

*(Lilydale Express Friday March 31, 1916)*

Death of Mr David Mitchell

Father of Madame Melba

A Pioneer of Lilydale

Expressions of regret were widespread on Saturday last, when it was learned that Mr David Mitchell, father of Madame Melba, had died early in the afternoon. Mr Mitchell though he had reached the age of 87 years attended to his business up till the Tuesday before his death. He then underwent an operation at a private hospital for an internal complaint, which had occurred within two years of a previous operation. For two or three days after this second operation his condition encouraged the hope that he would recover. But on Saturday morning his strength failed and he died shortly after midday.

Mr Mitchell was a native of Scotland, having been born in Forfarshire on February 16, 1829. He arrived in Melbourne in 1857, being then a strongly built young man of 28 years of age. A stonemason by trade, he immediately began business as a building contractor on the site in Burnley street, Richmond, where excepting for a short visit to Bendigo, he remained up till his death – a period of 64 years. Here were born the whole of his family of 10 children, seven of whom survive him. Mr Mitchell's visit to Bendigo was made 4 months after he came to Melbourne. He had a contract for the erection of a building but when it was nearly completed the prospective owner was unable to pay for it. Mr Mitchell stopped work and joined in the quest for gold. He met with moderate success, but his health was not satisfactory, and he determined to return to Melbourne. Vehicles were not there readily obtained, and, to use his own words in telling this portion of the story of his early life, he walked all the way back in order to get home quickly. He was back in Melbourne 24 hours after leaving Castlemaine. Mr Mitchell for about 45 years afterwards carried on the business of a builder and contractor, and many extensive undertakings were entrusted to him. The most notable was the erection of the existing Exhibition Building. He was also the builder of the old Masonic Hall, Prell's Buildings in Collins-street; the New Zealand Loan Company's Wool Stores, at Kensington; the Equitable Building, Collins-street; and Scots Church, in Collins-street. While erecting the last-named building Mr Mitchell took his daughter Nellie- now Madame Melba – who was then a girl about 15 years of age, to the top of the spire. Part of the ascent had to be made by haulage in a barrow. In 1899 Mr Mitchell retired from the occupation of a builder, and entered extensively into the production of lime and cement, getting the limestone from his Cave Hill estate at Lilydale, and manufacturing the cement at his works at Burnley-street. He also purchased several station properties, holding at different periods the Bethanga Estate (Upper Murray), Jancourt (Western District), Gooramadda, Dueran, Barjarg, and Colbinabbin. Most of these properties have been cut up and sold in recent years. He, however, retained Cave Hill Estate, where he engaged for some time in the business of ham and bacon curing. He was also a viticulturist, having bought the old St Hubert Estate, Yering, near Lilydale, which he disposed of to the original owner, Mr Joseph Timms, after holding it for three years. Latterly he confined his attention to his lime and cement business. He was always a keen, hardworking, conscientious businessman, and these qualities, combine with marked capacity, bought his fortune.

Mr Mitchell was an ardent musician. For a long period he was a member of the Scots Church choir, whilst in his home he displayed particular taste for the violin, which he played. Early in life he encouraged the development of the talent of his daughter Nellie, and he lived to see her become world-famous. It was the nature of the man that

seldom did he praised the singing of his daughter, even at the height of her fame. But his pride in her manifested itself by the expression of his features when he heard her singing. When on one occasion Madame Melba was told that her father had openly and effusively praised her she was as pleased as she was astonished. Mr Mitchell was anxiously looking forward to the return of Madame Melba, who is expected to arrive in Melbourne next Monday. Her last letter to him was received a few days ago. Though so extensively engaged in business affairs, Mr Mitchell did not figure largely in public life. For many years he was a member of the council of the Royal Agricultural Society, and he was a member of the Builders and Contractors' Association. He was of a most charitable disposition, making his gifts quietly. His wife predeceased him 35 years ago. He leaves a family of three sons and four daughters. Madame Melba is the eldest surviving member of the family. The other daughters are Mrs H. Box, of Melbourne; Mrs T.A. Patterson, of Auburn; and Mrs Charles Lempriere, of Melbourne. The sons are Messrs Frank, Charles J., and Ernest Mitchell.

