

# **ELIZABETH LEHANE (1850-1912): HER STORY**

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## ***Preface***

I am Elizabeth Lehane's great-granddaughter. It was only when my husband and I retired to New Farm in Brisbane that I learned Elizabeth's story and discovered that she had spent her last thirty years just across the Brisbane River from my new home.

She lived a quiet life as a single mother in Northcote Street and raised her three sons there. For most of my mother's life, she had never even named her paternal grandmother, though she had often talked about her much-admired maternal grandmother. With recent archival research, I realise why Elizabeth's story has been locked away, too shameful for open recollection within the family.

There are very few details to be found of the lives of ordinary Irish Catholics. What I write here is all that I know of my great grandmother, Elizabeth Lehane (Mrs John Mulcahy), who was born in 1850 Cahirciveen, County Kerry, and died in 1912 in Brisbane.

### *Elizabeth Lehane's family In County Limerick*

Elizabeth's father was Thomas Lehane, a police Constable from Limerick, who was appointed to the newly established Irish Constabulary in November 1831.<sup>1</sup> From his Service Record it appears he was 24 years old, taller than average, and was literate in a time when over 60% of Irishmen were illiterate.<sup>2</sup>

Labouring at that time was entirely unregulated and uncertain, and dependent on the whim of the boss and the nature of the season. In contrast, the Irish Constabulary provided regulated employment, secure income, career advancement, family accommodation and social status. Joining the Constabulary provided a unique opportunity for a Catholic Irishman to find a professional career in his homeland.

At the beginning of his career as a policeman, Thomas Lehane lived in a barracks in Limerick. Discipline was strict and pay was low. His main equipment was a baton and a pair of handcuffs, and his apprenticeship seems to have lasted for ten years.

He married Dora Mulcahy from Patrickswell, a village close to his own home, seven years after he joined the Constabulary. He and Dora would have had to live apart until he was eventually posted to another County where family accommodation would be provided for them.

### *To County Kerry*

Constable Thomas Lehane was posted to County Kerry in the early 1840s, while the worst of the Irish Famine raged. Kerry was one of the poorest and most famine-affected parts of Ireland. Constabulary policy was to appoint couples to a County where they did not have any established family ties, and they were then moved around quite frequently. This ensured that the policemen would remain impartial in policing duties, and limited conflicts of interest with their friends. However, good relationships with other constabulary staff were important, and Thomas and Dora had good friends wherever they lived. Their living quarters would have been in the Police Station, or attached to it. Baptism records in County Kerry show that his co-workers were sponsors for his children, and Thomas and Dora reciprocated as sponsors for their friends' children.<sup>3</sup>

In 1842, Constable Lehane's fourth child Thomas was baptised in Causeway Parish, about thirty kilometres north of Tralee, the largest town in County Kerry. By 1850 he was moved again, to Cahirciveen, about 50 kms SW of Tralee, where his daughters Elizabeth and Margaret were baptised in 1850 and 1852. His last child, John Joseph was baptised in 1857 at Blennerville, on the Dingle Peninsula. The Lehane family may have lived in other towns as well but I have found no records of this. Twenty-one years after he had joined the Constabulary, and after ten years of country service in County Kerry,

Thomas Lehane's Service Record notes that he was promoted to the position of Constable.

A policeman's work of keeping the peace included managing problems like arresting people who were drunk and disorderly, restoring peace during food riots, stopping illegal cock-fighting and illegal distilleries, and keeping records of all these activities. His most distressing responsibility would have been enforcing eviction orders, where the families of tenant farmers were thrown out of their houses by their employers. Policemen also shared leadership in the community as they were literate, and often called upon to help people fill in forms and write letters. The rate of literacy in County Kerry was exceptionally poor.

Government funded National schools were established in many of the larger townships in Ireland and were open to both Catholic and Protestant children. English language was the medium of instruction rather than Irish. Many Catholics were opposed to them, fearing that the Protestant religion taught there would undermine their Catholic beliefs and practices, and would lead to the demise of their Irish language which they valued dearly.

Constable Thomas Lehane had probably attended a National school. His competent literacy in English made him eligible to join the Constabulary, and he was socially confident enough to be recommended to the Constabulary by a Protestant Magistrate. Lehane's children were growing up in small Kerry townships where there may not

have been any government-funded schools to which he could legitimately send them.

167 years after my great grandmother Elizabeth Lehane was born, I visited Ireland, hoping to learn more about the Lehane family and to see where they had lived. We spent a few days around Cahirciveen but were unable to find the police station that dated from their time there. However, we did find the modest stone building where Elizabeth and her little sister Margaret would have been baptised.



*Cahirciveen Penal Church and Schoolhouse, a National Monument.  
Now decommissioned and used as a mechanic's workshop.*

The years of 1845 to 1850 are often called ‘the famine years’ or ‘the great starvation’ in Ireland. Had Thomas Lehane not become a member of the government-funded Irish Constabulary with its permanent job security, his family may not have survived so well.

Despite the difficulties Irish Catholic families battled to feed, clothe and educate their children in those years, all

the Lehane children who migrated to Queensland were literate, hardworking, and faithful Catholics.

