

Allen

A WOMAN OF SPIRIT



NOELENE ALLEN

*Allen*

A WOMAN OF SPIRIT

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I dedicate this book to my mother Peggy Ross and my maternal grandmother, the late Lillian Maude McIlwraith.

My mother and my grandmother faced many adversities in their lives and dealt with them with the same strength and courage as the women in the book you are about to read.

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	ix
<b>Foreword</b>	xi
<b>Introduction</b>	xiii
1. <b>The Journey Begins</b>	1
2. <b>Ireland 1800-1850</b>	5
3. <b>The Voyage</b>	9
4. <b>Melbourne</b>	11
5. <b>Settling in Australia</b>	15
6. <b>Wallan Wallan</b>	17
7. <b>John ‘Red’ Kelly</b>	23
8. <b>Marriage</b>	31
9. <b>Gold</b>	35
10. <b>Merri Creek and Beveridge</b>	39
11. <b>The Decline of Beveridge</b>	43
12. <b>Changing Times</b>	49
13. <b>Avenel</b>	55
14. <b>Ned’s Act of Bravery</b>	61
15. <b>The Loss of Red</b>	65
16. <b>Journey to a New Beginning</b>	67
17. <b>Settling into Life at Greta</b>	73
18. <b>Ellen’s Patch of Dirt</b>	77
19. <b>Harry Power, Bushranger</b>	83

NOELENE ALLEN

20.	<b>Anne Kelly</b>	87
21.	<b>The Bill Frost Affair</b>	93
22.	<b>Death of James Quinn</b>	99
23.	<b>Another New Beginning for Ellen</b>	101
24.	<b>The Fitzpatrick Affair</b>	107
25.	<b>The Trial</b>	119
26.	<b>Melbourne Gaol</b>	127
27.	<b>An Uneasy Peace in the Greta Valley</b>	135
28.	<b>The Family and the Outbreak</b>	137
29.	<b>Ellen Returns Home</b>	141
30.	<b>The Reward Board and the Royal Commission</b>	145
31.	<b>Constable Robert Graham</b>	151
32.	<b>Life Goes On</b>	155
33.	<b>The Life and Death of Maggie</b>	157
34.	<b>The Death of Ellen Skillion</b>	173
35.	<b>The Life and Death of Kate Kelly</b>	177
36.	<b>Kate's Children</b>	193
37.	<b>James Kelly</b>	199
38.	<b>A Change in Fortune?</b>	209
39.	<b>Ellen and George King's Family</b>	211
40.	<b>A New Century</b>	221
	<b>The Family Tree</b>	227
	<b>Bibliography</b>	231

*Ellen* A WOMAN OF SPIRIT



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N.A.

Beechworth 2012

*Ellen* A WOMAN OF SPIRIT

## Foreword

In the late 1960s George Farwell wrote a book entitled *What A Life! Ned Kelly*. As you read Noelene's *Ellen A Woman of Spirit* there is no doubt that you will believe that the axiom 'what a life!' would be more aptly applied to Ellen Kelly instead of Ned.

Ellen's life spanned ninety-two years of emotional turmoil. At the young age of nineteen she lost her first born child. At thirty-four she lost the love of her life and was left to raise her seven children alone. At thirty-nine she lost her first born grandchild and the following year she was to lose her eldest daughter as well as her own new born baby and her second grandchild.

Ellen's life began to look up at forty-three when she married George King, but it was only to last four years. The year 1878 was the turning point for Ellen and her family ... the year when her heartache really began.

Noelene has captured the emotions of Ellen and laid them bare for us to read. With empathy and compassion Noelene has woven the life of Ellen into a story that had to be told! While reading this account you will feel the highs and lows of Ellen's life that Noelene

# *Ellen* A WOMAN OF SPIRIT

identified and valued during her research. She is to be congratulated for the exertion and determination she put into her research over the last 10 years; sifting through documents, visiting and chatting with descendants of the Kellys, Lloyds and Quinns, checking and re-checking the facts and dates. As you read the fruits of her labour you will appreciate not only the incredible life of Ellen Kelly but the motivation Noelene had to tell Ellen's story ... to give Ellen Kelly the recognition she rightly deserves.

Brian McDonald  
Bondi 2012

## Introduction

Ellen Kelly became part of my life in 2002 when I was working in the Beechworth Courthouse and was asked by Richard Skinner, then the coordinator of the historic precinct, to research a woman who had links to the courthouse. After much reading, this woman's story touched my heart and mind. That woman was Ellen Kelly. I was able to find many books written about her son Ned but few that focused on the women of the family and in particular Ellen, and so my journey began.

During the journey I have travelled many kilometres, spoken to many people, made many new friends but most importantly I feel I have come to know Ellen Kelly and her family almost as well as I know my own family history.

