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Mary MacKillop Penola Centre

## PENOLA'S EARLY CATHOLIC HISTORY

The genesis of Catholic ministry and education in Penola was inextricably linked with the settlement of the district and the foundation of the town by Highland Scots from the Lochaber region of Inverness-shire.

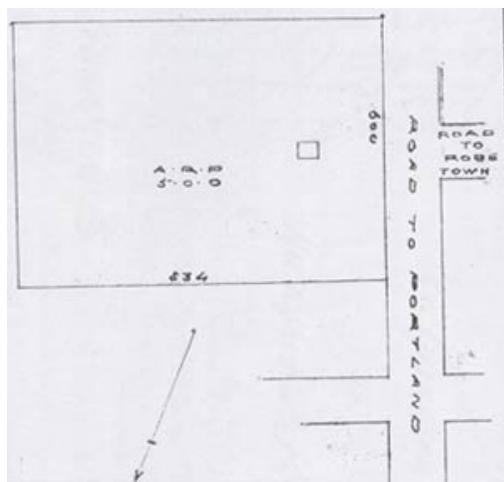
The first to arrive, Alexander Cameron, applied for a 48 square mile occupation license on 19 December 1845,<sup>1</sup> and had converted his first homestead into the Royal Oak Hotel by 23 November 1848.<sup>2</sup> In the same year, the roving Vicar General, Father Michael Ryan, made his first visit to the district in March.



*1859 St Joseph's Church & Presbytery*

On 14 February 1850, Cameron bought at auction a land grant of 80 acres that he had had surveyed, comprising Section 3 County of Grey, 20 acres of which he leased to Alexander Anderson four days later, on the condition that he 'engages to fence in the same and put up substantial buildings for carrying on a store.'<sup>3</sup> Cameron's freehold title was not actually issued until the following month, on 4 April 1850.<sup>4</sup>

Anderson moved fast and had completed his store, the second dwelling in the settlement,<sup>5</sup> by 14 May 1850, when he advertised in *The Portland Guardian* that he 'begs to inform his friends, the Settlers and others, of the New Country, that he has just opened the [Penola Stores].<sup>6</sup> It was located on the east side of Portland Street, directly opposite the road to Robe (now Riddoch Street).



On 5 March 1851 Cameron agreed to sell five acres of this lease, 'attached to the store'<sup>7</sup> to Anderson, but the business failed, the title reverted to Cameron, and the store was leased by Robert Muir, then George Gladstone.<sup>8</sup> By 1854 Gladstone had built a new store across Portland Street on Allotment 108, which later became known as Cobb & Co.

In the same year Bishop Francis Murphy accompanied Father Ryan on his annual visit to Penola and, on 10 June, bought the five acre title that included the store from Cameron for £300, to establish a permanent congregation.<sup>9</sup> Mary MacKillop, however, was later under the impression that 'Mr Cameron was the squatter who owned Penola Station and gave the land on which the church was built.'<sup>10</sup> The various financial transactions involved were

complicated, to say the least.

This land acquisition was in preparation for the arrival, on 30 November 1854, of the first resident priest, Father Peter Powell, whose 'zeal, energy and untiring exertions [were] much esteemed by all classes of society.'<sup>11</sup> He would occupy 'two small rooms' in the building,<sup>12</sup> and on Sunday 3 December (coincidentally the day of the Eureka Rebellion)<sup>13</sup> conducted his first service in the shop area of the store, which held 'about 20 or 30 people and was larger than ever the congregation required.'<sup>14</sup>

The following month he established a Catholic school under his own 'immediate inspection and patronage'<sup>15</sup> 'in a hut adjoining the store'<sup>16</sup> of which Michael O'Grady was the teacher. O'Grady was clearly competent, and he also applied for a government teacher's licence later in the year, on 17 October, which was granted on 28 November 1855. This was the first such licence in the South East, and guaranteed him an annual SA Board of Education stipend of about £32, but obliged him to 'watch the morals, punctuality and cleanliness' of his pupils.<sup>17</sup> He continued to teach throughout 1856, and possibly into the following year, as he knew the second resident priest, the Rev Julian Edmund Tenison Woods, who arrived on the Feast of Saint Joseph, 19 March 1857. O'Grady subsequently went to the Victorian

gold fields, and was teaching at Steiglitz, near Geelong, from 9 January 1858 until that school closed on 26 May 1858.<sup>18</sup>