In 1858 Thomas Lehane died, aged only 51 years. The cause of his death is not known. Dora reported his death and was awarded a gratuity of £26 12s. 11d. for his 26 years and 4 months of service to the Constabulary.<sup>4</sup>

Her only option would have been to return to her family's home near Limerick with her five surviving children. Ireland was still in the grip of the dreadful famine. The 'gratuity' paid to Dora would have helped with costs of travel back to Limerick, but the older children would need to have found work to help the family survive. By the time Dora returned to Limerick, she was only forty-one years old.

I have no information about how the family managed until, inevitably, they began to emigrate.

### ***The Queensland Immigration Scheme***

In 1859 Queensland became independent from New South Wales. In 1860, the *Alienation of Crown Lands Act* made a land order to the value of £18 payable to any person who paid his own passage to the colony, or to the person or body which had paid his passage for him.

In 1861 Queensland established its Queensland Immigration Scheme (QIS). There was a severe shortage of labour in Queensland, so the QIS would help populate the State.

### *Mary Lehane migrates, August 1862*

The first of the Lehane family to migrate to Australia was Mary, three years after her father had died. She was a 24 year old domestic servant when she arrived in Brisbane on the *Theresa*.<sup>5</sup> The *Theresa* carried 305 assisted immigrants, 112 single men and 83 single women to Queensland.<sup>6</sup> They were all QIS-assisted migrants.

As there were no upper class, self-funded ‘cabin’ passengers to impose class barriers and take precedence on this voyage, the assisted immigrants all shared the same passenger conditions. They would have had access to most of the deck space on board, and would have socialised equally with the officers and crew during the journey. The *Theresa* reached Brisbane in a passage of 100 days. The trip was smooth and there was no sickness to be reported. On arrival in Brisbane, accommodation for QIS immigrants was provided until they found work and began their new lives in Brisbane.

Presumably Mary readily found work as a domestic servant, or perhaps as a governess. Her friendship base in Brisbane would have included friends made during the journey out on the *Theresa*, and other contacts arranged for her by well-connected friends in Limerick.

Mary must have written very positive letters about her shipboard adventures and ports of call to her family back in Limerick, but unfortunately, these letters have not survived. I imagine that Elizabeth and Margaret Lehane,

aged 12 and 10 years, would have pored over Mary's letters and been totally entranced by her stories of exotic places and gallant ship's officers. They may have even guessed that Mary had fallen in love with a handsome Scottish officer, formerly a Lieutenant in the Royal Navy, named James Keith Duncan.



*Portrait of Lieutenant James Keith Duncan, RN  
(Photo: J Guiverra)*

James Duncan was discharged seventeen days after arriving at Brisbane. It may have been that he was not yet ready to set off on another 100 days of gruelling voyage, or perhaps he could see the almost unlimited business opportunities to be had in Queensland. He soon began investing in land around Brisbane and further afield. His decision to stay in Brisbane may also have been because he had fallen in love with Mary Lehan, who had migrated to Brisbane on his ship and was expecting her family to come and join her in Brisbane soon. Their marriage in St



Stephens Cathedral was set for February 1865, two and a half years after they had arrived in Brisbane.<sup>7</sup>

### ***The Lehane family migrates, 1865***

Meanwhile in Limerick, the family's financial security had vanished with the death of Constable Lehane. Food shortage, disease and evictions of whole families from farmland continued throughout Ireland, and Irish people were emigrating at an unprecedented rate, hoping for a more secure future than Ireland could offer. The Lehanes would have hoped that Mary would settle and make contact with respectable people in Brisbane who would be able to help them with work and social contacts when they eventually joined her.

Dora must have been anxious to get to Brisbane in time for Mary's wedding.

The Lehane family boarded the *Empress of the Seas* in London, on 18 June 1865. Like Mary, they travelled as Assisted Migrants with the QIS, but compared to Mary's voyage, they had a terrible time.

On board the *Empress of the Seas* were 491 passengers compared with only 303 passengers on the *Theresa*. The sixteen self-funded passengers on *Empress of the Seas* had priority over all the most pleasant parts of the ship, while the 475 'assisted' 3rd class passengers were cramped and often below decks. Ease of socialisation would have been severely curtailed by the class distinction.

A summary of their voyage was printed in the *Brisbane Courier*.<sup>8</sup> They had been unable to dock in Moreton Bay as planned because the weather there was too bad, so the passengers and their luggage were taken off the *Empress of the Seas* in Keppel Bay, onto a small steamship. Transferring from a large stable ship, down a rope and wooden ladder, to a smaller boat bobbing around in the waves could have been quite terrifying. They were ferried to the railway wharf and transported to the Immigration Barracks in Rockhampton.

The medical report stated:

... that the deaths during the voyage were principally those of children, with seven adults. The causes of death were diarrhoea, bronchitis, consumption, malignant tumour, meningitis and convulsions. There were eleven births during the voyage ... The passengers appear quite contented and have no complaint.

