

Donald Henry McLEAN & Mary Frances (Fanny) McLEAN, nee SMITH & Ellen Joanna McLEAN, nee FORD

Biography as published in 1995

DONALD HENRY McLEAN, born 27/8/1854, (possibly at "Waterloo" Angas Plains, as John had already purchased there).

Parents : Mary McLean (nee Stacey) & John McLean

Grandparents : Christine McLean (nee McPhee & Donald McLean

Donald probably received his education at the Angas Plains Public School, as it opened in 1861 when he was 7 years old - there is no family record of his early years.

By 29/7/1876 he was advertising in the "Southern Argus" at Strathalbyn, that "Donald McLean and Co intended to open a butcher's shop at Milang". From an account published in Argus "Jottings" long after when visiting Strathalbyn, he recalled these days and his meeting with his first wife.

Rumour had reached him that a very pretty girl had moved into the district with her family! Father John McLean, with the rest of his brood in a wagonette drove off one Sunday to attend church at St Andrew's in Strathalbyn, and young Donald was given instructions to follow on horseback. But instead, he took himself off in the direction of the newcomers at Lake Plains. A son came out to see what he wanted, so Donald in his Sunday best concocted a story of strayed cattle -presently the sister appeared and Donald took the decision on the instant, that he would marry her and he did!

MARRIAGE: to Mary Frances (Fanny) Smith (born 1855) only daughter of Frances and William Bacon-Smith of Lake Plains on 6/4/1881, at the Congregational Church, Milang. Some of the family notes, which are intertwined in research give Mr Smith the title of "Lord William Bacon-Smith" but he does not show up in Burke's peerage.

He was born in 1824 and buried in Milang aged 52 years on 9/8/1876, so was deceased by the time of Donald's marriage. It was said too, that Captain John Smith of the "Titanic" which was lost in 1912 was his brother, but even if much younger, it was unlikely that he would still be at sea in 1912. A nephew perhaps, as the story persists!

Donald farmed and did butchering. There was one son born, William, before Mary Frances contracted TB following a severe cold - they apparently lived at Lake Plains.

DEATH NOTICE: of Mary Frances aged 29 years, at Lake Plains, on 30/11/1884 and was interred at Milang Cemetery on 3/12/84. On the 22nd March, 1922, Donald had her disinterred and reburied at Strathalbyn. The story is that those who opened the coffin when doing the work (Donald's curiosity) - found that she looked exactly as on the day of her burial. This was but briefly, as when the air touched her she shivered away to dust - despite this Donald carressed her hair in admiration! This move was not looked on favorably by a good many people!

Donald left Milang in 1885, much grieved by Mary's death. By 1886 he was leasing land at Kaniva, probably at Kiata in Victoria.

In 1887, he met Ellen Joanna Ford, at Kaniva, the eldest daughter of Jesse Ford from England, and his deceased wife, Wilhemema Wadell Ford, from Scotland - Ellen was caring for her 11 brothers and sisters!

MARRIAGE: To Ellen Ford, on 23/12/1888, at Norwood, South Australia. The Rev. Cann officiated, Donald was aged 34 and Ellen was 17 years. Mrs McCann and James Lawson were the witnesses. One cannot but suspect, that this was a "run away" marriage as Jesse Ford was losing his housekeeper. They returned to Victoria and Kaniva - the railway had gone through from Adelaide to Melbourne in 1887.

During this period Donald Henry was farming near Kiata, between Nhill and Dimboola. By 1892 he was running a butchers cart into Nhill, as he had fat sheep and couldn't sell them. It seems he had moved away from Kaniva at this time.

In 1897 a big cyclone struck this area surrounding Nhill, Donald lost nearly everything, house unroofed, paddocks swept clear and crops all gone. His granddaughter, Mrs Dulcie Cossens, recalls being told that during the height of the cyclone in 1897 Donald had been absent when it struck, but returned entering the front door of the house, to find the family sheltering in the front room of the house.

He queried why they were all in the front room - opening the door to the kitchen – to find he was outside - the entire back of the house had disintegrated! They were in the only room left!

