

William Joseph McDONALD 29-5-1884 to 26-9-1958 & Myrtle Ellen Kezia REES

Biography as published in 1985 & 1995

William Joseph was the third child and first son of Flora and Joseph McDonald. He was born at Nurrabiel, nearly three months after the death of his parents' previous child, Edith Florence. His grandparents were Rachel and Ewen McDonald and great-grandparents were Christina and Donald McLean.

Bill was premature, weighing under four pounds, and as a tiny baby was carried around on a large cushion. His heaviest weight as an adult was to be sixteen stone.

That year Harry S Truman, future president of the USA, was born and Mark Twain published *Huckleberry Finn*. In Australia near Bendigo, Victoria, Hugh Victor McKay developed his revolutionary stripper-harvester.

Bill attended Nurrabiel State School and the certificate of exemption from compulsory attendance stating that William McDonald had been educated up to the standard of education required by the Education Act 1890 is dated the 6th day of December AD 1897 and signed by district inspector William A. Cavanagh. After leaving school at 13 Bill joined his father working the family farm. As a young man Bill played football and cricket with the local teams and as a member of the Nurrabiel rifle shooting team won several trophies. He had a marked sense of fun and many of his young relatives called him Teasing Billy. For many years, when work on their own farm allowed, he and his brothers did seasonal work for district farmers especially at shearing and harvest time. Sowing and harvesting crops was a much longer and more labour-intensive activity than it is today. Just feeding and caring for the horses was a full-time job, especially when they were involved in the heavy work of continuous ploughing. It was always somebody's chore to rise in the morning, any time from 4 o'clock, round up the horses from their paddock and stable them for the morning feed before starting work as soon as possible.

When the family moved to the new farm, *Glencoe* at Mockinya, Bill accompanied them. In July 1909 he visited his Tucker relations near Strathalbyn in South Australia and sent a postcard to his mother; it is still in his family's possession. After World War One a neighbouring district, Wonwondah, reformed its football team and Bill became the captain-coach. Considered elderly to be a footballer he was often referred to in the footy world as 'king of the kids'. On September 15, 1924, Bill was married to Myrtle Ellen Kezia Rees at the Baptist church, Stawell, Victoria, by the Reverend Frank Robinson. Bill's brother Ted was best man and a sister of the bride, Dorris Rees, was bridesmaid. Myrtle was the daughter and eldest child of Owen and Esther Rees, nee Rigby, and was born at Coleraine, Victoria, on July 3, 1893 at the home of her Rigby grandparents. In the 1880s the Rees family, Welsh Baptists, were among the pioneer settlers of Brimpaen, a district adjoining Mockinya. After a honey-moon in Sydney, Bill and Myrt moved into the house built for them by Ted Nuske on land recently purchased from the John Twatt family. It was close to the main road, the Henty Highway, and about a mile from the McDonald homestead. Mindful of his Scottish ancestry Bill named his house *Inverness*.

In 1922 Bill had taken over the Mockinya post office and telephone from the Twatt family and installed the equipment in his parents' home. This was now transferred to his own house and fixed to the wall of the hall, to the delight of his sister Jess and brother Allan who were thankful to see the last of 'that awful noisy new-fangled thing'. At this stage there were no subscribers and Bill would deliver urgent messages to his neighbours when necessary. For the next thirty-three years Bill and Myrt and their two children Ian and Lois provided this valuable service for district people and travellers whose vehicles might have broken down on the rough and lonely country roads. These small telephone and post offices were 'unofficial' because they were only part-time and were in the same category as contractors to the Postmaster-General's Department. Mockinya was on a line known as an omnibus trunk, having a number of offices attached. They were, in order running south from Horsham: Haven, McKenzie Creek, Wonwondah South, Mockinya, Brimpaen, Cherrypool and Glenisla. Each office had a call sign;

Mockinya was two short rings and one long ring. Each call on the line was heard in every office and as the line became busier over the years almost incessant ringing could be heard in each house. The phone had to be accessible to the public at all times. Therefore it was not possible to lock the house if the family was absent for any length of time; the back door would be open and each room in the house locked separately. The pay was a pittance. By 1956 Mockinya exchange had seven subscribers and Myrt received £80 a year.