A somewhat different memory of this voyage, and the arrival of the *Empress of the Seas* passengers in Rockhampton instead of Brisbane, is held by the Peck family who were on the same voyage. Their family website<sup>9</sup> describes how John Peck and his pregnant wife and family had arrived at Keppel Bay. Although it was a fast voyage there was insufficient food and nutrition aboard, and 32 people died without a record or evidence of an epidemic aboard. 'Not the best environment for an expectant mother' was the Pecks' descendant's comment.

As an aside, it is sobering to note that also on page 249 of this record of arriving passengers on the *Empress of the Seas*, are two families, the Judds and the Luxtons, where a parent and a small child in each family is listed as ‘dead’, having died during the voyage.

The Lehanes had been so looking forward to seeing Mary and her new husband in Brisbane, but there they were in remote Rockhampton, after 108 days afloat, and with hundreds of miles still to travel, and their ordeal was not yet over.

They made their way on to Brisbane by way of coastal steamer, the quickest transport between Rockhampton and Brisbane at that time. One can only guess that Dora would not have coped well with the stress and the physical exertion demanded of her during disembarkation. She never fully recovered from the rigours of her voyage to Queensland, and died in Brisbane on 5 October 1866, only thirteen months after arriving in Rockhampton.<sup>10</sup> She was only 49 years old.

### ***Settling into Brisbane: 1865 to 1874***

After their arrival in 1865, odd records can be found on Electoral Rolls that indicate where the Lehanes lived at the time. Other records list their employment, the birth of their children, and occasional brushes with the law. I assume that Dora and her younger children lived with Mary and James Duncan in their family home. Mary’s first baby, Mary Theresa,<sup>11</sup> was born not long before Dora

died in October 1866. It must have been such a happy and sad time for the family to live through a birth and a death. Perhaps Dora's first grandchild was called 'Theresa' after the ship her parents travelled on to reach Queensland.

I have found no records of what Elizabeth Lehane did in Brisbane at this time, so what were her siblings doing? And who were her friends? Without this context it is difficult to understand anything about what sort of person she was.

Margaret and John Joseph Lehane probably attended the St Joseph's School nearby in South Brisbane until they were old enough to find work.

Lizzie Lehane's brother-in-law, James Duncan, was busy making what he could of the opportunities Queensland offered. He began his working life in Queensland ferrying cargo between the Brisbane River and Ipswich. He set up a similar transport business on his own and was able to provide a comfortable family home for his in-laws when they came from Ireland. He was an affable man, and got on well with Mary's family. In 1867 their second child, Dora was born, and was no doubt doted upon by her Lehane aunts and uncles.

Lizzie's older brother, Thomas Lehane, worked hard and initially applied himself to many kinds of employment. He was interested in small business opportunities. In 1873 he had become bankrupt in an unsuccessful partnership with a storekeeper in Dalby. He returned to Brisbane and

went into a successful partnership with his brother-in-law James Duncan, as 'Duncan and Lehane' (grocers), and later became a well-known hotel owner in Brisbane.

Lizzie's younger sister, Margaret Lehane, was eleven years old when she arrived in Brisbane in 1865. After some years at school, she entered the congregation of Sisters of St Joseph on 3 May 1873. She took the religious name of Sister Rose, and taught at the St Joseph's school in South Brisbane. The Lehane family were very supportive of the Sisters of St Joseph. The St Joseph Archives record:

The Lehane family are remembered in the Josephite history of Queensland for their kindness to the Sisters and their support of Mary MacKillop during the 1870s.<sup>12</sup>

When Bishop Quinn insisted that the Josephites move out of Queensland in 1880, Sister Rose went to New South Wales and spent many years teaching in Bulli. She did not return to teach in Queensland and retired to live at the Mount Street convent in North Sydney, where she died in March 1930, aged 78 years.<sup>13</sup>

Lizzie's youngest brother was John Joseph Lehane.<sup>14</sup> He was only 1 year old when his father died, and 10 when his mother died, so his brother Thomas and his brother-in-law James Duncan became father figures and role models while he was at school and a young adult. The Lehane siblings had closely bonded from their years of moving

around County Kerry, and John Joseph was fortunate to have two very supportive older sisters, Mary and Elizabeth. He was 17 years old when his sister Lizzie married and moved to the Gympie goldfields.

Lizzie Lehane was 15 years old when she arrived in Queensland. She may have attended school in Brisbane, but more likely stayed at home to help her mother and older sister Mary through her first pregnancy. Family history is silent about Elizabeth Lehane; I knew nothing about her when I started this research. I discovered that she had found work when I saw her wedding certificate of April 1874, which stated that her occupation was 'servant'.<sup>15</sup> Lizzie's employer is not known.

It is difficult to establish how the Lehanes fitted into Brisbane society. They arrived as poor Irish immigrants, like so many others, but the Lehanes had had the advantage of having a father with a secure profession as a police constable during the worst of the Irish famine, and they had all been educated to competent literacy. They seem to have been confident, caring and amiable people who came to associate with some of Brisbane's leading professionals and businessmen. Elizabeth's bridesmaid was Margaret Gallwey, the daughter of the Bailiff of the Supreme Court in Queensland. Three years after Lizzie's wedding, in 1877, Margaret Gallwey married Elizabeth's older brother, Thomas Lehane.<sup>16</sup> This connection with legal professionals in Brisbane was to stand Lizzie Lehane in good stead when she later needed help.



