I am here today as a member of the Mary MacKillop Committee to explain how this book came to be written. The NSW Mary MacKillop Committee was formed in 1982 with the primary goal of promoting the cause of Mary MacKillop. She had already been named Servant of God and the Committee’s mandate was to provide the Sisters, Associates and the wider Church community with ongoing knowledge of her and Julian Tenison Woods.

We did this in three main areas – celebrations, resources and publications, and pilgrimages:

- Celebrations of significant historical events were organised throughout the province along with the introduction of extra Masses on the eighth of the month
- Copies of the Positio were made and circulated to the Sisters. Leaflets in 30 different languages were printed with the Mary MacKillop prayer
- Pilgrimages were organised to Perthville, Goulburn and Lochinvar to broaden the Sisters’ knowledge of our Federation Sisters. These were highly successful in contributing to a better understanding of the story of their foundations and for meeting the local Sisters

In preparation for Mary’s Beatification in 1995 more requests for information about her came from schools and parishes. Committee members responded by visiting these places to give talks on Mary.

In the lead up to her canonisation in 2010 and in the wake of our withdrawal from many country and city places the Committee decided to identify all the Josephite foundations that had been made in NSW. This became a major task and through contact with dioceses and parishes the Committee endeavoured to have a plaque installed in each locality where the Sisters of St Joseph had made a foundation.

It was at this time that I suggested to the Committee that the work of Mary MacKillop in NSW was largely unknown and that maybe we should do something about documenting it.

I came to this awareness because of three unrelated happenings but somehow, they came together over the years as I reflected on my experiences.

The first occurred in 1983 when the centenary of the Sisters’ coming to my home parish of Albion Park occurred. The usual celebrations and displays were arranged. I was particularly interested by a photocopied double page on display. On it was a list of names of the children in the class, written in Mary’s handwriting, with columns drawn and headings for subjects across the page. Also recorded were the ages and religion of each child as well as their competency in each subject as examined by Mary. As I read down this list I got very excited when I saw that my grandfather’s was one of the names listed. So, as a 12-year-old he came in contact with Australia’s first saint! What a
story for the family to hold onto! Also listed were names of other people I knew or to whom I was related.

The second experience relates to my travels around country NSW. I have been to many of the places that Mary visited. I have read histories written when some of these places celebrated centenaries. I have a sense of what it means to be a local in a country town and to be part of that history.

The third experience occurred while I was Education Officer at Mary Mackillop Place. I had access to many of Mary’s letters and I also spent time in the Archives reading copies of Mary’s diaries. I got a sense of some of her more human qualities as she visited the Sisters, particularly in country towns. There she met with local people, mentioning them by name as she was often the recipient of their generosity.

So, I thought that it would be worth sharing the interactions that Mary had with these people in these towns. This could lead to more people engaging with Mary Mackillop in a very real way. For example, when I was in Glen Innes I learnt how proud our Sr Marie Biddle’s family was of their connection with Mary MacKillop. Marie’s grandfather had driven Mary in his buggy to somewhere in the area! It was part of their family history. It is my belief that in many country towns the early settlers and their descendants have a claim on the town of their forbears and as such would be interested in Mary’s connections with some of their ancestors. As in my personal experience when I learnt that my Pop was examined by Mary MacKillop in her visit to Albion Park. Seeing my grandfather’s name written in her handwriting was a real thrill!

The Committee accepted the idea of the need to tell the story of Mary in NSW and so three of us - Jeanette Foxe, Bridie O’Connell and I started the research. We divided the period 1872 – 1909 into three sections and began work. After about 12 months we realised that it was beyond us in terms of time and our competency to do justice to the story. We recognised the need for it to be written by one person.

At about this time Bernadette had her book *Flora MacKillop* published. I suggested that we give her time to catch her breath and then invite her to complete the work that we had begun.

The Committee has continued to evolve. In 2014 the name changed to the Founders and Followers Committee. We adopted a different focus, that of living the legacy of Mary and Julian. The emphasis was not so much on providing information about them as of providing experiences that we the followers could integrate into our own lives. Two Pilgrimages have been developed and formalised in two separate publications, and prayer reflections and novenas have been prepared for celebrations of Mary MacKillop’s feast day & Julian Tenison Woods’ days.

On behalf of the Founders and Followers Committee, I thank you Bernadette, for agreeing to tell the story of Mary MacKillop in NSW. I congratulate you on the completion of your third book which is a further contribution to the wealth of material available on the history of our Congregation. I now look forward to reading *One Door Closes Another Opens*. 