The funeral took place on Monday afternoon, and the cortege was one of the largest seen in Melbourne for some years, a large number of personal friends and employees being present. A floral car was laden with wreaths and flowers. Madame Melba, who is on board the S.S. Niagara – due at Auckland next Sunday – and whom the news of her father's death had been communicated by wireless, was represented in the funeral procession by the motor car of her brother, Mr Frank Mitchell, driven by Madame Melba's chauffeur. It was the wish of Mr Mitchell that a horse and buggy which had served him for many years, should follow him to the grave, and in charge of a groom, they were given a place of honour in the procession. The Lilydale Shire Council was represented by Crs Hughes and McGhee. The Rev Dr Marshall, of Scots Church, conducted a short service at the house, and also at the graveside, in the Presbyterian portion of the Melbourne General Cemetery. The pall bearers were Mr Donald Mackinnon, M.L.A., Dr H.M. O'Hara, Mr George Aitken, Mr Roderick Murchison, Mr Clement Langford, Mr J.C. Stewart, Mr Edward Newbigin, and Mr Isaac Fuller. As a token of sympathy with Madame Melba, the University Conservatorium was closed during the day. The funeral arrangements were carried out by A.A. Sleight.

#### Reference at Council Meeting

At Monday's meeting of the Lilydale Shire Council, President Wallace referred to the death, reported that morning, of Mr David Mitchell, who was, he said, once of the most esteemed citizens in the district. Everybody had always spoken highly of Mr Mitchell, who had been an honourable citizen, and had done a lot of good work in the district. Had it not been for the enormous works undertaken at Cave Hill, Lilydale would not be nearly so prosperous today. He had been a shrewd businessman, and had lived to a good old age. He moved that a letter of condolence, expressing the sympathy of the council, in their sad loss, be forwarded to the relatives of Mr Mitchell, and that Crs Hughes and McGhee represent the council at the funeral. Cr Hughes, in seconding the motion, expressed deep regret at the decease of Mr Mitchell, who had been one of the best men in the State. He had freely invested his capital for the benefit of the people, and had engaged in numerous enterprises which had been of advantage to the country. His death would be a severe loss to the State. Cr Rouget said that one feature stood out in Mr Mitchell's life, and that was that he was a self-made man, who had started at the bottom of the ladder and had climbed up. He had done a vast amount of development work in the district, and the State could ill afford to lose such a man. He had invested his money in enterprises which would be

of benefit in years to come. Mr Mitchell was also an old councillor of the shire and an ex-president.

Cr Burgi said that, although Mr Mitchell had been a keen businessman, he had always been strictly upright and honest, and his word was his bond. He had done a great deal for the benefit of the community, and had not allowed his land to stand idle, but had greatly improved it, and consequently advanced the interests of the district. It was an advantage to the State to have men of this stamp.

Cr McGhee said he had known Mr Mitchell from boyhood, and he was a man of sterling qualities, who might be called the “Father of Lilydale.” He had established and built up a number of industries, which had gone a long way towards making Lilydale as prosperous as it is. He had been chiefly instrumental in getting the railway constructed to Lilydale, and when he first opened his lime kilns had worked them at a loss on account of the difficulty of transport, but this did not deter him, and he had worked hard to get the railway. He (the speaker) had been one of the contractors for carting the lime to Melbourne.

Cr Blair said that Mr Mitchell had been a benefactor to Lilydale as he had spent a great deal of money here. He was also one of the proved councillors of the shire, and had been associated with his (Cr Blair’s) father in the council. There were only two or three of the original ..... left. He recollected one story about the life of Mr Mitchell which was interesting. The late Mr Henry Paul, when secretary, had referred to Cave Hill at a council meeting. Mr Mitchell asked why that name had been adopted. Mr Paul replied he believed there was a cave in the hill full of limestone. So afterwards Mr Mitchell opened his works, and they had operated ever since. He deeply regretted the passing of Mr Mitchell.

The motion was carried.

The President moved the council adjourned for a quarter of an hour as a mark of respect to the late Mr Mitchell.

This was seconded by ... and carried.

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