*Elizabeth Lehane in Brisbane at the time of her wedding, c 1874  
(Photo: author's own)*

### ***Marriage and the move to Gympie: 1874 to 1880***

Lizzie married John Mulcahy<sup>17</sup> in the almost completed St Stephen's Cathedral,<sup>18</sup> in 1874. John Mulcahy was a farmer's son from Bruff, in Limerick, who had come to Queensland in 1863. Wasting no time, he found work in Toowoomba, and when gold was discovered at Gympie in 1867, he acquired Miners Rights,<sup>19</sup> moved to Gympie and made a lot of money.<sup>20</sup> He was soon searching for pastoral land to farm. The lure of owning his own farm was irresistible to a land-deprived Irish farmer. He travelled on horseback to look around the Nanango area,<sup>21</sup> where the government had resumed parts of the old pastoral runs and advertised the land for sale. John Mulcahy is reported to have been the first to take up land in the Nanango district,

in December 1878,<sup>22</sup> and acquired his property, *The Grange*, on the principle known as ‘Selection before Survey’.

How John Mulcahy first met the Lehanes is not known. They may have had family connections from Ireland, having all come from the same part of Limerick, and Dora Lehane’s maiden name was also Mulcahy. John Mulcahy, James Duncan, and Thomas and John Lehane, all owned land or resided in Stanley St, South Brisbane. They were all interested in buying land around Nanango, and bid for land at the same auctions. It is not surprising that Lizzie Lehane would marry her brothers’ hard working and successful friend.

Gympie would have been a challenging place for Lizzie to settle into, as she was used to having her extended family around her and the reasonably comfortable urban facilities of Brisbane. Gympie was a rough, and rapidly growing mining town with not many conveniences available for family life. The environment was dirty and noisy, and snakes were a menace as many were poisonous and invaded the roofs of houses. There were jumper ants and wild cats, but not enough cats to keep down the plagues of mice and rats.<sup>23</sup>

Four months after they were married John Mulcahy advertised locally for tenders ‘To build a 4 room cottage at Monkland’, on the Brisbane Road, four kilometres from Gympie town’.<sup>24</sup> The cottage would not be set in quiet countryside, but in the middle of the most productive site



John Mulcahy was mining. It was a five-acre allotment, surrounded by mullock heaps and noisy mining rigs, and they lived there for about three years. Lizzie may have been responsible for some of the improvements around the cottage before it was eventually advertised for sale in August 1877:

For sale or to let – furnished. A well finished 4 roomed Cottage, with kitchen, fowl house, stockyard, 5 acres of land, all securely fenced, about 1 acre trenched and planted out with grape vines and choice fruit trees. The situation is one of the finest on the Monkland; the land is held under Kings Homestead Act. Apply to John Mulcahy, Brisbane Road.<sup>25</sup>

John worked hard. He was community-minded and was frequently noted in *The Gympie Times* to have collected money for the families of injured miners, and to have donated money to church building funds.<sup>26</sup> He travelled away from home quite often, investigating land sales around Nanango,<sup>27</sup> so Lizzie probably had a lonely life.

I have been unable to discover where Sister Rose Lehane was employed as a teacher when she joined the Sisters of St Joseph in 1873, other than that she initially taught in South Brisbane. A St Joseph's school was opened in The Monkland at Gympie in 1872,<sup>28</sup> and possibly Sister Rose was appointed there before the Sisters withdrew from Queensland in 1880.



*St Joseph's School, Monkland. 1910  
(Photo origin unknown)*

Lizzie and John's sons, James and John were born in Gympie in 1875 and 1876. I suspect that Lizzie was not very happy in Gympie. At Monkland, she was isolated from whatever might have interested her in Gympie township, and she would have missed the companionship of her siblings and their social circle in Brisbane. As her husband was often away, she had only her two little boys for company. Their third son, Herbert, was born in February 1880.<sup>29</sup> His birth registration identifies that he was born outside Brisbane, either in Gympie or at Nanango.

### ***Lizzie and her family move to The Grange, 1880***

By 1880, John Mulcahy had built his homestead, *The Grange*, which for many years was the only house between Barambah and Nanango Stations.<sup>30</sup> It was fourteen miles from Nanango town, and was the mail exchange stop on the coach route between Nanango and

Kilkivan. *The Grange* was an impressive timber homestead. It was later described as ‘a dwelling of eight rooms’<sup>31</sup> and ‘a modern building of impressive outlook, [which] overlooks the road from Nanango to Goomeri’.<sup>32</sup>



*The Grange homestead, Barambah Road, Nanango*  
(Photo: J Guiverra)

Lizzie and the children moved to begin a new life there in 1879 or 1880, although John Mulcahy was not granted his certificate of land ownership until March 1884. John Mulcahy’s sister Margaret Hurley and her family lived at Nanango. Margaret may have been the closest female friend that Lizzie had during her years of living at *The Grange*.

John Mulcahy kept almost 1000 sheep on his property, often employing a Chinese shepherd to look after them while he was away in Gympie. He and his Lehane brothers-in-law continued to buy adjacent agricultural land as it became available. All their land was well

watered, and their sheep wandered freely across all their properties. While he was expanding his farming interests, he continued his mining interests in Gympie, which required his absence from home for considerable periods of time.