By 1898, Donald had transferred to Cobram on the River Murray, and at this time had returned alone to "Waterloo" at Angas Plains seeking help. His youngest brother, Ted, used to tell of him being given a stripper, 2 horses and provisions for the return trip, and no doubt supplies for the family.

Donald had been anxious to obtain two young horses, but had been convinced by his father, John McLean, to take an older and a younger horse - being told they would be less trouble and safer together. On the return trip to Victoria, Donald became so tired, that he stopped the horses and lay down in front of them for a quick sleep.

He awoke to find they had turned the stripper around, and disappeared whilst he slept. He set off to track them, and soon found them jammed on a big mallee, having gone one each side of it! He retrieved them and eventually reached home in Victoria.

By 1899 Donald, Ellen, and their young family had arrived in Mildura by wagon and buggy, the family stricken with typhoid fever, and Ellen's brother very ill - he died the following year - the only redhead in a family of 12!

In 1902 there was a big drought in the Victorian mallee, the family were attending school in Mildura and probably very happy for about the first time in their lives.

In 1902, Donald and his son, Jim, 13 years old, rode pushbikes to Adelaide from Mildura. thence to Lameroo, where they started clearing another scrub block! There was no railway there then, many wild dogs, and no water supply except for a reliable natural "soak" about 20 miles south of the town, over innumerable sandhills.

In 1906, Donald's family left Mildura, Jack, Ethel, Beat, Colin, and mother, Ellen, travelled down river in the paddle steamer "Gem" to Murray Bridge, and then took the train to Lameroo.

Some years were spent in Lameroo where son, Jack, nearly died of appendicitis. He was taken to Murray Bridge and recovered from an operation.

In 1910, Donald sold his Lameroo block to Jack's future father-in-law, Albert Needs, to take up land at Murrayville in Victoria, with Clarence F4 Lackmann arriving in the area at this time. On 6/4/1911 Ellen and family came to Murrayville, there were very few people there at this time, and Mrs F. Tully, the first white woman, who had arrived in 1909, had opened a boarding house. In 1912, Jack married Mary Needs in Lameroo, and the railway from Ouyen to Murrayville, was opened.

Following the 1907 era (in which Donald Henry transferred from Lameroo to Murrayville) a young school teacher, named Oliver Looney, stationed at Murrayville in writing home to his father in Amphitheatre, Central Victoria, painted this picture-

"I'm jolly glad you haven't got any land up here. I don't reckon any man over thirty ought to tackle farming up here, unless he has a small fortune to spend on it.

There are miles and miles of country, nothing but sand and scrub with a sandhill now and again. Most of the holdings are 640 acre blocks and a lot of them are unfenced.

They roll the mallee down, then when it is dry, they burn it off. Then those who can afford it: and who have small mallee on their land, have a great big rake they drag over it to rake up the sticks.

The other poor beggars have to pick the sticks up by hand. Fancy having to pick up a couple of hundred acres of sticks by hand. Then they scratch it over with a stump jump plough, and sow the crop. Before the crop is up two inches, the scrub is a foot high. I have seen some higher than that and not a sign of crop. I don't know what they do after that!

Horsefood is about £5 a ton up here and the bullocks go about eating the straw, and even the paper packaging out of the cases at the grocer's.

Mr Baldock asked me to come for a drive of about a mile or more to a Mrs McLean's. He was going there to get some butter. We stopped there till nearly a quarter past ten, and I've just got back.

Mr McLean seems to have done pretty well. he is getting £6 a ton for his hay and he had two and a half tons to the acre.

He reckons the people up here don't know much about farming! His father was the first man to put in a crop in South Australia, so I suppose he reckons he ought to know something about it.

The Germans seem to do better than the others up here - they seem to be more thrifty. Some of them have bonzer teams of horses".

The writer, Oliver Looney, was brought up on a farm of sheep and orchards, at Amphitheatre (32 miles east of Ararat) in the Pyrenees Range.

In 1914 there was a big drought in the Murrayville area, and farmers obtained work on the railway line being built from Murrayville to Pinnaroo, in S.A. Beatrice McLean married George Harley, parents of Mrs Dulcie Cossens, of Ararat, Vic.