My research has been long and detailed and if there are any errors they are mine and I take full responsibility for them.

I have sifted through the many stories I have been told and the research I have gathered and sought those closest to what I believe are the truth. As with all family stories, details change as the years pass and memories dim. I have written Ellen's story from my heart

taking care not to include anything that I felt could be hurtful to the many descendants of the Kelly family.

During my research it became clear to me how Australia's history is so recent. When I saw the photo of Ellen Kelly sitting at the wheel of a motor car which appeared in the Sydney Morning Herald on 2nd December, 2006 in an article written by Steve Waldon I was jolted into the realisation of how much the world changed during Ellen's lifetime. Australians went to war on two occasions during this period. They went to the battlefields in South Africa from 1899 to 1902 during the Boer War, and the First World War was fought from 1914 to 1918 on the bloody battlefields of Europe. This war touched the lives of the Kelly family when Kate's son Fred Foster was killed .

In the late 1800s the motor car appeared on the world scene and changed the way people travelled. The horse, so important to many people of the time but so integral in the lives of the Kelly family would fast disappear as the only mode of travel.

Electricity was invented in the late 1880s and the telephone during the 1870s. The horse drawn trams used in the larger Australian cities were replaced by steam driven trams and later the trams we still love to ride on when we visit Melbourne were introduced. On 1st January, 1901 the Commonwealth of Australia was established when Federation was declared. I was then left to ponder if Ellen was aware of the many changes happening around the world or was she so absorbed by her own family's day to day existence she knew little of the changes. Ellen would have relied on her children and grandchildren to tell her of local and world events and at her age many of the events would have been hard for her to comprehend.

## NOELENE ALLEN

I knew little of the Kelly story when I started my research and although it has been nine years since I began it would be presumptuous of me to think I know the entire story. Ellen's story belongs to her family. One of the descendants of the families close to the story said in a recent magazine that 'Noelene has dealt with the story with understanding, kindness and sympathy with the families.' That comment is very much appreciated and makes the many ups and downs on the research trail worthwhile.

My greatest support and encouragement has come from my husband Eric, who has travelled this journey with me, trudged through cemeteries and old buildings, driven over many back roads in Kelly country, sat through many 'Ellen' talks, pored over many draft copies of the book, and has always encouraged me to complete this project.

My wish is that if Ellen and the women of the Kelly family were able to read this book they would endorse the story and that the descendants of the Kelly, Quinn and Lloyd families know I have done my very best to be honest and sympathetic to their story.



The Giant's Causeway, County Antrim, northeast coast of Northern Ireland



## The Journey Begins

*County Antrim* in the northeast corner of Northern Ireland is just thirteen miles across the channel from the Scottish coast, almost close enough to touch. Ellen Quinn's life journey began in 1832 in this tranquil, peaceful, gloriously green Irish countryside dotted with quiet little villages and mystic glens often shrouded in fog.

Myths and legends surround much of the history of Ireland, its culture, music and people shaped by centuries of thunderous happenings. One of those legends, the legend of Finn McCool, Ulster warrior and commander of the King of Ireland's armies, tells how he built giant sized stepping stones to the Isle of Staffa off the coast of Scotland to visit a lady giant he had fallen in love with. The stepping stones would become one of Ireland's most famous legends, known around the world as the Giant's Causeway.

James Quinn was born not far from the Giant's Causeway and when he married Mary McCluskey around 1824, they settled in County Antrim where their children were born: Patrick in 1825, Helen in 1826, John or 'Jack' as he became known in 1830, Mary in 1831 and Ellen in 1832.

*Ellen* A WOMAN OF SPIRIT



## NOELENE ALLEN

*Greta* is a small hamlet in the north east of Victoria, 155 miles from Melbourne, Australia, tucked away in a valley with large trees, mostly red gums growing along the banks of the creeks that meander through the farms of the district. Summers in the valley can be harsh and dry, the parched landscape waiting for rain that often does not come and when it does fall the valley is sometimes covered by floodwater. Droughts are common and were a new experience for the settlers in the district.

In autumn, the air begins to cool and the beauty of the landscape's changing colours is breathtaking. Winter however, brings with it cold crisp mornings, the paddocks covered in frost; the rugged mountain ranges in the distance topped with snow. Spring is when the valley comes back to life; many of the bulbs planted by the early settlers resurfacing. Purple and gold iris, pink belladonna lilies, golden jonquils and yellow daffodils dot the countryside near piles of old bricks, chimney stacks standing silently alone in a paddock or by the roadside, reminders that once a family lived nearby.

Australia is a country of contrasts and as it grew and developed so too would its legends. Ellen Quinn and her family would be part of one of those legends, a legend that would live on and be talked about in countries all around the world including her home country Ireland. Ellen Quinn's final resting place is in the peaceful Greta Valley.