By 1881 a crisis involving one of his neighbours, John Millis, erupted. John Millis was from the family that had originally owned all the station property which was then being subdivided by the government and sold as agricultural farms to small investors like John Mulcahy. John Millis had John Mulcahy arrested for sheep stealing and charged in the local court at Nanango. One can only imagine how distressing John and Lizzie would have found this. John Mulcahy reacted by taking Millis to court to seek reimbursement for the value of the sheep he had lost during the legal process, and for compensation of £5000 for damage to his reputation caused by Millis's accusations.

The case, *Mulcahy v Millis* of November 1881 was heard before the Chief Justice, Sir Charles Lilley, and widely reported in Australian newspapers.<sup>33</sup> Two QCs appeared for the Plaintiff and the Defendant. Justice Lilley, in his summing up, said Mulcahy and Millis may have been uncomfortable neighbours, but that did not mean they would steal each other's sheep. The jury should decide which version of the story they believed, without imputing perjury to anyone. On the jury's findings, the Judge found for the Plaintiff [Mulcahy] and awarded him

£199 6s. for the financial loss he had suffered with the damage to his sheep, and the value of the sheep never returned to him.

However, the damage to John Mulcahy's reputation from the police prosecution was interpreted by Justice Lilley as a 'social or political consideration'. His advice steered deliberations away from reflecting on the social and political aspects of events which had undoubtedly caused John Mulcahy a great deal of stress. Mulcahy's apparent victimisation by his more socially-secure neighbours had not been addressed.

One might speculate about how Elizabeth Mulcahy was affected by her husband's problems, and how she might have been able to support him through such a stressful event. However, a second Mulcahy lawsuit, *Mulcahy vs Mulcahy*, only four months later, revealed what had actually been happening in her life. This second lawsuit provides the first opportunity for Lizzie's own voice to be heard. I was shocked to read in the Queensland Archives what had happened in their married life.

### ***Mulcahy v Mulcahy. Matrimonial Writ, 1882.***

The Matrimonial writ *Mulcahy v Mulcahy* details the domestic violence Lizzie had been subjected to by her husband throughout their eight years of married life. After the *Mulcahy v Millis* case ended in November 1881, Elizabeth Mulcahy left her husband and fled from *The Grange* to Brisbane with her children where she sought a

judicial separation from her husband on the grounds of cruelty.<sup>34</sup> She most likely caught the mail coach to Brisbane, as it regularly stopped at *The Grange*, and then stayed with her sister-in-law, Margaret Lehane, who had been her bridesmaid, and was expecting her first baby in July. Undoubtedly, Elizabeth would have been encouraged by her legal in-laws in Brisbane to leave her husband, and helped through the legal process of separation.

I have summarised the proceedings from my notes of the court documents:

Elizabeth Mulcahy's original petition was filed on 15 February 1882.

After marrying, Elizabeth Mulcahy lived with her husband at Gympie, and at Barambah Road near Nanango. She is 30 years old, and they have 3 small boys.

John Mulcahy is a selector on Barambah Road and owns property to the value of £4000. Elizabeth owns no separate estate or income.

Shortly after the marriage in 1874, John Mulcahy threatened to stab Elizabeth Mulcahy with a knife, and commenced and has to the present time continued, to beat her with great unkindness and cruelty. ...

In March 1875 [when Elizabeth was seven months pregnant with her first child] he violently beat her and threw her from a high verandah at Gympie. Since then, Elizabeth's health has been greatly impaired. ...

On about 20 January 1882 he beat Elizabeth and threatened to murder her.

Because of this ill-treatment she has had to leave her house and seek protection of her friends many times. With John's solemn promise to treat her kindly in future she has been induced to return home. But it has continued and Elizabeth is too alarmed to go back to him. She seeks a judicial separation and custody of the children, and John pays the costs and such alimony as the Court sees fit.

Elizabeth was required to submit a list of John Mulcahy's assets in support of her claim for alimony. John responded with his lesser list of assets and denied her claims.

Witnesses. Elizabeth's claim for alimony was to be supported by witnesses, including a well-known Temperance advocate, and a Methodist and a Congregational witness. The selection of witnesses suggests that John Mulcahy was known to be a drinker who could become violent. The evidence of the case would become sensational in the press.

Then Elizabeth was required to submit an Affidavit. It is presented in her own words:

I have been compelled to leave my husband because of his cruelty and now live with my relatives [in Stanley Street].

I have no estate or income other than the Alimony *pendent lite* allowed by the court and no means of money to carry on this suit.

My said husband alleges he is possessed of property valued at £3000.

Since the commencement of this suit he has threatened to sell off all his property and go to America. He has sold land in Brisbane for £600, far under its real value.

John Mulcahy was ordered to pay court costs of £150 and, later, Elizabeth's costs of £96 7s. 11d.

The case for judicial separation on grounds of cruelty was to be heard at the Supreme Court before the Chief Justice without a jury and upon oral evidence, but the case was settled out of court at the last minute. No doubt the Lehane and Mulcahy families were relieved that an 'out of court' settlement was reached, and the case was not reported in the newspapers.