In 1916 Ethel McLean married Clarence Lackmann, who enlisted in the A.I.F. with Colin McLean, and left for overseas. On 13th August, 1918, Donald Henry's youngest son, Colin Donald McLean, was killed in action at Brae, in France. Clarence Lackmann returned from active service in 1917.

After the 1920's Donald Henry's fortunes improved at Murrayville, with a better sequence of seasons and prices, but by this time John McLean's eldest son was becoming an old man, and some of his family took over the farming operations for him. Further of the May 23rd 1918, "Jottings" in the "Southern Argus" Strathalbyn - "Last week the eldest born of the late John McLean of Angas Plains (the 1st son, but the 5th child) - visited this town. He left here 40 years ago for the Wimmera, in Victoria He has settled his sons on separate farms without lessening the original homestead selection, and the original freehold land now totals close to 10,000 acres in the heart of the best country in Victoria.

In the early days the McLean family owned far more than this, but except for the Angas Plains property - all of it has long since passed into other hands - the Squire of the Plains (John McLean) having alone bequeathed to his progeny the gift of holding landed estate.

Mr Donald H. McLean is very much interested in the progress of Strathalbyn, and has told several little tales of the early days. When he left the Plains they were at low ebb and the call of the north was beginning to sound. There were empty farms everywhere telling of the exodus to new areas. The place was in a poor way, he says, and if buyers cared to bid property could be bought for a song!

Today (1918) the town is a beautiful one, and as prosperous as it is charming. It should be noted that the soil of the plains was exhausted from heavy cropping by the late 1870's, hence the many who departed."

In 1922 Donald Henry was again in Strathalbyn, and in December of that year he gave the story of the first wheat grown in South Australia to the Editor of the "Argus" - and reproduced the section concerning his grandfather, Donald McLean ~ because it is the clearest and most concise of the various accounts.

Further, to the 1918 visit of Donald Henry McLean to Strathalbyn, a second column of his reminiscences was published in the "Southern Argus" dated 27th June, his previous one being in May. He had been to find the remains of the first mud brick house at Hilton, and spoke of the arrival of the five McLean brothers. Allan, John, Archie, Big Hugh and Little Hugh. Father Donald's section 50, formed the present south western corner block (1918) of the main South Road and Richmond Road, called Marleston after the man who had purchased from Donald, not all, but 38 acres at £12.0.0 (\$24) per acre, a good price in 1840. In 1918 it had not been cut up into many blocks, but was soon to be by Mr B.A. Marles, and the remains of the McLean house would shortly vanish.

Donald Henry had met this Mr Marles when he was hunting for the original section, as he was intending to purchase a piece of it. Amongst various anecdotes Donald H. told the writer of the article, was that Mrs John Cheriton, a sister of the McLean brothers, drove off with "Young Lochinvar" and they married before anyone could catch up with them. (John Cheriton, was barely 20 years old, so the objection would have been on account of his youth, as he was well educated and intelligent). However it turned out a happy union for all parties, fulfilling the Old Scots adage - "best is the woin' that's nae lang adoin'".

Mr McLean also said that he had done the best financially of all the family, that he had settled all his own family on well stocked farms, and between them in the previous season they had cleared over 26.000 bushels of wheat, as well as a big lot of sidelines.

DEATH: of Donald Henry McLean, aged 79 years on 26/9/1933 at his farm house, Murrayville, Victoria. His coffin was brought to Strathalbyn by car overnight, and it is said that it protruded on either side. Many cars were fitted only with side curtains then. The funeral took place from the Chapel Street house of his sisters, Elizabeth and Florence McLean, and he was buried beside his first wife, Mary Frances, at the Strathalbyn Cemetery on 28th November, 1933.

OBITUARY: From the "Southern Argus".

"Mr Donald H McLean, who at the age of 79 years, died at Murrayville, Victoria, on 26/9/1933. was buried at Strathalbyn.

