

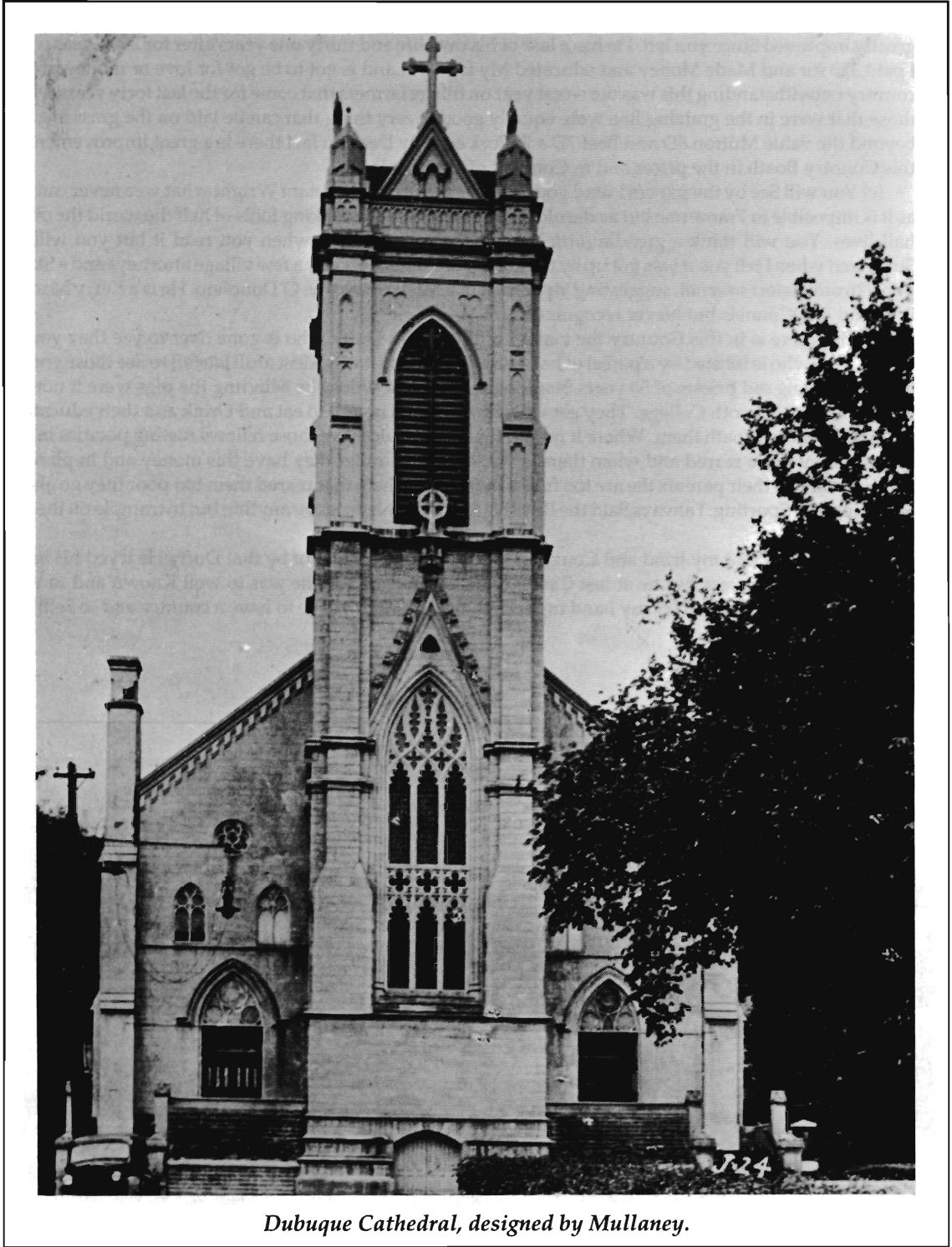


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Dubuque Cathedral, designed by Mullaney.



John Mullaney — a Cahir architect in America

by Noreen Higgins

The name Mullaney is now an uncommon one in South Tipperary, mainly because of the passing of time and the patterns of emigration in the nineteenth century. However, in the past, Mullaney families were to be found in the parishes of Kilmoyler, Kilfeacle and Golden, Cashel and Cahir.

One of the better known Mullaney families of Tipperary origin is the architect John Mullaney (1813-1884), who lived in Iowa in the United States from 1847. He was the architect of the Dubuque Cathedral (1857-58 and ff), St. Mary's Church, Dubuque (1864-67), and part of the New Melleray Monastery (1867-70) at Peosta, Iowa.

John Mullaney's birthplace is now believed to be Cahir town. His people came from the townland of Ballymacadam, about three miles south of Cahir. Mullaney was a name associated with Cahir until recent times. The first record of a Mullaney in Cahir town occurs in the Hearth Roll Records (1665-66), where Philip Mullaney "of the towne of Caher" is recorded.

Mullaney families are also recorded in the parish registers of Cahir (1776-1870), and on the old Mullaney gravestones at Cahir Abbey. These gravestones show the residences of Mullaney families to be in the townlands of Clonmore and Ballymacadam.

