

**Clarendon Eyre
(Originally Spring Bank)
6 Robb Close, Bulleen.**

Robert Laidlaw, a successful early district farmer, was associated with this property from 1853 when he leased the site, Farm 28, 90 acres in Campbell's Carlton Estate subdivision of the Unwin Special Survey at Bulleen. The rent was 50 pounds per year.³³² Although these farm allotments were leased at relatively low rents, they were sold at much higher rates later that decade. Property values rose steeply as produce prices improved as a result of increasing demand during the goldrush era.³³³

In 1857, Laidlaw purchased the 90 acre Bulleen farm from Campbell for 2400 pounds.³³⁴ It became known as Springbank and was rated as such in early Templestowe Road District records³³⁵ It is not known whether there was a house on the property at this time.

An examination of Templestowe Riding records confirmed that the present Italianate residence was constructed during the 1870s, perhaps as early as 1875. In that year, a house with a substantial valuation, owned and occupied by Laidlaw, was listed in Templestowe Riding rate records.³³⁶ No evidence has been found, however, to confirm that the designer was David Mitchell, Melba's father,³³⁷ as has been claimed.

During the 1870s, Laidlaw owned other farming land in the vicinity and also rented a couple of farm allotments. By 1879, he owned the former Sandilands Farm in the Carlton Estate on Koonung Creek and rented the "late Foy's" and "late Greenaways" farms from Campbell.³³⁸ By the 1880s, Laidlaw owned or rented about 300 acres of Bulleen farm land.³³⁹

The Spring Bank property on its 90 acres increased in valuation during the 1880s, particularly between 1885 and 1888.³⁴⁰ This suggests either improvements made to the house, or increased property values during the 1880s boom era.

³³² RGO Search 485 (Caldicott).

³³³ James Bonwick, "A Sketch of Boroondara Thirty Years Ago", in *Kew Mercury*, 23 March 1888.

³³⁴ RGO Search 13028 (Laidlaw).

³³⁵ Templestowe District Board RB 1864 No. 139.

³³⁶ Shire of Bulleen RB 1875 Templestowe Riding No. 72NAV 165 pounds).

³³⁷ Irvine Green, "Springbank, now called Clarendon Eyre," 1982, p.3.

³³⁸ Shire of Bulleen RB Templestowe Riding Nos. 61-63.

³³⁹ Shire of Bulleen RB 1881 Templestowe Riding Nos. 64-68.

³⁴⁰ Shire of Bulleen RB 1885 Templestowe Riding No. 66 (NAV 230 pounds); 1888 No. 80 (NAV 425 pounds).

Robert Laidlaw, who was from Scotland, came to Melbourne in 1839. In the early 1840s, with John Kerr, he selected land on the Kooyong Creek. He then went into partnership with Alexander Duncan. The pair selected land along Bulleen Road in the Carlton Estate area. Laidlaw became a most successful Bulleen farmer. In 1855 (after his purchase of Spring Bank) Laidlaw took first prize at Geelong for both wheat and potatoes. According to an 1888 report, he also "from time to time obtained a number of medals for farm produce, and the second prize for the best managed farm"³⁴¹. In 1856, he was elected member of the Templestowe Road District Board and was one of the first six councillors elected in 1875 to the Shire of Templestowe. He was active in the Victorian Agricultural Society and was a district JP.³⁴²

An 1890 article contained a sketch showing Spring Bank as a local landmark on its elevated site above Bulleen Road. By this time, Laidlaw's house stood within a garden setting with some well-established trees. Cattle were grazing in the surrounding paddocks. Passing the gates of Laidlaw's home, the writer commented on "the highly favoured Spring Bank whose site is a matter of envy." Standing on the summit of the hill, its "grounds slope down to the river on the one side, and stretched along in luxuriant wealth on the other."³⁴³

Laidlaw died in 1907 but other members of the family lived on at Spring Bank until 1915. It was sold in 1925 to JBM Wood, former Mayor of Hawthorn. He renamed the property Clarendon Eyre after the jersey stud which he purchased for it.³⁴⁴ A 1920s auction plan of the area between Rosanna and Bulleen showed the two great district residences, Banyule in Heidelberg and Clarendon Eyre in Bulleen as important landmarks.³⁴⁵

The former Spring Bank was sold in 1940 to the White family who ran it as a dairy farm until the MMBW (now Melbourne Water) acquired most of the land.³⁴⁶ The old property (still a local landmark) stands today on a much reduced allotment, although some garden elements remain. It now forms part of a housing estate constructed around Robb Close and Ilma Court, two new streets created off Bulleen Road in a recent subdivision.

Of *regional historical significance* as the 1870s residence of Robert Laidlaw, a successful district farmer and early settler.

³⁴¹ *Victoria and its Metropolis*, 1888, vol.2, p.523.

³⁴² Marilyn McBriar, "Springbank-Clarendon Eyre," Oct. 1984, pp.1-4; *Victoria and its Metropolis*

³⁴³ *Illustrated Australian News*, 1 Feb. 1890.

³⁴⁴ McBriar, p.4.

³⁴⁵ E. Haughton Collection, SLV.

³⁴⁶ McBriar, p.4.