



Never to Return Home: John and Mary White's Otago Story

Fraser Boyd

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Can you imagine sailing to the other side of the world with no hope of returning home? Life in rural Ireland in the 1860s was tough, even after the potato famine was over. Capable young men and women with a spark of ambition had few opportunities. Many boldly emigrated to other countries to find a better life. Mary Neylon of Ennistimon in County Clare and John White of Letterkenny in Donegal, who arrived in Port Chalmers in 1864 and 1865 respectively, are two such adventurers. Mary and John are the great grandparents of the author's wife, Margaret. We know only a few basic facts about them but, with sustained imagination, Fraser Boyd tells the story of their early years in New Zealand. Along the way we learn what life was like for the earliest farming families in Portobello and for those who settled in the growing towns of Port Chalmers and Dunedin. Mary and John started by working on farms in Portobello for a year, and we see them develop new skills and confidence. We also share in the joys and sorrows of the first years of their marriage. The story provides a new understanding of how the rigid social and economic structures of Ireland gave way to a new sense of community and mutual respect between landowners and their workers in this country. Going back home was not an option. They had to succeed here.

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