

Sister Mary Agnes McSweeney - composer of Hail Glorious Saint Patrick



ELIZABETH McSWEENEY, daughter of Michael and Ellen (nee Galway) was born in Cobh/Queenstown on 16 November 1823. She was half-niece (a daughter of one's half brother or half-sister) of Fr. Thomas Croke CC who baptised her (later Fr. Thomas Croke was appointed PP of Charleville from 1827 until his death in 1873). As her father was of some means, a custom's officer, she was fortunate to receive a good education.

Elizabeth entered the Mercy Convent in Charleville on 4 April 1843 and was received as Sr. Mary Agnes on 22 August 1843. She was professed the following year on 11 September 1844. She took charge of the pension school, set up by the sisters before they were able to take over the Girl's National School. She also had charge of the novices for 15 years.

In 1865 Bishop Quinn, was appointed as first bishop of a new diocese in Bathurst, near Sydney, Australia. He needed sisters for his mission. He was a friend of Archbishop Croke who advised him to go to Charleville convent. Sr. Agnes was among the first seven to go on the foundation to Bathurst, which was led by her cousin, Sr. Ignatius Croke. They left Ireland on 31 July 1866 and set sail on The Empress. The 66 passengers spent 3 months at sea and arrived in Port Jackson and the end of October. They travelled by train and Cobb

and Co. coach over the Blue Mountains and arrived in Bathurst, 15000 miles away from home, at the end of October.

The sisters started teaching almost immediately. Sr. Agnes loved teaching First Communion classes, visiting the homes of the pupils as well as the sick and the needy and the prisoners in Bathurst gaol. Later the sisters set up a boarding school for children from the outback. Sr. Agnes was appointed Mother Assistant to Mother Ignatius for the first ten years. She was the first Novice Mistress and the first School Principal, also the first to celebrate a Golden Jubilee in 1883. The Bathurst Annals tell us that Sr. Agnes was of "uncommon ability, remarkably proficient in French and English Literature; a good referee on historical questions, proficient in French and English literature; a good referee on historical questions especially ancient and ecclesiastical history and a producer of serious and humorous poetry". Mother Mary Agnes died on 2nd June 1905 and is buried in the Convent cemetery in Bathurst.

Reference: The Mercy Archives

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