The outcomes of Elizabeth's petition were that she was awarded alimony of 100 pounds per year and court costs



to be paid by John Mulcahy; she won a judicial separation from him and she had custody of their children.

Elizabeth was well supported by her family and their friends from Brisbane's legal community in her petition for separation from her husband. Without their help she may never have petitioned for separation, and may never have enjoyed the freedom and safety of living separately from John Mulcahy.

### ***Life as a single mother in Brisbane: 1882 to 1884***

A new phase of life began for Elizabeth Mulcahy after the Matrimonial Writ. She remained in Brisbane with her children, initially living with her relatives. John Mulcahy had to remain resident at *The Grange* as a condition of buying his agricultural farm until it was paid off,<sup>35</sup> as did his brother-in law, John Joseph Lehane, and they were both granted their Certificates of Ownership of land near Nanango in March 1884.<sup>36</sup> Meanwhile, John Mulcahy also continued his business at Gympie. In 1887, he was appointed to the Board of the North Lady Mary Company gold mine.<sup>37</sup>

From 1882, Elizabeth Mulcahy disappeared from official records for some time. Her sons James and John were 7 and 5 years old and ready to start at one of the nearby Catholic primary schools. Young Herbert was still only 2 years old. I imagine that Mrs Elizabeth Mulcahy lived a quiet life caring for her children, with the support of the

Lehanes nearby, and perhaps she shared their house on Stanley Street.

After 1884, Elizbaeth's younger brother, John Joseph Lehane was able to leave his property at *The Grange* in the hands of John Mulcahy and move back to Brisbane. In 1885 he joined Duncan and Lehane's grocery business in Stanley Street, South Brisbane, and opened a Grocery Store on the corner of Lytton Road and Geelong Street in what is now East Brisbane.

***Mrs Elizabeth Mulcahy at the General Store: 1885 to 1901***

John Joseph Lehane was a bachelor. He and his sister, Mrs Elizabeth Mulcahy, were listed in the 1885 Queensland Post Office Directory at the General Store on Lytton Street, Kangaroo Point, an outlet for Duncan and Lehane's grocery business. They lived on the premises and managed this business together for many years. They evidently had a good relationship, and eventually Elizabeth's three boys were also listed in the directory as shop assistants or grocers after they left school. John Joseph Lehane probably became a kind of substitute father figure to the Mulcahy boys during their years of growing up.

But John Joseph Lehane was not blessed with the good fortune of his brother Thomas, and Elizabeth was a stabilising influence on him. Brisbane newspapers recorded his occasional summons to court, like the time in

1890 when he and Elizabeth faced the Police Court over a Petty Debt case. The verdict was in their favour and they were repaid £29. 6s. In 1893 his other business on Stanley Street river frontage was flooded out in the exceptional flood of that year, and went into liquidation. In 1897 he was sued for £3.19s. 2d. due on 100 shares in Qld Norseman Gold Mining Company.

In 1889 John Joseph Lehane bought his own house in Mowbray Estate in East Brisbane, and in 1901 Elizabeth moved into her own home in Northcote Street, not far from the store. It was a large home of ten rooms and accommodated her children and other relatives whenever they came to town.

As they reached high school age, Elizabeth's boys attended St Killian's School in South Brisbane. It was an expensive school, run by priests with some lay teachers. Many years later it was handed on to the Christian Brothers and became St Laurence O'Toole School. Whether John or Elizabeth Mulcahy paid the school fees is not known. I presume the boys all completed their schooling at 16 years old.



*James T Mulcahy and Mary Peters Martin. 1906  
(Photo: J Guivarra)*

James T Mulcahy, the eldest son, would have left school in about 1891. He worked in the Lytton Road store,<sup>38</sup> and possibly also helped his father periodically at *The Grange*. In 1899 James became a clerk in the government Marine Department,<sup>39</sup> and then left the civil service and went into a ten year indentured partnership with his father as ‘John Mulcahy and Son’, to jointly manage *The Grange*. By that time John Mulcahy, aged 67, needed some help as *The Grange* was a large property of 6,507 acres. James moved permanently to live there in 1904, and married Mary Peters Martin in 1906. Their first child, Marie, born in August 1907, was the first grandchild for John and Elizabeth Mulcahy.

One month later, Elizabeth Mulcahy’s house in Northcote St was advertised for rent for three months.<sup>40</sup> I surmise

that Elizabeth Mulcahy had decided to visit Nanango and see her first grandchild. This may have been the moment when she and her estranged husband John Mulcahy re-established an amicable relationship, although, whether she stayed at *The Grange*, or in Nanango with her nieces Mary Theresa and Dora Duncan, is not known.



*John Andrew Mulcahy, c 1910*  
(Photo: author's own)

John Andrew Mulcahy was my grandfather. He applied for a position as a clerk in the civil service on completing his schooling, and in 1898 he was on the Electoral Roll, aged 21, as a 'Civil Servant'. He had begun work in the Government Stores Department and was promoted to the Income Tax Department in 1904.<sup>41</sup> He spent his entire career in the Taxation Department, eventually becoming Chief Land Tax Assessor in 1921, and Assistant Commissioner for Land Tax in 1929. He continued to live at Northcote Street and studied accounting, and was able

to assist his mother and uncle with the official paperwork for their grocery business and other matters. In 1910 he married his childhood sweetheart, Flossie Griffiths.