John Mullaney, the architect, was born to John Mullaney and Bridget Burke of Ballymacadam, his baptism being recorded in the Cahir parish register on 29 July, 1813. They had four known children: Edmund and James, who later farmed the land at Ballymacadam; John, the architect and churchbuilder; and Patrick, baptised 9 October 1831, who also emigrated to the United States.

Patrick entered the Trappists (probably at Mount Melleray), taking the name Brother Stanislaus. He was one of the original group of monks who founded the New Melleray Monastery at Peosta, Iowa.

The Mullaney name is associated by tradition with church-building in the Cahir area. Indeed, a reference to "the Malaney houses" in Cahir occurs in the biography of William Tinsley¹. Tinsley, a Clonmel-based architect, planned the lay-out of Cahir town in the 1840s, while in the employ of Lord Lismore.

John Mullaney became a builder. In 1837, "a Mr. Mullaney of Cahir" built the Parish Church at Faithlegg, near Ardmore, Co. Waterford². There is also a "John Mullaney & son John" listed as builders and carpenters in Wellington Street, Cahir in 1846, the year before he left for Iowa.

In the late 1830s, while working for one of the local gentry, John fell in love with his employer's daughter, Catherine Hutchinson. Born in 1812, she possibly came from the Clonmel area. Their marriage was not approved of and they later left for London. They spent three years in England (1838-1841 approximately), where their first child, Catherine, was born in 1840.

These three years that Mullaney spent in the employ of the celebrated Gothic revivalist architect, Welby Pugin (1812-1852). Pugin was the architect of many English and Irish churches of the 1840s, including St. Mary's Church, Derby (1837-39), St. George's Cathedral, Southwark, London (1840 and ff). His churches in Ireland included St. Mary's Church, Killarney (1842 and ff), St. Aidan's Cathedral, Enniscorthy (1843 and ff) and the church of St. Patrick's College, Maynooth (1845 and ff).

St. George's Cathedral in Southwark was under construction in 1840 while Mullaney was in Pugin's employ. Pugin took great interest in the training of his builders and architects. His designs



later influenced Mullaney in his work in Iowa.

Mullaney and his family returned to Cahir in the early 1840s. This coincided with Pugin's church-building period in Ireland, and Mullaney may have been involved in some of these projects. He would have also found local employment with Tinsley in the planning of Cahir town (1841-48). Two further children, Joseph (1844) and John (1846), of his are recorded in Cahir baptismal register.

In 1847 Mullaney and his family emigrated to the U.S. by way of Chicago to La Salle, Illinois. In 1851 he came to Dubuque, Iowa, to join the Leeman & Keenan firm of builders. A cathedral for the town had been planned as early as 1835, but two previous attempts at construction had failed.

In 1857 a third attempt was made to commence building the cathedral. Mullaney obtained the construction bid that year. By February 1858 the basement of the cathedral was already in use. A second dedication followed in 1861.

The cathedral as designed by Mullaney was 83 feet across its front, with a limestone facade and brick sides. The steeple and tower area were to be 243 feet high. The architectural style was mixed, with Gothic predominating. It gave "an admirable effect", according to the *Dubuque Express & Herald*. False gables erected over the two front entrances were later removed.

However, the Cathedral's tower remained unfinished. By May 1871 a fund-raising effort to complete the tower had only raised \$5,000 of a projected \$30,000. In 1872-73, when it was realised that the Cathedral's foundations would not support a tower of the intended height, construction was again halted.

Mullaney ceased to be associated with the Cathedral at this point and went on to other projects. Eventually in 1876 a tower of 90 feet was completed, topped with four pinnacles, instead of Mullaney's planned steeple of cut limestone.

John Mullaney also designed St. Mary's Church, Dubuque (1864-67). It is said that he used Salisbury Cathedral in England as his model; its tower rises to a height of 250 feet. He also designed Eagle Point school-house, the "Mullaney block" on Dubuque's Main Street where the *Times* newspaper office was situated, and other buildings in the area. He and his wife and three of their seven children are listed in the 1860 U.S. Census of 1860 for Dubuque.

He also designed the wings of the New Melleray Monastery (1867-70) at Peosta, Iowa, where his brother, Patrick (1831-1858) had been a monk. Patrick at the age of 27 was the first one of the original community from Ireland to die, of cholera.

Mullaney's wife, Catherine, died in 1873 and was buried in Dubuque. He then married a Mrs. Margaret Murphy of Chicago. He moved to Clinton, where his son John, a lawyer, lived in 1878.

After an illness of 18 months John died on 19 April 1884, of Bright's disease. He was buried in West Key, south of Dubuque, beside his first wife. His son John and his second wife survived him. Fittingly his funeral service was held in his main architectural achievement, the Cathedral at Dubuque.

FOOTNOTES

1. J. D. Forbes: *Victorian Architect — the Life and Work of William Tinsley*. (Indiana, 1953), p.39.
2. Canon P. Power: *Parochial History of Waterford and Lismore* (Waterford, 1912), p.14.

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1776 Hearth Roll Records for Co. Tipperary.

Cahir Catholic records.

Slater's Directory of Ireland, 1846.

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W. Wilkie: *Dubuque on the Mississippi* (Dubuque 1987).

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