

Look for the
RED
UMBRELLA

GEOFF McARTHUR

PART 1: 1845–77

On a crisp Ballarat morning in 1902, a young woman stood before a closed shopfront on Sturt Street, the city's grand thoroughfare. She stared for a time at the windows above the shop's veranda. She'd spent so many hours looking through those windows at the flow of life below. This was where she'd been born, twenty-five years ago, and where her mother, father and brother – her entire family – had died. She studied the exquisite display in the shop window in front of her. A perfectly arranged array of parasols and umbrellas for the ladies, all in beautiful hues. Tightly-wrapped, serviceable brollies for the gentlemen, with polished brass handles, or the glossy wooden heads of birds and animals. Above, hanging from the veranda, was the old red umbrella sign that'd been there for as long as she could remember. She took one last look at the elegant lettering stretching across the window glass.

Mrs Muller's Umbrella Shop

Picking up her carpetbag, she walked along the vast street she knew so well, past the statues of kings, queens, poets and goddesses. Past the iron-framed garden beds, fountains, monuments, and majestic bluestone buildings she'd explored as a child. She headed for the

Ballarat Railway Station with a one-way ticket to Melbourne in her purse.



Little Maggie Greig was woken by an explosion of gunfire, shouts, and screams. Before she knew what was happening, she was dragged from her sapling cot by her mother, wrapped in a blanket and hustled out into the early-morning darkness. For a moment, the family paused on the edge of the hill by their tents, trying to understand what was happening on the flat below them. As the gunfire and cries grew louder, John and Margaret Greig took their four children and headed through the darkness towards Brown Hill. The track was jammed with terrified families doing the same. Somehow, this entire family from a fishing village east of Edinburgh had found themselves just a stone's throw away from the pre-dawn military attack on the Eureka Stockade miners in Ballarat in December 1854.



Despite only being fifty miles wide, the kingdom of Fife on the east coast of Scotland is the ancestral home of the country's rulers. It sits on a peninsula skirted by the Firth of Tay, the North Sea, and the Firth of Forth. The rocky outcrops along the coast provide a home for enormous colonies of puffins and other seabirds, and the cold Scottish seas have provided Fifers with food and work for centuries. It's an ancient place. The oldest burial mounds found in the district date back to the Bronze Age.

In the 19th century, its heaviest population centres were the towns

of Dunfermline, Glenrothes, St Andrews and Kirkcaldy. Commonly referred to by the Scots as Lang Toun (Long Town), Kirkcaldy was known for the longest esplanade in Europe – the four-mile-long High Street, skirting the coast from Dysart to Linktown. It joined what were once separate small villages into a sprawling town.

In its earlier years, Kirkcaldy had been an important trading port. Raw materials, including hides, wool, skins, coal, and salt, were exported from the town until well into the 19th century. Over the years, it developed many industries, including linen production, linoleum manufacturing and shipbuilding. Daniel Defoe, author of *Robinson Crusoe*, described it as ‘a larger, more populous, and better-built town than... any on this coast’. However, by the end of the 1840s, its industries had declined.

Dysart was the district hit hardest. By the middle of the century, poverty was on the rise amongst its families. John Greig, a young man from Dysart, spent time at sea, then tried his hand as a tailor and a baker, before ultimately being forced to work as a farm labourer. He married young Margaret Burrell from Dunfermline in 1835. Over the next ten years, their family grew with the births of Isabella, Agnes, John and Margaret. The baptisms of all four children were registered at the Dysart Abbey in Kirkcaldy.