Mrs Elizabeth Mulcahy, as the local grocer, would have been friendly with the Griffiths family who lived nearby in Edgar Street. Mrs Caroline Griffiths, who successfully completed a Cookery Teachers Certificate in December 1902, was probably a regular customer at the Lytton Road grocery store. The Griffiths were a Protestant family from England, but Mrs Griffiths and her daughters Flossie and Dorothy were received into the Catholic Church, and made their First Communion in September 1898. The Griffiths family moved to Melbourne in 1904.

John Andrew Mulcahy used to visit Melbourne every year to attend the Melbourne Cup races, and while there, would buy Flossie a new outfit and take her to the Melbourne Cup.<sup>42</sup> He married Florence Griffiths in Melbourne on 16 September 1910. Unfortunately, his parents were not at the wedding. His mother Elizabeth Mulcahy had stayed in Brisbane to care for his father, John Mulcahy, who was very ill. John Mulcahy died in Brisbane three days before the wedding.

John Andrew Mulcahy returned to Brisbane with Flossie, and they lived with Elizabeth and cared for her at Northcote Street until she died in 1912. Elizabeth Mulcahy willed her Northcote Street house to her son John when she died.



*John and Flossie Mulcahy's wedding in Melbourne, 1910. Front: Florence and John Mulcahy; J Alfred Griffiths and Dorothy Griffiths. Rear: James T Mulcahy and M Hurbert Mulcahy. (Photo: author's own)*

Herbert Mulcahy helped Elizabeth and his uncle John Joseph Lehane in the Lytton Road store on finishing school in about 1896. The Post Office Directory lists him as 'Grocer' between 1901 and 1906. He then moved to the Grange to help his father and pursue his own career as a farmer.

John Mulcahy advanced money to Herbert to buy land, and gave him some animals. The 1908 and 1913 Electoral Rolls list him as a 'Farmer' at *The Grange*. When John Mulcahy died in 1910 he left *The Grange* to be equally divided between his three sons,<sup>43</sup> but after Elizabeth died in 1912, Herbert decided to sell his share to his brothers and move to New South Wales. He continued to keep in touch with his brothers and their families for many years.

### **Mrs Elizabeth Mulcahy: in retirement - 1901 to 1912**

In 1901 Elizabeth was 51 years old and ready to retire. All her boys had finished school and had taken their turn in

the grocery business, until finally, Herbert took up farming. Her son John Andrew Mulcahy, who continued to live with her, was socially outgoing. He and his barrister cousin John Joseph Lehane were great friends. They were often mentioned in newspaper social notes as they attended tennis and bridge parties, fundraising balls and debating societies. I imagine she enjoyed the fun and gossip they brought into her life.

The Mulcahy boys seem to have moved readily between *The Grange* and her house at Northcote Street. When her husband became ill towards the end of his life, she took him in and cared for him. His Will was witnessed in her house at Northcote Street, and he left her well provided for when he died in 1910. His funeral notice announced that his cortege would be leaving from 'Glen Fern' in Northcote St, which must have been the name of Elizabeth's house at that time.

### ***Death at the new Mater Hospital in Brisbane -1910 to 1912***

As their health declined, John and Elizabeth Mulcahy had both subscribed to the building of the 'new' Mater Hospital in Brisbane, not far from St Killian's School and Northcote Street in East Brisbane. John Mulcahy had been admitted to the temporary Mater hospital at 'Aubigny', a large old house the Mercy nuns had leased near the riverbank in Brisbane while their new hospital was being built. He died there on 13 September 1910, just three days after the new Mater hospital was opened, and in the week



that the other patients were moved into the new accommodation. He must have been too sick to be transferred. In his Will he left £100 to the Sister in Charge of the Mater Hospital, as well as £50 to the Nanango hospital.

By 1912, Elizabeth's health was failing. She had had not travelled to Melbourne when John Andrew and Flossie were married, but had stayed in Brisbane to care for her husband while he died. She was admitted to the new Mater hospital a number of times in 1911 by her doctor, Dr Lillian Cooper. Dr Cooper, an Edinburgh graduate, is famous as the first female doctor registered in Queensland, and the first female surgeon to practise in Australia. Elizabeth died in the Mater hospital on 3 November 1912. Both John and Elizabeth Mulcahy are buried at the Toowong Cemetery in Brisbane.

### *Afterword*

Elizabeth Mulcahy was one of so many of our forgotten forebears in Queensland. Despite the dreadful conditions of discrimination and famine that she and her contemporaries in Ireland suffered, she was resilient and resourceful, and a survivor. Migration to Australia made many people rich and famous, but some like Elizabeth were abused and would have been destitute without strong, church-based family bonds to supported them. Domestic violence is a pervasive problem over the ages, a family embarrassment best swept under the carpet. For this reason, she, like so many others was almost forgotten.