He was the eldest son of the late Mr John McLean. of Angas Plains, and took up land at Lameroo, and afterwards at Murrayville. His father, with his grandfather, came to South Australia in 1837 and were the first to grow a crop of wheat in this State in 1838. A widow, 2 sons and 2 daughters survive. One son, Colin, was a victim in the Great War. "

DEATH: of Ellen Joanna, 2nd wife of late Donald Henry McLean, at Birdwoodton, aged 78 years on 14/4/1949 and was buried at Murrayville. Vic. Although Donald had made provision for her to be buried at Strathalbyn on his other side, she had made it clear that she had no intention of making a threesome, "the other side of the sandwich".

OBITUARY: from a Victorian paper, of 30/4/1949.

"Mrs E.J. McLean, a Murrayville pioneer, died on April 14th, 1949, at the age of 78 years, in her sleep on holiday at the home of her grand daughter, Mrs T.W. Povey, (Lila) of Birdwoodton, Victoria. Her sudden death was a surprise to the family, as Mrs McLean was in very good spirits when she retired for the night. She was a pioneer of the Murrayville district, having come there with her husband and family from Lameroo in 1911. She was the widow of Donald Henry McLean who predeceased her over 15 years ago. They, with the family, lived for several years around Kaniva, Nhill and Mildura. Mrs McLean was laid to rest at the Murrayville Cemetery on the morning of April 16th, after a service in the Church of England, conducted by the Rev. E. T. S. Reynolds, who also officiated at the graveside.

The deceased lady had five children - Allan John, Merbein; James, Clayton, Vic; Ethel, Mrs Clarence Lackmann, Murrayville; Beatrice, Mrs G. Harley, Melbourne; and Colin killed in France, during World War I, She had 32 grandchildren, 6 of whom are deceased. One of them, Colin Lackmann, was killed in Tobruk, during World War II. There were also 2 great grandchildren. Mrs McLean was interred beside Coral Cossens who was one of them.

The coffin was borne to the graveside by Kevin and Brian Lackmann (grandsons) also Gordon Cossens, Edgar Kalns with Edward and Ernest Harley. "

One child born to Donald and Mary :-

1. William Bacon Smith McLean, born 4/3/1882 at Milang, SA. Married Margaret (unknown surname). [See biographies 5064](#)

Five children born to Donald and Ellen :-

2. Allan John (Jack) Ormiston McLean, born 5/10/1889, at Bill's Gully, Vic. Married Mary Margaret Needs. [See biographies 5065](#)
3. James Ernest Hopetoun McLean, b. 26/7/1891, at Kiala, Victoria, Married at Adelaide to Johanna Frances O'Donnell. [See biographies 5066](#)
4. Ethel May Victoria McLean, Born. 22/7/1893, at Kiata, Vic. Married to Clarence Ferdinand Lackmann. [See biographies 5069](#)
5. Beatrice 'Beat' Blanche Adelaide McLean, born 25/6/1894, at Kanlva Vic, d. 7/12/1969. Married: George John Bower Harley, b. 14/4/1890 at Heskett, Vic. died 16/2/1958. Six children – Sylvie, Dulcie, Nellie, George, Dorothy & Gloria.
6. Colin Donald Sydney McLean, Born 13/10/1895 at Kiata, Vic.. On the outbreak of World War I, he was unmarried and enlisted in the 1st A.I.F. He was killed in France at Brae on 13/8/1918. He had been presented with a medal by King George. Obituary: Summarised from a newspaper clipping dated 4/10/1918. After seven week's training at Mitcham Camp, followed by four weeks training in England, Private McLean joined the 32nd Battalion with the 9th reinforcements. He sewed with them for 12 months and was transferred to the 50th Battalion after his elder brother, James, joined it. The principal battles he was engaged in were The Somme, Bullecourt, Pollegyn Wood and Passchendale. The late soldier was a great athlete, and being a distance runner, he was for a time engaged in running dispatches from front lines to Battalion headquarters in which vocation he met his death. James was in close proximity when he was killed outright. While in England, Private McLean had the honour to perform before the King, and his photo, amongst a group of athletes, appeared in the Adelaide "Chronicle". A memorial service was held in the Pinnaroo Presbyterian Church on September 29th, 1918 for Private Colin McLean and Corporal Chas, T. Routley, both of Murrayville.

• SOURCE : This biography is an extract from "The History of Donald & Christina McLean and Their Descendants" which was published in 1995 – page 292 to 310.
• 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.