Bill was a keen horseman and had judged at district gymkhanas. As a local horse doctor he treated many of the neighbours' sick cattle and horses. However his main interest was wool and sheep, and he was a good judge of these. Bill and Ted each purchased a 1924 model Chevrolet car, the first in the family, but their brother Allan never learned to drive any mechanical vehicle. Bill was a Freemason with Wimmera Lodge.

During the Depression the Moora channel, part of the Wimmera-Mallee water supply system, was constructed as government relief work. With an eye to recouping the loss on a cattle deal, the McDonald brothers applied for the contract to supply meat to the contractors and men camping and working on the scheme. Their tender was successful and they built a regulation shed with cement floor for sheep killing. It now houses a 500-gallon water tank on a trailer, used for firefighting.

In 1933 Bill became a committee member of the Horsham Agricultural Society and vice-president in 1936. This organisation was dear to his heart and he resigned in 1952 only because of ill health. He was succeeded by his son Ian. In 1936, with other district parents, Bill contributed financially and by working bees to building the Mockinya State School two miles north of his home. His son Ian remembers helping Dad cart red gum stumps for the foundations in their heavy old cart pulled by two draught horses: 'You felt every bump.'

Children of Bill and Myrt

- | | | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1 | <i>Ian</i> Douglas McDonald | Born 29-11-1925 | |
| 2 | <i>Lois</i> Jean McDonald | Born 30-8-1929 | Died 7-3-1977 |

During World War Two, Bill was one of three Mockinya men who joined the Volunteer Defence Corps based in Horsham. The others were Lionel Tully and Edgar Hammond. The members assembled for drill every Saturday afternoon at the army drill hall in Baillie Street. Often the family went in for the day and shopped for supplies in the morning. Bill was one of the founding members of the Wonwondah Rural Fire Brigade, formed in 1940, and became its first captain.

It was about this time that Parkinson's disease began to affect him and over the next fifteen years Bill became increasingly unable to work or to do simple things for himself. During this illness he was attended devotedly by his wife Myrtle and their two children. In later years one of his chief pleasures was to be driven to Horsham on a Friday afternoon. Here before the advent of parking meters, the car would be parked in the shade in Firebrace Street and Bill would be sitting in the front seat ready for a yarn to anyone with time to spare. When their first grandchild, Stuart Ervin, was born in 1954 it became customary for the young parents to bring him to visit Bill and Myrt for tea on Sundays. It was a welcome weekly event. As Bill's health failed, Myrt became increasingly housebound, particularly as she did not drive a car. She still milked the house cow morning and evening and ran the telephone exchange which kept her in touch with people beyond the farm.

When their son Ian married in 1957 they retired to a house they had built in Horsham at 6 Centenary Avenue. Myrt's sister Dorris, known as Auntie Dot, closed her old family home at Brimpaen and moved to Horsham with them to help manage Bill. And the telephone was moved to another house in the district.

Bill died in Wimmera Base Hospital on September 26, 1958, fourteen months after he left the farm. He was buried in the old section of Horsham cemetery.

Myrt joined the Presbyterian Ladies Guild, attended church each Sunday, held small afternoon tea parties at her home and truly enjoyed her social life. She and Auntie Dot were always willing to look after grandchildren while their busy mothers did the weekly shopping. Dot died suddenly in 1964 aged 59 years. Myrt lived in the house

until she had a mild stroke and for the last two years of her life divided her time between her son and her daughter. On June , 1973, only a month before her eightieth birthday, she died suddenly at the home of her daughter Lois Ervin at McKenzie Creek. She was buried next to her husband in the old section of Horsham cemetery. Headstones mark their graves.

- SOURCE : This biography was from page 102 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 or Strathalbyn Museum phone 08 8536 2656 to discover more about your family – and about privacy and copyright.