With slim prospects for the family in Scotland, the couple, along with Margaret’s sister Elizabeth and her husband William Shiels, began to seriously consider the possibility of a fresh start in an emerging city – Sydney, Australia. Shiels had a cousin living there, whose letters filled the couples with hope. Assisted migration was being offered, and the opportunity eventually proved irresistible. The extended party of the two Burrell sisters, their husbands, John’s younger brother Walter Greig, and their troop of eight children left Scotland forever. After saying their goodbyes to parents,

grandparents, and siblings, knowing they'd likely never meet again, the party made their way south to London by rail during the winter of 1849. On 6 February, the barque *Agenoria* pulled out of Plymouth, bound for Sydney. The Greig family were listed as steerage passengers. John and Margaret were thirty-three and thirty-two years of age. Isabella was thirteen, Agnes eleven, John eight and little Maggie just three.

Name	Age	Sex	Occupation	Remarks
John Greig	32	Male	Shipwright	Wife & 6 children
Margaret	32	Female	Housewife	Wife & 6 children
Isabella	13	Female	do	with death
Agnes	11	Female	do	do
John	8	Male	do	do
Margaret	3	Female	do	do

New South Wales Assisted Immigrant Passenger Lists, 1829–1896

The *Agenoria* was a 670-ton barque built just three years earlier. The *Shipping Gazette* described the ship and its journey:

The Agenoria - This vessel has made good passage of one hundred and seven days from Plymouth. She is commanded by Captain Newby, formerly of the Mary and an old trader to this colony [NSW]. By her, we are in possession of dates from London up to 4th February. She has onboard 256 immigrants - English, Irish and Scotch, of whom 97 are male and 88 females, 29 boys and 32 girls from one to fourteen years of age, and ten infants. Seven deaths and six births occurred during the voyage. All onboard are now in good health, and much credit

is due to the commander, surgeon-superintendent and officers of the ship for the remarkably clean condition in which she has arrived.

Shipping Gazette, 26 May 1849

The months at sea must've been an extraordinary experience for the Greig children and their cousins. They could hardly have imagined the pitching of the ship in huge seas and the equator's stifling heat.

Upon arriving in Sydney, John Greig found work as a baker. For the next three years, the family settled into their new life. At the age of eighteen, Isabella met and married a young Scot, Duncan McMillan, but their time together in Sydney would only be brief. McMillan and his father-in-law had heard of the gold discoveries 600 miles south, in the new colony of Victoria. Since the initial findings in Ballarat and Buninyong in 1851, the staggering scope of the gold deposits had become evident. People from far and wide were abandoning their professions to participate in an unprecedented phenomenon.

One of the richest deposits of alluvial gold found anywhere in the world was located a relatively short distance from the cities of Geelong and Melbourne. With his eldest daughter and new son-in-law, John Greig headed for the goldfields in 1853, leaving his wife and their three younger children in Sydney. They were part of the massive migration that saw the populations of Victorian towns such as Ballarat, Bendigo and Castlemaine explode between 1852 and 1853. Their tents stood on a hill in Ballarat East, overlooking Specimen Creek and the Eureka diggings. Hopeful prospectors spent every hour of daylight washing gravel in the creek's cold clay-stained waters.

Once the initial party was established, the rest of the family were sent for. Margaret and her three children took passage to Port Phillip, where they met Duncan McMillan, who escorted them on the 70-mile

journey to Ballarat. Although this had already become a well-worn route, it would've been quite an ordeal for Margaret and her children, who'd only known life in industrial Scotland and the bustling streets of Sydney. Young Maggie had her ninth birthday while on the road – one she would never forget.

Many years later, Agnes would recall the journey she undertook as a fifteen-year-old girl.

We arrived on the field on November 18, 1854. My mother, my sister and younger brother and I formed the party. My brother-in-law met us in Melbourne, and we started at once for the diggings in a dray and were three days and two nights on the journey. My mother used to ride on the dray, but the young folks walked most of the way. It was new and strange to us, and we found much to interest us on the way.

We slept at night under the dray, and I shall never forget our first night camping out. The dray was surrounded by great forest trees, and the loneliness and stillness of it all broken now and again by strange night voices of the bush was very weird. When we arrived, we found that my father had three tents in a cluster here on the brow of the hill where my home is still. I have resided here ever since. I had never entered a tent before, and to us who were women, they looked queer places to live in with saplings driven into the ground for bed posts and boxes for tables and chairs. We soon, however, got used to it all.

