



MARTIN Whyte with the original Vermont Ledger he found 25 years ago.
PHOTOS: RAY RYAN

and many more," explained Jimmy. Joe Clarke confirmed that these surnames correspond to townlands in the Mountbellew and Moylough catchment areas. The men came in groupings from Clooncalliga-Marless, Cloonoran, Moylough village, Castle Bellew, Gatestown, Doon Wood and Creggannagruagh, near Caltra.

"Based on the rollcall alone, you can say with certainty that this document originates from the Mount Bellew estate," said Joe.

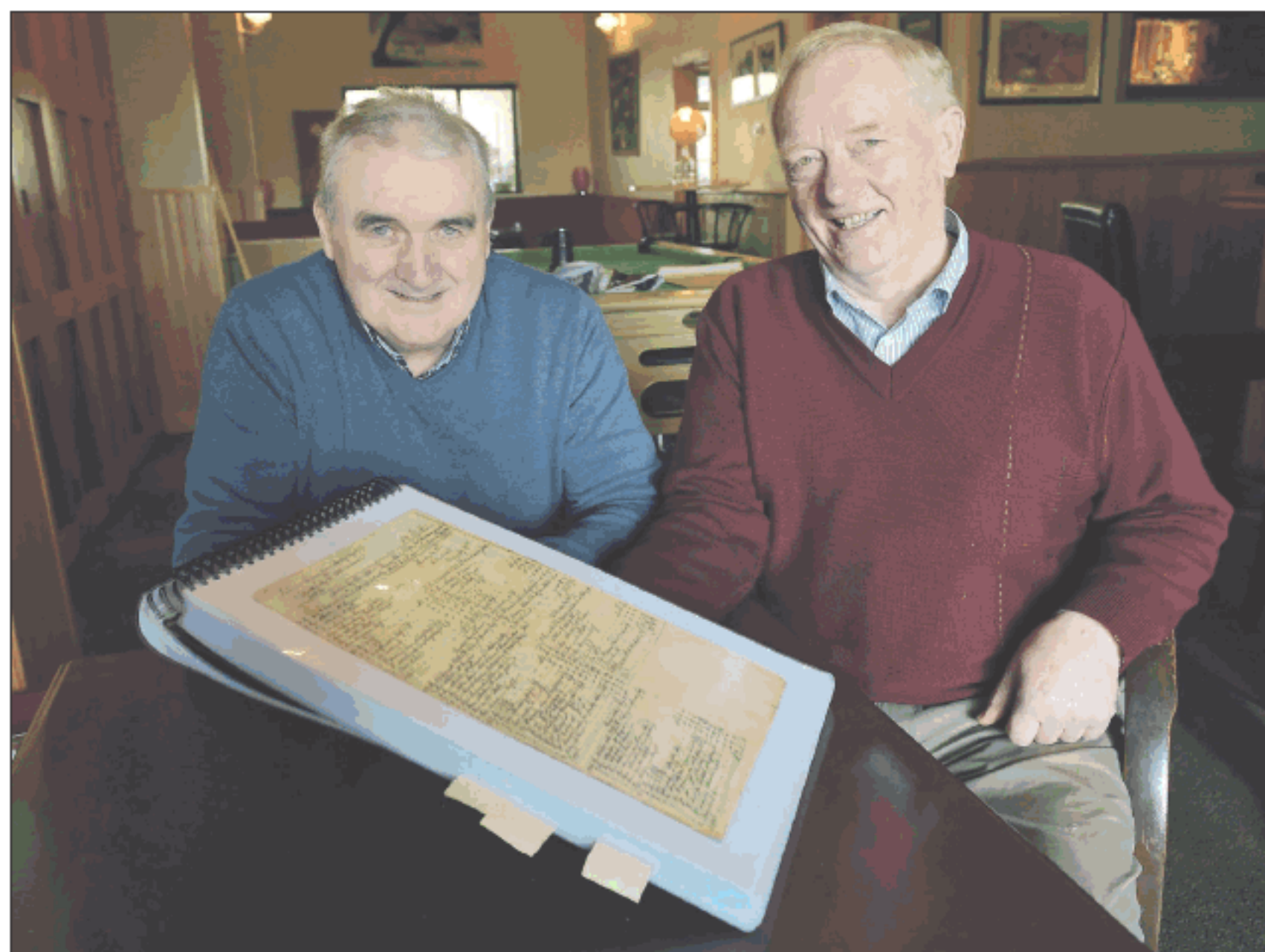
"The Lime account on page 12, settled on June 15 of 1808, is signed by Roderick Halvey, who took up the post as Steward when Christopher Dillon Bellew

succeeded as proprietor of Mount Bellew in 1797.

"On page 12 again, Thomas Hayden was a blacksmith in the Bellew forge. He lived in the town of Mount Bellew Bridge."

The labour account books of the Grattan-Bellew estate cover a six-month period. The 'winter half-year' that the Vermont Ledger describes ran from the start of November to the end of April. The 'summer half-year' detailed the remainder of the year.

The men didn't work on St Stephen's Day of 1807 or St Patrick's Day of 1808, and the ledger has the details of more than 50 men, along with the work they



JIMMY Laffey and Christy Ruane looking through the pages of the printed version of the ledger.



CARROLL'S Cottage when Martin Whyte first bought it.

did and the wages they were paid.

A separate ledger would have been kept for those who worked inside Mountbellew House itself, so it is unknown as to how many people were employed on the estate 215 years ago.

"They talk about sowing and picking spuds in the ledger. They mention the yard, the pigeon house, and spreading dung.

"There was a man who delivered a letter to Castle Moyle House near Tuam. They talk about drawing stones from Tycooley near Caltra. They talk about killing pigs, the island, the bog field and chapel wall, about planting trees in the wood, and they also mention a cooper," offered Jimmy.

Marie Mannion is Heritage Officer with Galway County Council. It was Marie who Jimmy and Martin went to with their discovery.

She helped supply funding for them to get the Vermont Ledger scanned, bound, laminated and printed into two copies. This work was done by Cantec, a printing company based in Galway city.

As fate would have it when it comes to this particular sequence of events, Marie is related to several of the men mentioned in the pages of the ledger. Marie is from the townland of Cloonoran in Moylough, where her mother still resides.

The ledger is now also available to view on the Skehana and District Heritage Group's website.

"At least now it's documented. It's in print, it's on the website. Marie Mannion provided us with financial support for it, so we're thankful to her for doing that," said Martin.

"The pages in the ledger are very delicate. The resolution on the printed version is better than the original, you can make out the writing clearer."

The Wyndham Land Purchase (Ireland) Act of 1903 precipitated the end of the control landlords held over tenants in Ireland and gave the Land Commission the required leeway to transfer the lands of these landlords to the tenants.

The majority of these tenants were farmers, some of whom later took the roofs off the big houses so as to avoid paying domestic rates on them.

Indeed, some big houses, like Mountbellew House in 1939, were demolished for their stone, while others were set ablaze during the War of Independence.

It meant pieces of history were lost, because of what they represented. Any documents found connected with them are now priceless commodities.

The tale surrounding Martin Whyte's discovery in a simple cottage all the way back in 1997, his wife Breda's subsequent intervention and the helping hands of Jimmy Laffey, Marie Mannion and Joe Clarke, has ensured though that a document of some historical significance, the Vermont Ledger, has been saved.



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