

a centenary of canberra's catholics

Family pioneers of rural life

In the ninth in a series of portraits of significant Catholics of the national capital, archdiocesan historian Fr Brian Maher remembers Jim Rochford.

Alexander Rochford, aged 22, arrived in Australia in 1863 from Bannow, County Wexford.

He walked from Melbourne to Queanbeyan to join his brother John at Yarralumla working on the property of Irishman Terence A Murray.

They conducted a small leased farm there.

Alexander married Elizabeth Rolfe in 1872. By 1882 they moved with several children to Bedulluck near Hall and developed a farm, Forest View, from virgin bush.

The district contained many small farms for families such as McCarthy, Hibberson, McAuliffe, O'Rourke, Rolfe, Cavanagh, Ryan, Coulton, Blundell, who formed the nucleus of a Catholic community.

A son, George Rochford, married Alice Curran and developed Forest View into a successful farm.

Their children were Zena (Coulton), Ronald, James, Bernard, Clarence, Kathleen (Curll) and Alma (Endean).

The boys grew up, hardened by farm work, being physically strong and self reliant.

Ron and Jim, at age 11 and eight, took a dray loaded with wheat over rough roads and creeks to Crago's Mill at Yass, about 50km away, to be milled.

They slept overnight under the dray and returned home next day with milled flour.

The children walked more than 3km to Glenwood Public School.

Jim left school at 14 and got casual jobs at Jeir Station, the largest property nearby, but it was great Depression time so there was only tucker provided, no cash for work done.

Then he joined a team of shearers working as a rouseabout in sheds through wartorn NSW as far as Broken Hill. He attended a course in Sydney for shearing machine "experts".

Boarding in North Sydney, aged 20, he walked each day to East Sydney over the new Harbour Bridge to save the 3d fare. On his return home, he rejoined the shearing team to care for the machinery and shears.

After some years he took over a declining blacksmith shop in 1938 and

began to deal in agricultural requisites and motor vehicle repairs. In 1939, he joined the AIF, serving in transport units in New Guinea.

On returning home to Hall, he expanded his business taking on agencies and dealerships for vehicles, refrigerators and household appliances.

With growing success, he bought a farm of about 490 hectares (1200 acres) on Wallaroo Road, grazing up to 4000 sheep.

Jim with his brother Ron played a major role in the Hall Agricultural Show, which later developed into the Royal Canberra Agricultural Show.

Ron Rochford became for many years the public face of this event.

Meanwhile, their brothers Bernard and Clarence joined the police force. Bernard had a very successful police career, serving in the Northern Territory and finally being appointed a

police commissioner in the ACT. Clarrie stayed in NSW.

When the Little Company of Mary came to open Calvary, Jim wanted to do his best to help the sisters, so he attended the first auxiliary meeting, which he described as 70 women and one man.

Jim was appointed to an executive position and was forced to ponder financial matters.

In 1979, he decided to conduct an art show, an idea suggested by his artist friend Averil Muller. For eight years he organised this event with the guidance of Averil.

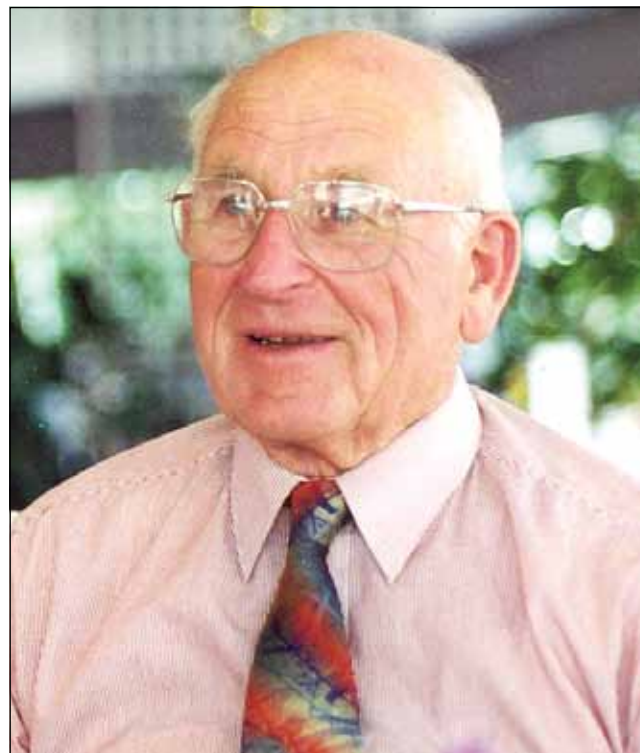
They solicited top professional artists to exhibit works with outstanding success.