I would especially like to thank my cousins, Judith Guivarra in Brisbane and Brenda Mulcahy in Sydney, for the use of their family photos to illustrate this presentation and for their encouragement in researching our family history. It has been a privilege to have unearthed Elizabeth's story. I am glad I could revive her memory and tell her story to you.



*Elizabeth's picture in pride of place; John Andrew Mulcahy's living room in Laidlaw Parade, East Brisbane c 1941.  
(Photo: Betty Mulcahy)*

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- <sup>1</sup> Royal Irish Constabulary (RIC) service records, 1816 -1922 transcription, British National Archives, Kew. Series HO 184.
- <sup>2</sup> Irish Census of 1841.
- <sup>3</sup> In Causeway Parish they were sponsors for Bartholemew Supple's baby John, 11/6/1843, and Bartholemew Supple was sponsor for baby Thomas Lehane, 21/3/1842.
- <sup>4</sup> RIC Record, 11/4/1858.
- <sup>5</sup> The *Theresa* left Plymouth, 26 April 1862, arriving at Moreton Bay 8 August 1862.
- <sup>6</sup> *The Courier (Brisbane)*, 16 August 1862, p.3, 'The arrival of six immigrant vessels'.
- <sup>7</sup> JK Duncan and Mary Lehane, marriage registered Qld, 1865/1211.
- <sup>8</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, Saturday 7 October 1865, p.4.
- <sup>9</sup> 'Ships list update: Michelle's Heritage. Feb 18, 2011', sighted on 10 February 2022.
- <sup>10</sup> Dora Lehane, born Ireland, died Brisbane, reg no 1866/B003604.
- <sup>11</sup> Mary T Duncan, birth reg no 1866/85076.
- <sup>12</sup> Email from the Queensland Archives of the Sisters of St Joseph, 'Sr. Rose Lehane', 11 September 2017.
- <sup>13</sup> NSW Death reg no 1831/1930.
- <sup>14</sup> John Joseph Lehane, baptised in County Kerry in 1857.
- <sup>15</sup> Qld marriage certificate 23/4/1874: 1874/8004330.
- <sup>16</sup> Margaret Allwey m. Thomas Lehane, Qld marriage reg no 1877/5517.
- <sup>17</sup> John Mulcahy baptised in Limerick, Ireland, 6 April 1837.
- <sup>18</sup> Married in St Stephen's Cathedral, 23 April 1874.
- <sup>19</sup> John Mulcahy, Miners Rights: 39808, 30/4/1871; 47213, 30/4/1872; 53507, 30/4/1873; Government Gazette nos. 721, 764 and 806.
- <sup>20</sup> His mining interests included the North Glanmire Mine and the Lady Mary crushing machine.
- <sup>21</sup> The distance from Gympie to Nanango is 135 km on the highway, but he would have ridden cross-country.
- <sup>22</sup> Grimes, J., *Pioneering into the future - a history of NanangoShire*, p.188.
- <sup>23</sup> Atkinson, L., *Doctors of Gympie. Stephen Joseph Burke, 2nd doctor in Gympie 1867-1870*, Project of the Local History Section, Gympie Regional Libraries, 2004-2016.

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- <sup>24</sup> *Gympie Times*, 29 August 1874, p.3; 'Plans and specifications to be seen at John Mulcahy's. Tenders to close Sat Sept 5<sup>th</sup>'.
- <sup>25</sup> *Gympie Times*, 15 August 1877, p.2, and 23 August 1879, p.2.
- <sup>26</sup> *Freeman's Journal*, Sydney, 17 April 1875, p.7.
- <sup>27</sup> *The Queenslander*, 18 May 1877, p.29, and 28 December 1878, p.411.
- <sup>28</sup> Sister M Martina Joyce RSJ, 'The Sisters of St Joseph in Queensland. Beginnings: 1870-1880', *Brisbane Catholic Historical Society Proceedings*, Vol 3, 1992, Church Archivists Press, p.42.
- <sup>29</sup> Michael Herbert Mulcahy born, BDM Reg no 1880/C/2592.
- <sup>30</sup> Grimes, p.188.
- <sup>31</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 20 April 1918, p.8.
- <sup>32</sup> *The Queenslander*, 1 May 1926, p.35.
- <sup>33</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 9 November 1881, p.6.
- <sup>34</sup> Queensland Archives, Matrimonial Writ: MULCAHY Elizabeth, MULCAHY John Series 5688 ID879611, 1882.
- <sup>35</sup> Queensland Electoral Roll 1883-4, John Mulcahy listed at Nanango.
- <sup>36</sup> Grimes, p.188.
- <sup>37</sup> *Brisbane Courier*, 26 April 1887.
- <sup>38</sup> 1898 Electoral Roll, listing James T Mulcahy (23, Grocer).
- <sup>39</sup> *The Queenslander*, 22 July 1899, p.194.
- <sup>40</sup> *The Telegraph*, 26 September 1907, p.5.
- <sup>41</sup> *Queensland Government Gazette*, 1904, p.1046.
- <sup>42</sup> My uncle Jim (James Duncan Mulcahy) told me this when I visited him at Bribie Island.
- <sup>43</sup> Codicil to Will of John Mulcahy, 2 September 1910.