

# Jessie McDONALD

23-9-1880 to 20-2-1963

Biography as published in 1985 & 1995

Jessie was the first child of Flora and Joseph McDonald and was born at Jallumba, Victoria. Two first cousins were born that year, Grace Raggatt at Horsham and William John Tucker in South Australia. Her grandparents were Rachel and Ewen McDonald and great-grandparents were Christina and Donald McLean.

That year the future United States Army general Douglas MacArthur was born and the composer Jacques Offenbach died. In Australia the Sydney *Bulletin* was first published, and Ned Kelly was hanged in Melbourne Gaol.

Jessie attended Nurrabiel State School No. 2279 on its original site near the present Methodist church and, after leaving, helped at home on the farm. Over the years she helped friends and relatives in times of sickness and childbirth. In particular she remembered helping Aunt Annie McDonald at Jallumba when the twins Grace and Adelaide were born in 1908. In 1958 she reminisced about her life.

*Our house at Nurrabiel was made of straight buloke sticks, daubed with mud, mixed with chaff and it had an earth floor. One year, the north end fell out because it rained too much and us kids thought it was very exciting and we laughed a lot. Near the Methodist church was a blacksmith and a Salvation Army hall. There were geese in the Darragan Swamp nearby. Cape barren ones and black and white ones called magpie geese. On the way to Horsham you passed through a patch of mallee scrub. There were mallee hens and large nest mounds; people would hunt and eat them. When we went to school we used to hang our calico school bags in the porch and the teacher's cow would sometimes eat it. Even if you put it inside it would reach its head in and get the lot, the bag and our lunch. And there used to be mobs of goats roaming around, billies and nannies and little ones. They'd chase us kids; we were scared. As a small child I stood on a box at the kitchen table to make dough for the bread. Then in later years I used to bake fourteen loaves of bread a week, lots of extras around to feed those days. I made all my own clothes and lots of shirts for the men. We'd buy our best clothes from Langlands in Horsham and some working clothes from the Indian hawkers. Some of these Indians didn't have any transport apart from their own feet. They carried big bundles on their backs and balanced on their heads.*

*Every spring all the kids in our family were dosed up with sulphur and treacle 'to purify the blood' they told us. And some of us got the Barcoo rot too, sort of scabs and ulcers on your hands and arms and the back of your neck. As a cure we had to drink a concoction of horehound and hogweed roots boiled together. It was awful. Most of us had sandy blight in the eyes; we just bathed them with warm water. I used to love shearing time best. and when the thrashing machine came, because there'd be a lot of extra men around and we'd have some fun and sing-songs and hear all about the people at the last place they'd been at and any other news in the district. I remember being taken as a child to see the grand opening of the Noradjuha railway station. We were all dressed in our best clothes and went in a double seated buggy. When we came to Glencoe we had a big orchard, and we didn't do any bottling of fruit in those days; we'd dry it in the sun. We'd have cases of apricots, peaches, plums, nectarines, all out on racks. Another time we had lots of fun was feather-picking parties. We'd save all the feathers from our own chooks and from birds shot in the swamps by the men and when we had a big collection we'd ask some relatives or neighbours to visit us. We'd do a big bake up and sit around and eat while we talked and pulled the soft feather part from the hard quill. That way we made mattresses and pillows. We have some still. During the Second World War, it was one shearing time, I dressed up in a man's clothes. tied bowyangs around my legs and put a worn-out old hat on. I went across to the woolshed, walked up to my brother Bill and said "Any chance of a job Boss?" He recognised me and grinned but didn't let on, and nobody else knew me. I had a swag on my back too, made a real job of it. In the old days at Nurrabiel we never ate or cooked with butter because you could sell it to the store at Noradjuha. Most people had a wooden butter mould that just held a pound in weight. On the*

*bottom there was a pattern, and people would know whose butter it was. Ours had a bird with a design of leaves around it. On Mondays for years, we'd have boiled rice for dinner and afterwards we'd use the water from it to starch some of the clothes, even my cotton underwear.*

Jess accompanied her parents to Horsham in 1922 and helped care for her father until his death. She was described as crazy about cats and when living on the farm always had a dozen or so around the place. There was no fly wire on the windows so they were frequently in and out of the house. Jess had a very dry sense of humour which rolled out to suit the occasion. She was renowned in the family for her big cart-wheel biscuits made of fat, flour and soda.

*1 small cup sugar, 1 small cup dripping, 3 cups plain flour, 1 teaspoon lemon juice, 1 teaspoon sodium bicarbonate, 2 teaspoons cream of tartar, pinch salt,  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup coconut, 2 eggs.*

*Method: Mix dripping and sugar together. Add lemon juice. Add eggs singly, then the coconut damped with milk. Mix in the flour, soda and cream of tartar, sifted together. Use a knife to mix and then your hands. Bake about 20 minutes.*

Jess sewed, liked crochet and knitted many pairs of socks for the local Red Cross branch during World War Two. She never married. After the death of their mother, Jess continued to housekeep for her bachelor brother Allan. In 1950 they retired to 47 McPherson Street, Hosham, leaving the farm to be worked by Bill and his son Ian. Jess was always a tall, spare figure with hair parted in the middle and twisted into a bun at the back. She never followed the fashion of shorter skirts and, until her death, wore dresses to her ankles. After an illness of six weeks Jess died of cancer in Wimmera Base Hospital, aged 82 years. After a service at St Andrew's Presbyterian Church, conducted by the Reverend Reford Corr, she was buried in Horsham cemetery the same day as her cousin Flora Raggatt. The coffin-bearers were Gordon McDonald, Neil McDonald, Murdoch McDonald, Colin McDonald, Noel McDonald and Ian McDonald.

- SOURCE : This biography was from page 100 of "History of Ewen & Rachel McDonald & Descendants" by Jill McDonald which was originally published in 1985. It was republished as part of "The History of Donald & Christina McLean and Their Descendants" in 1995.
- COLONIALISTS : Christina and Donald McLean and their ten children migrated from Argyllshire to South Australia in 1837. This was in the earliest years of the colony. The McLeans initially settled near Adelaide where they grew the first wheat crop in SA. Then in about 1840 they pioneered the Strathalbyn area. There are now well over 20,000 descendants spread across Australia and elsewhere.
- CHANGES : Please contact us with additions, corrections or suggestions about any part of this family tree.
- CONTACT : Visit our website [www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com](http://www.christinaanddonaldmclean.com) or Strathalbyn Museum phone 08 8536 2656 to discover more about your family – and about privacy and copyright.