The Argus, 3 December 1904

While the men threw themselves feverishly into the hunt for gold, the women tried to make their rough tents into homes. Agnes reflected on the world in which she, her mother and her siblings had arrived.

There was a good deal of hardship, but we just learned to do without things and were as happy and contented then as we are today, with all the conveniences we have about us. I have always thought that the young diggers of the early days were splendid fellows. Numbers of them were well set-up, manly men, and kind and respectful to women. Their digger's costume was very picturesque. Red or blue shirts with a red sash or a broad leather belt around the waist, a brass snake buckle, and California felt hats with broad brims and tall crowns. Sunday was their wash day, and it used to amuse us to see a long line of them at the creek washing.

The Argus, 3 December 1904

It soon became evident they'd arrived at the most volatile time in Ballarat's early history. Tensions were escalating due to the authorities' increased enforcement of gold licences, along with the acquittal of a well-connected hotel owner, James Bentley, on the charge of murdering a miner. This had eroded many diggers' respect for colonial authorities and culminated in the burning of Bentley's Eureka Hotel. The Greig family didn't fall in with the group of emerging dissenters, who were known as the 'Tipperary Mob', but would never forget what happened to them. On the 50th anniversary of the Eureka uprising, 65-year-old Agnes was interviewed by a Melbourne newspaper, *The Argus*, regarding the family's experience on that December pre-dawn morning.

For several nights before the stockade fight, everybody was in a state of alarm and anxiety. We slept in our clothes, ready to flee to a place of safety. My father was aroused on the Sunday morning by the soldiers firing and quickly called us. We

gathered some things together in bundles, ready to make off. From our tent door, we could see the red-coats as they knelt on the ground and fired. Lester's Free-Trade Hotel stood near the gatehouse, over there on the Buninyong line, and it was up behind that that the soldiers were posted. We all made off towards Brown Hill, where hundreds of women and children and men had gathered. We returned home after the military had marched the prisoners away, and visited the stockade, and saw a number of dead bodies and some of the pikes the blacksmith had made-some finished, some unfinished. Martial law was proclaimed, and for days there was no work done, and everybody was in a great state of anxiety. No light was allowed to be used after 8 o'clock, unless in the case of sickness, and then only with a special permit from the commissioners. Things, however, soon settled down again, and we resumed our usual occupations.

The Argus, 3 December 1904



Agnes Franks, née Greig, 1904

What Agnes recounted, fifty years on, was the attack on the Eureka Stockade on Sunday 3 December 1854. A party of 276 soldiers and police, commanded by Captain John Thomas, marched under cover of night to the rebels' rough stockade. It was situated on the low ground south of the hill where the Greigs' tents stood. While there was some disagreement about who fired first, there was none about the outcome. The ill-prepared and crudely-armed rebels were quickly overrun. At least thirty-four of them died in the assault, and more later succumbed to their wounds. Witnesses testified that the slaughter continued long after the miners' hasty surrender. Six members of the attacking force were killed, and 104 diggers were arrested.

In the aftermath, troopers and police tore down the rebels' huge blue-and-white flag and ripped it to pieces. Martial law was declared. The diggings were silent for a few days, while loved ones were buried and order re-established. By the time a series of trials and a commission of enquiry took place, most miners had resumed their work. Under normal circumstances, people may have left after such an unsettling event – but not in Ballarat, with rivers of gold waiting to be found.