Jim developed skills as a picture framer which he continued to old age.

With increasing demands on his business, and art show politics and bureaucracy pressing him, he withdrew and the project collapsed, after raising thousands of dollars for Calvary.

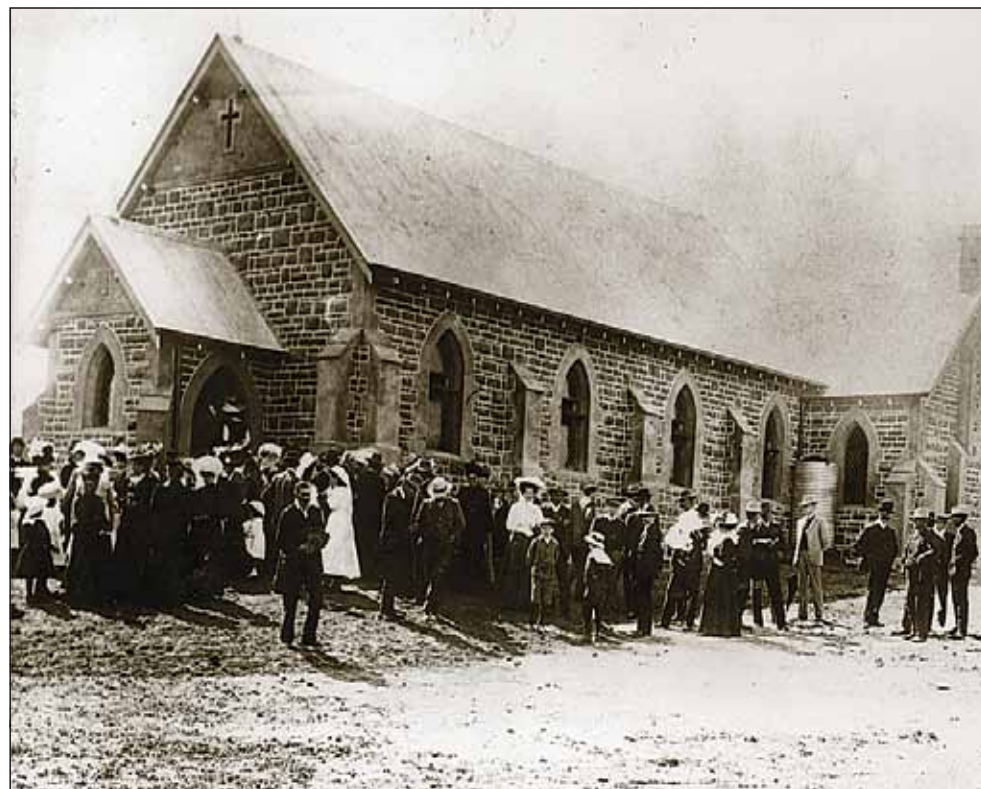
Jim was active in local civic life promoting his village of Hall to gain essential services such as reticulated water, electricity and sewerage, yet retaining its village atmosphere.

He organised a memorial as a tribute to ex-World War 2 servicemen with



LEFT: Jim Rochford ... active in local civic life promoting the village of Hall, but seeking to retain its atmosphere.

BELOW: The historic St Francis Xavier Church at Hall, on opening day in 1910.



the help of Rotary, of which he was a long-time member.

He published a family history, Sons of Wexford, which is a valuable social record of pioneering rural ways of life.

Jim, in later years, wrote a history of St Francis Xavier church, Hall, Catholic Churches at Ginninderra & Hall (1985), and attracted helpers to renovate the church, to repair roof and windows, plaster and flooring plus landscaping and toilets.

The Rochford, Rolfe, Southwell, Rule, Murphy and Cavanagh families had served the small community for

years, providing breakfast for the visiting priests, fund raising and maintenance.

The church centenary was celebrated last year with Archbishop Mark Coleridge as celebrant of the Mass.

The church over the years has been attended by priests from Yass, Queanbeyan, Watson, O'Connor, Braddon and now Evatt.

It is much favoured as a venue for weddings, enjoying spectacular views over farmland and distant mountains.

The pines planted decades ago give it a wonderful atmosphere and it is still a tribute to our pioneer Catholic families.

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