



THE PICK OF THE GREAT NORTH ROAD

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Patrick Cuneen of Cuneens Bridge Fame Elizabeth A. Roberts

For a while it was a policy of Cessnock Council to name their bridges after the persons whose land the bridge was on. As little was known about Patrick Cuneen after whom Cuneens Bridge is named it was decided to research him. In 1841 with both parents deceased the newly married Cuneens, Patrick and his wife Margaret, decided to join the many who were leaving over-crowded Ireland and emigrated to Australia arriving on the Susan in March 1841.

The population of Ireland had climbed from about five million in 1780 to over eight million in 1841. Both the Cuneens came from Limerick. Limerick on the River Shanon is on the south-west coast of Ireland. It was here the Vikings had landed and its name means “barren spot of land”. In the mid nineteenth century some of the main industries were lace making and clothing (1). Patrick and Margaret were both involved in these industries but to obtain a free passage Patrick, who could both read and write, gave his occupation as farm labourer while Margaret admitted to being a lace worker. After his obligatory time as a farm labourer, the Cuneens return to Sydney where two of their children were baptized.

In Sydney, Patrick probably obtained employment as a tailor. There is a five gap in the records then in 1854, as a forty year old tailor he purchased Lot 5 (allotment 6, section 5) of Wollombi town lands, a one acre triangular shaped block at the junction of the two branches of Wollombi Brook. He moved there with his family of at least three daughters and two sons (2).

It appears Patrick Cuneen lived in Wollombi for at least fifteen years. His daughter Mary Ann married John Castles of Yango at Maitland in 1861 and later the same year appeared in court in Wollombi charging David Davis with unlawful assault. He was accused of striking Mary Ann Castles when she was taking a short cut across his land. Her younger sister Ellen Cuneen gave evidence on her behalf. The case was dismissed but the next case on the same day was also against David Davis brought by his wife in fear of her life from his violence. This case was proven (3).

John Castles had a lease holding at Yango Creek. Between 1872 and 1874 and the Castle family moved with their five children to Tamworth where another five children were born. About the same time it appears the rest of the family moved to Sydney, leaving one child buried in the cemetery (4). They disappear from the Wollombi electoral roll and Ellen Cneen married Joseph Locke in Sydney



in 1877. Patrick Cuneen died in Sydney in 1879 aged 68. Ellen's first child was born early January 1880 in Sydney. The rest of her children were born in Inverell before her early death in 1889.

1. <http://members.tripod.com/Preachan/limerick1.html>;
http://www.eztrip.com/dg_viewLocation_formId-75402.html
2. Greville's Post Office Directory 1872
3. Wollombi Court Records July December 1861 transcribed by Carl Hoipo 2001
4. Patrick and two of his sons Thomas and James appear in the 1869-70 Wollombi electoral roll and Patrick is listed as tailor in the 1872 Greville postal directory entry for Wollombi; Wollombi cemetery book.

