

The ROCHFORDS OF TULLA AND AUSTRALIA 1798 TO 1920

Family history is usually made up of two parts, documented information which can be researched and established as fact and stories and legends handed down by word of mouth from one generation to another, often expanded and romanticised along the way. These family stories are often very difficult to prove, but are usually based on fact and add to our feeling and understanding of the family in the distant past.

My Rochford ancestors were no different. The first part of the story begins with recollections passed down from generation to generation.

The Rochford family legend is that seven brothers or cousins arrived in Ireland with the French forces that came to support the uprising of 1798. This force of about 1000 men and seventy officers, led by General Jean Joseph Humbert, arrived at Killala Bay in County Mayo in August 1798 and were joined by several thousand of the local population. The French were seasoned well armed troops and the locals were mainly armed with pikes and agricultural implements.

The combined force advanced south and had a major victory when they overran the English garrison at Castlebar and then had several other smaller victories.

The English regrouped their forces and under the leadership of General Charles Cornwallis, defeated the combined French and Irish forces in a bloody battle at Ballinamuck.

The Rochford family legend is that the seven brothers or cousins escaped capture and quietly settled in Co. Clare and Co. Mayo. This story is made more plausible by the fact that the French forces left from the port of Rochefort and the family are thought to have taken their name from the place where they lived.

Proving this story is very difficult, as records are scanty and few and far between, but we can be sure of some details as we move from legends to provable facts. The first of these is that there were some Rocheforts in the French forces who came to England in what we now call the Norman Invasion and that over time they changed their name from Rochefort to Rochford and that some of these Rochford families moved to Ireland about 1250.

In the late 1700's there were several Rochford families living in Limerick City and it's not out of the question that they may have assisted their French kin to quietly settle in Clare and Mayo.

It's here where we begin to move from legend to fact and the first of these is that there were Rochford's living around the village of Tulla in Co. Clare when Catholic parish records began in 1819. The first proven Rochford record is a marriage appears in the parish register on 24 February 1819.

The earliest reference to my direct line is in the Tithe Applotment records of 1827. These tax records show my great great grandfather, Patrick Rochford living on the townland of Kilbogoon and we believe that this is where this family line first settled and that Patrick was the son or perhaps the brother of the original settler.

Evidence begins to build when the parish register records the marriage of Patrick Rochford of Kilbogoon to Mary Hennessy of Newgrove on 1 March 1829. It was about this time that Patrick Rochford became a hotelkeeper in the town of Tulla. His 'pub' was a small one roomed bar with a tap room. Patrick and Mary and their growing family lived at the rear and above the bar.



In those times Tulla was a busy market town and is reported to have had eighteen pubs or hotels and as Patrick's pub was located on the main street, not far from the fair green, he should have had a good trade, and the family probably lived a comfortable life.

The picture shown to the left, which was taken in 1991, is thought to have been the Rochford family pub.

Patrick and Mary had ten children, all baptised in the Catholic church in Tulla. They were Johanna born 1829, Bridget 1831, Catherine 1832, Patrick 1834, James, 1837, Michael 1838, James 1842, Jane 1844, Michael 1848 and Ellen 1850. Two of the children must have died at an early age, as later children were given the same names.

Patrick and Mary Rochford are thought to have migrated to America, with some of his children, about 1860, we have been unable to prove this family story, but if it is true, some of the other children must have stayed in Ireland or returned to Ireland some time after the family travelled to the USA.

Australian shipping records show that three of the girls, Catherine, Bridget and Jane migrated to Australia.

Jane became my great grandmother. She departed Liverpool in the 'Great Australia' on 7 October 1864 arriving at Port Phillip (Melbourne) on 13 January 1865, after a journey of 100 days. This was a good average time for the journey. The fastest ships could make the journey in about 80 days and the slowest in 120 days, or sometimes longer.

The 'Great Australia' was a large ship of 1660 tons and on this voyage she carried over 400 statute passengers, made up of 371 adults, 61 children and 10 babies.

The 'Great Australia' was a ship of the Black Ball line which was one of the best known shipping lines to bring migrants to Australia, and thousands of passengers travelled under it's banner. The Black Ball line was established by one of the great shipping entrepreneurs of his day, James Baines, who was born about 1833, in Liverpool, where his mother ran a cake and sweet shop. From a humble start Baines rose to be a household name in shipping circles and in the 1860's he owned 86 ships and employed 3000 seamen. Unfortunately his star began to wane with the emergence of steam ships and his decline was hastened by some poor business decisions. He died penniless in 1889 aged 66.

It seems likely that when Jane Rochford arrived in Melbourne she took up domestic service, as there was great demand for domestics at that time. The servants lived in and as labour was in short supply, they were generally treated well by their employers.

Jane married Michael O'Callaghan at St. Mary's Catholic church St. Kilda Victoria on 4 June 1871.

Soon after their marriage the O'Callaghans moved to the suburb of Prahran, where their first child, Mary Ellen was born on 9 June 1872. The family then moved to the suburb of Richmond, where my grandfather, Patrick John was born on 5 February 1875.

Later in 1875, the family moved to Sydney and lived in the new suburb of Ultimo, which was quite near to the city and close to work opportunities. Three other children were born at Ultimo. They were Michael, born 21 October 1877, Stephen Thomas, 30 December 1879 and Annie Agnes, 15 August 1882.

Ultimo was a large tract of land that had been owned by the Harris family from the early days of the colony and they retained their land as a wooded bushland gentleman's estate for a long time even as the nearby estates were being rapidly subdivided and developed as housing. It wasn't until the 1879's that the Harris family began to subdivide and sell their land. Jane Rochford and her family may have been the first occupants of their house in Quay St. Ultimo and the family then lived at that address for over twenty years.

By the turn of the century, the peninsula which contained Ultimo was home for many thousands of working class people.

Jane's husband, Michael, died in 1909 and by this time the family had become property owners and soon after the death of her husband, Jane purchased a livery stable which she ran with two of her sons until her death in 1918.

The livery stable provided a taxi and light carrying service for commercial travellers and employed several drivers. In those days the travellers hired a buggy or a small cart and drove themselves or, more commonly, hired a cart and driver. For some time the livery stable prospered, however, towards the end of Jane's life it was being affected by the rise in the use of motor vehicles.

At the time of Jane's death, the stable had four buggies and four sulkies, five horses and a variety of harness and equipment.

At the time of her death Jane owned two properties and her estate was valued at 1280 pounds. The average wage of the day was about two pounds per week and on that basis, Jane's estate was worth about 600 weeks wages. By today's Australian average wage standards, it would have been worth about \$450,000. This is not a 'huge' sum, but a very 'comfortable amount'.

The property continued to run as a livery stable after Jane's death but was sold (with several adjacent properties) a few years later to a large engineering firm who built a factory there, but things keep changing and some years ago the factory was demolished and today a large McDonalds family restaurant stands on the site.

Jane (and Michael's) story is typical of many Irish immigrants who came to Australia. They worked hard and prospered and their descendants have continued to take advantage of the opportunities available, nonetheless, several generations later a strong link to Ireland remains.

The author would be happy to hear from anyone who has an interest in the Rochfords of Tulla Co. Clare.

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