*Left:* The road in front of Ellen's property at Eleven Mile Creek. The Kelly family travelled this road on their journey from Avenel to Greta



Mother and child being evicted off their land in Ireland, circa 1830  
PRIVATE COLLECTION

2

**Ireland 1800-1850**

There was much unrest throughout Ireland during the early 1800s. Most of the Irish countryside was owned by the English and Anglo-Irish ruling class. The British had confiscated much of the land from Irish Catholics during the time of Oliver Cromwell, forcing Irish farmers to pay rents on land they or their ancestors once owned. These absentee property owners rarely set foot on their properties; while they enjoyed the high life in England, their middlemen or agents collected the rents. The middlemen, mostly Protestants, managed large amounts of land, rent was expensive and many of the holdings were subdivided into smaller and smaller holdings. The average holding was about ten acres or less and tenure was not secure for the many Irish Catholic farmers who by law did not own any of the improvements they made on their land. Even a stone house built for the family became the property of the landlord. The farmers often found they were to be evicted from their land on little or no notice, mostly at the whim of the landlord or his middleman.

Worried for the future of his family, James Quinn was well aware of the threat of eviction from his land, a threat never far from his mind. He felt more trouble was brewing with the English and that

his growing family would have few opportunities in Northern Ireland. There was little opportunity for the young people of Ireland for employment, owning their own land or security for them or their future families. James and Mary Quinn made the brave decision to venture to a new country far across the world, a raw, new country ready to grow, a country that needed strong young men and women like the Quinns who would be willing and ready to work. Australia would offer them the opportunity to be part of a new beginning; James was optimistic his family would prosper in this new beginning. He was a man with dreams and a vision for the future of his young family and he took some time to convince his wife the move to Australia would give their family a better chance in life than staying in their homeland. Their decision would change their lives forever and in ways they could not imagine.

When Mary Quinn began the task of packing the family's belongings, what thoughts and questions must have run through her mind? Her heart would have been filled with anticipation, sadness and dread; wondering what the future would hold for her family in this new country so far away. Would she and her children cope with the long sea voyage, what was Australia really like; would her family be happy there? So many questions, with no easy answers. She supported her husband in their decision to seek a better future for their family and put on a brave face. Sad to leave the country of her birth, the birthplace of their eight children and the land she loved; knowing that she would never see her parents again filled her heart with sorrow. Mary began the preparations for the long sea voyage to their new home and prayed the decision she had agreed to would give her family the future she and James wanted for their children.

## NOELENE ALLEN

How did the Quinn children feel about leaving Ireland? Were they anxious about leaving their grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins? Probably, but the adventure ahead would have made them keen to begin their new lives. Ellen would have been excited too, but too young to understand the changes the move and the impact her father's decision would bring for her family. Little did she know then she would become part of her new country's history and mother of one of her adopted country's most famous folk heroes.

*Ellen* A WOMAN OF SPIRIT



3

**The Voyage**

The Quinn family, James, Mary and their children Patrick aged fifteen, Helen, Jack, Mary Anne, Ellen, Kate, Jane and baby Jimmy just six months old left their home in County Antrim and arrived in Liverpool, England ready to board the ship ‘The England’ as part of a passenger list of 367 bounty migrants.

Master Thompson was in charge of this long and arduous journey. The ship sailed out of Liverpool on 4<sup>th</sup> April, 1841 and would not arrive in Melbourne until 17<sup>th</sup> July, 1841. The passengers aboard the ship would encounter the full effects of mother nature during the voyage, wind, cold weather and the change of seasons from the northern to the southern hemisphere. They left England in spring and arrived in Melbourne in mid winter and although Australia’s winters were not as cold as their home country Ireland, they would take time to acclimatise. Seasickness would strike many of those on board but after a few weeks the passengers would find their sea legs and begin to enjoy the voyage, unlike their fellow countrymen and women who were sent to Australia as convicts. Their journeys would have been very different to the passengers aboard ‘The England’ who had all made their own decision to travel across the world to start a new life; the convicts’ decision had been made for them. An epidemic

of whooping cough plagued the passengers and crew, two adults and sixteen children died during the three and a half months at sea but the Quinn family escaped the ravages of this terrible disease.

On board, Mary Quinn was kept busy with her family and would have had little time to contemplate what the new life in Australia held for her and her family. ‘Migrating to improve their position’ was James Quinn’s philosophy for the move and he would have spent many hours during the voyage planning his family’s new life, hoping the confidence he felt in his decision would be justified when they arrived. The passengers and crew settled into their routine while Ellen, who was a happy, outgoing child, made friends with those on board. A favourite with the crew, her love of singing and dancing helped everyone to pass the time. Full of anticipation, not knowing what the future held, too young to realise the enormity of her father’s decision, she was excited and could not wait to reach her new home.