transform the lives (and fortunes) of farmers in the Goulburn Valley. Although the soil of the Valley had from the outset been recognized as particularly fertile, the early settlers had had to contend with a climate of a harshness unknown in Ireland, and

drought, fires and floods made 'dry' farming a difficult life. While 1873 to 1877 (when the Mulcahys were at both Warring and Byrneside) are recorded as having been 'good years', 1878 is described as the year the rust arrived in the wheat crops – and 1881, 1884 and 1888 were years of severe drought. In 1880 there had been a proposal to build a dam on the Goulburn River four miles upstream from Murchison, and a second proposal was brought forward in 1884. Eventually the colonial parliament decided to make the construction of the dam and related irrigation scheme a 'national project' and work began in 1888. The site chosen enabled the retaining wall of the Weir to be built on a rocky outcrop in the river where it passed the Mulcahy land (blocks 3, 4, 5 and 6) at Warring. The eastern end of the retaining wall is built on block 3, and so the present park and maintenance plant are on land originally selected and cleared by the family. The flat topography of the Valley made irrigation relatively simple, and within a very few years most of the district – and all of the Mulcahy land – had been converted from dry farming and its unpredictable economics to the stability and security of irrigation.

(This article has been reprinted from the book *From the Golden Vale to the Goulburn Valley: A History of the Mulcahy Family* by Thomas Patrick Flanagan and John Stanislaus Mulcahy, published in Australia in 1984. One of the authors presented a copy of the book to Michael O'Dwyer, Pallasgreen, Co. Limerick, who later presented this copy to the Limerick County Library. The Journal wishes to express its gratitude to Michael O'Dwyer and the staff of the library for making the book available for use in this Australian edition).