

Bendigo, Australia

In 1875, three Sisters and four Postulants from Swinford answered the call. They set out for Bendigo, (Sandhurst) Australia. They were Sr. Aloysius Martyn (who had first come to Swinford in 1855), de Sales Dooley (the lifelong friend of Aloysius), and Ligouri O'Hara. The Postulants were Annie Woods, Ellen Gough, Eliza Byrne, and Bridget McDonald. They boarded a ship called *The Dunalistair* which sailed from London on 26th September, 1875 and arrived in Melbourne on 27th December, 1875. They opened a school in 1876. A Boarding school opened in 1877.

On this first mission, they were accompanied by Fr. Owen Davey, the local curate in Swinford. He worked in Benalla later from 1880 to 1884. He approached Mother Aloysius Martyn for Sisters to go to Benalla. She refused because she did not favour the Benalla foundation. He went above her authority and travelled to Swinford. The story of Benalla did not run smoothly and it is bound up with Fr. Owen Davey, (later Dean Davey). He returned to Benalla with three Sisters: Stanislaus Dooley, Columba Dooley and Francis McNiffe. On Whit Sunday 1888, the installation of the Sisters of Mercy took place in Benalla. As had been expected, the Sisters took over St. Joseph's girls' school from Mr. O'Connell, who was a highly respected teacher, and did great work among the youth. The Sisters were unaware that they may have been supplanting Mr. O'Connell. They were frustrated from the beginning, the new school promised on arrival had not materialized and they were still living in a small rented house. They finally decided to leave Benalla. On Friday, 13th of June, 1890, the Benalla Standard made reference to the Mercy Sisters: *'Our Catholic readers will learn with much regret of the departure of the Mercy Sisters from Benalla. They left on the 12th June on the 9.30 am train for Melbourne, accompanied by Dean Davey who intends to see them on board the steamer, 'Oraya', which leaves Williamstown on Saturday, 14th June, 1890, for London. After an absence of four years, they have been recalled to the house of their profession in Swinford, Ireland. During their stay in this town they have labored zealously in the school and parish and their departure is much regretted by all.'* However, these Sisters never returned to Swinford, nor do we know if they were ever recalled. Their departure was shrouded in mystery. Sr. Columba returned to Bendigo, Sr. Frances went on to New Zealand, where she joined a Mercy Community there. Sr. Stanislaus stayed in Adelaide, where she rented rooms teaching music and painting. Later she became a member of the Adelaide Mercy Community.

Despite all this controversy, foundations from the original foundation followed in Tatura, Cobram, Shipparton, and Latrobe, Tasmania.