The Greig family made Ballarat East their permanent home. Working with a group of other Scots, John Greig and Duncan McMillan established a claim that enabled them to build houses where their tents had stood. Known in the directory of 1857 as 'off Victoria Street', their road would eventually become Rodier Street. John and Margaret Greig occupied the first house on the ridge, with young John and Maggie. A year after the family arrived in Ballarat, Agnes married English miner William Franks at the age of sixteen. The three homes at the edge of the hill on Rodier Street would be the domain of John and Margaret Greig, and their extended family, for

many years to come – and with two married daughters, the clan soon grew. Within five years of arriving in Ballarat, John and Margaret Greig had six grandchildren and one more child of their own. Their youngest son, Henry Greig, was born when his mother was forty-five.

In her 1904 *Argus* interview, Agnes Franks spoke of those early days.

Yes, I married here to a digger, of course. When we set up housekeeping, our tent was the same as my father's. I shall never forget the comical conditions under which my first baby daughter was christened. I insisted on going to the church to have the ceremony performed. My husband and I walked down to the Presbyterian Church, which stood back from Victoria St, then called Melbourne Road. The church was a big calico tent, mildewed around the flaps and with holes in it: the seats were roughly dressed slabs nailed to stringybark posts driven into the ground, the pulpit a drapery case with the top and one side knocked off, and the table in front of it a gin case nailed to saplings. The congregation, besides ourselves, was one woman and two dogs. We waited for some time until the minister turned up, and as we waited, the woman's dogs chased each other in and out of the holes in the tent flaps. The minister gave us a sermon, and his son, who accompanied him, started the singing and took up the collection on a tin plate.

The Argus, 3 December 1904

She also gave insight into the practicalities facing a young woman raising a family on the diggings.

... provisions were very dear, but then there was plenty of gold to be got. Eggs were 12/- a dozen, milk 4/- a quart, potatoes

1/- per lb., flour £5 a bag. There was no kerosene in those days. Candles were generally used for lighting, and these we often made ourselves. The scarcity of milk was the greatest hardship to families where there were young children. The carriers began to bring up goats from Geelong for sale, and I was quite envied by other mothers when my husband secured one for £6.

The Argus, 3 December 1904

Over the next few years, Agnes and William Franks would have three more daughters, but tragically lost their only son just one day after his birth. Baby John Franks's birth and death were recorded as occurring at Free Trade Hill, a name long-lost from Ballarat place names. The hill overlooked the workings of the Eureka Lead and Mr Lester's Free Trade Hotel, which sat at its southern base. Next door, the McMillans had nine children, of whom seven survived infancy.

The fate of John and Margaret Greig's Scottish-born son, John, appears to have been a tragic one. In 1857, several reports appeared in the local newspapers about various offences he had committed with other youths. He was described as a 'dangerous lunatic' despite being only sixteen. His father, John, agreed at a police court hearing to take better care of him, but he was ultimately unsuccessful. On medical advice, young John was committed to gaol two months later.

LUNACY.- John Greig, who has several times been remanded on this charge, was committed to the safekeeping of his father, who promised to take care of him.

The Ballarat Star, 2 October 1857

DANGEROUS LUNATIC- John Greig, an incurable lunatic, was remanded until tomorrow for another medical opinion.

The Ballarat Star, 24 December 1857

DANGEROUS LUNATIC- John Greig was again brought up on a charge of this nature, and on the evidence of Dr Clendinning was committed to gaol.

The Ballarat Star, 27 December 1857

Sadly, young John Greig vanishes from historical records after this sentence. No accounts of his release, death or further activity have been found. Nor is he ever again mentioned in the ongoing exploits of the Greig family. Hopefully, his fate was better than what could be envisaged for a boy in such dire circumstances.

John Greig senior would become a respected gentleman in the Ballarat East community. His interest in mining grew in line with new developments and technologies as they emerged on the Ballarat fields. He was influential in mining and local government, chaired public meetings and was widely recognised as one of the early pioneers of Ballarat.

In the years ahead, one of the Greig children would become much better-known than the others. Young Maggie grew up in a close-knit Scottish family with firm religious beliefs and a strong work ethic. She would soon meet a most unusual man who would change her life in extraordinary ways, calling upon every one of the qualities instilled in her by her parents.