Woods continued the work of his predecessors, only taking up intermittent residence in the store during his ten years in the district, mentioning that, 'two small rooms attached were meant for my domestic use, but I did not use them, as I was always on the move.'<sup>19</sup>

The year after his arrival he initiated the building of a new church, between the store and Portland Street, and in March 1859 it was reported that:

The new stone Catholic Church is rapidly approaching completion, and I understand will be opened for divine service on Sabbath week. The beautiful little edifice, with its neat belfry, is quite an ornament to our 'bonnie little town.' Much credit is due to the Rev Mr Woods, the young priest, for his indefatigable exertions, and also to a certain wealthy settler for the reality.<sup>20</sup>

Opening on Easter Sunday, 24 April 1859, it was later followed, towards the end of his tenure, by the Schoolhouse that Woods completed for Mary MacKillop in June 1867.

The old wooden store, that in its time had served as a chapel, a presbytery and a school, survived until 1872, when it was reported that:

One of the oldest institutions of the township has disappeared, namely St Joseph's Presbytery, and in its place we now see a handsome stone mansion – a very great improvement on the old dilapidated wooden building existing for so many years. There was however, one pleasing association attached to the old building, namely, that it was the first place in this township where public worship was held, in fact we may say it was the place where the first footstep of civilization was stamped in the South Eastern District.

This new stone presbytery still stands today on the exact site of Anderson's Store, although it became a convent for the Sisters of Saint Joseph in 1936, when they returned to open the new St Joseph's School (now the Mary MacKillop Memorial School). Saint Joseph's Church that Woods built in 1859 survived, well buttressed, for 65 years until it was wrecked in 1924, to be replaced by the present edifice.

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<sup>1</sup> SRSA, GRG 35/4, 14.2.1846

<sup>2</sup> SA Government Gazette, 23.11.1848

<sup>3</sup> Old Systems Land Titles, 3.37

<sup>4</sup> Old Systems Land Titles, 428.69

<sup>5</sup> *The Border Watch*, 5.8.1871

<sup>6</sup> *The Portland Guardian*, 14.5.1850

<sup>7</sup> Old Systems Land Titles, 1.37

<sup>8</sup> *South-Eastern Star*, 17.5.1881

<sup>9</sup> Old Systems Land Titles, 34.71: Indenture and Conveyance from Alexander Cameron Junior of Penola to Francis Murphy Bishop of Adelaide, as to 5 acres of Section 3 for £300. Dated 10.6.1854.

<sup>10</sup> Mary MacKillop, *Julian Tenison Woods – A Life*, Blackburn 1997, page 38

<sup>11</sup> *The Portland Guardian*, 11.1.1855

<sup>12</sup> JET Woods, *Personal Reminiscences of Adam Lindsay Gordon*, Melbourne Review, April 1884, p 133

<sup>13</sup> Pam O'Connor, *150 Years of Catholicism in Penola and District*, Penola 2004, page 3

<sup>14</sup> JET Woods, *Memoirs*, to Anne Bulger, chapter 7, page 12

<sup>15</sup> *The Portland Guardian*, 11.1.1855

<sup>16</sup> Rev George O'Neill, *Life of the Rev JET Woods*, Sydney 1929, page 90

<sup>17</sup> Peter Rymill, *The Early History of the Penola Primary School*, in *Penola Historical Selections Volume 5*, Penola 1993, page 37

<sup>18</sup> MDHC, Catholic Archdiocese of Melbourne

<sup>19</sup> JET Woods, *Personal Reminiscences of Adam Lindsay Gordon*, Melbourne Review, April 1884, p 133

<sup>20</sup> *The Adelaide Register*, 2.3.1859