

Leaves
of
History



Historic Area: **Mc Donald**

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Mechanical Reproduction:
by Louis Max Grossmann

Brief History of McDonald written by

A.D.White in 1979

MCDONALD

Named for the pioneer family of the McDonalds, early settlers, this town experienced a rather modest growth in its earlier years. John McDonald came into the area in 1773 when he was about 22 years of age. He took up a tract of land of 1,000 acres, known as Mt. Pleasant, and to this, in the years ahead, the McDonald family added other large tracts.

The first building was the McDonald cabin, and, a bit later Mr. McDonald added a fort or block-house for the protection of himself and the few neighbors in the area from the incursions of the Indians. Since he served as a justice of the peace and an Indian trader, other buildings were added to provide space for these activities. John McDonald lived as a bachelor for about six years before he was married on April 28, 1778, to Martha Noble, whose family lived in a small settlement a few miles down Robinson Run from the McDonald cabin. This couple became the parents of six sons and five daughters, and these children with their families became prominent in the home area and in other areas where they chose to live.

On the home farm which he inherited from his father, Edward McDonald lived and he was succeeded by his son, John N. McDonald who erected the beautiful home which still stands on the farm and which is now the home of the Kim Darragh family.

The town of McDonald was laid out on a part of the McDonald farm and on the Johnston tract which lay to the east. There being no industrial or commercial activities in the area, there was little incentive for a town to grow. But when the Pittsburgh and Steubenville Railroad was built up the Robinson Run valley in the 1860s, it ran through the Mt. Pleasant tract. A post office known as Havelock was opened and it kept that name until about 1869 or 1870 when it was changed to McDonald to agree with the name of the station which had been established on the railroad.

The coming of the railroad promoted the importance of the place by providing an access to markets for the people of the surrounding countryside. Farmers began shipping milk and other

farm products began coming in and places of business were established for their handling and sale. So, as a result, the lots which had been laid out began to find buyers, as people bought them and settled here.

But still, the town was not large, or very important until 1890 when exploring for oil revealed the presence of substantial quantities of this valuable fuel under the grounds of the area. Two fairly good wells had been brought in on the McDonald farm, and as other wells were drilled with satisfactory results, an oil boom soon developed, and drilling began on a large scale. All available land was put under lease and many people flocked to McDonald to work in the oil field and to provide services for these workers, so its development as a place of residence and a place of business was well established. The town became incorporated as a borough on November 11, 1889.

Following the excitement of the oil boom, the opening of the coal fields gave another boost to the importance of the town. Several mines were located nearby, and large quantities of the "black diamonds" were shipped over the Panhandle Railroad from this point. All of this development has, of course, been of great economic advantage to McDonald, and its present population is composed of fairly well-to-do people. These people have been progressive and have always sought the best of cultural advantages for themselves and their families. Good schools have always been maintained, and the borough schools are now a part of the Fort Cherry School System, with an elementary school being held at McDonald and secondary students being transported to the Fort Cherry High School.

Attention has always been given to the religious needs of the people, too. The McDonalds and their early Scotch-Irish neighbors attended the Presbyterian Church at Candor, but as people of other persuasions settled in McDonald, all of the major denominations have established churches.

Notable among immigrants from European countries who have come to McDonald are a number of families of French and Belgian nationality who have made their homes here and have established themselves as substantial citizens of the McDonald Community. Most ethnic groups of the present day are well represented.

Mc DONALD.

Robison Tp.

Scale of 200 Ft. to One Inch.



Heirs of F. Mc Donald.

Dr. N. Mc Donald.

Dr. N. Mc Donald.

Dr. N. Mc Donald.

G. S. Head & Co.

Heirs of H. Richardson.

W. P. Reid & Co.

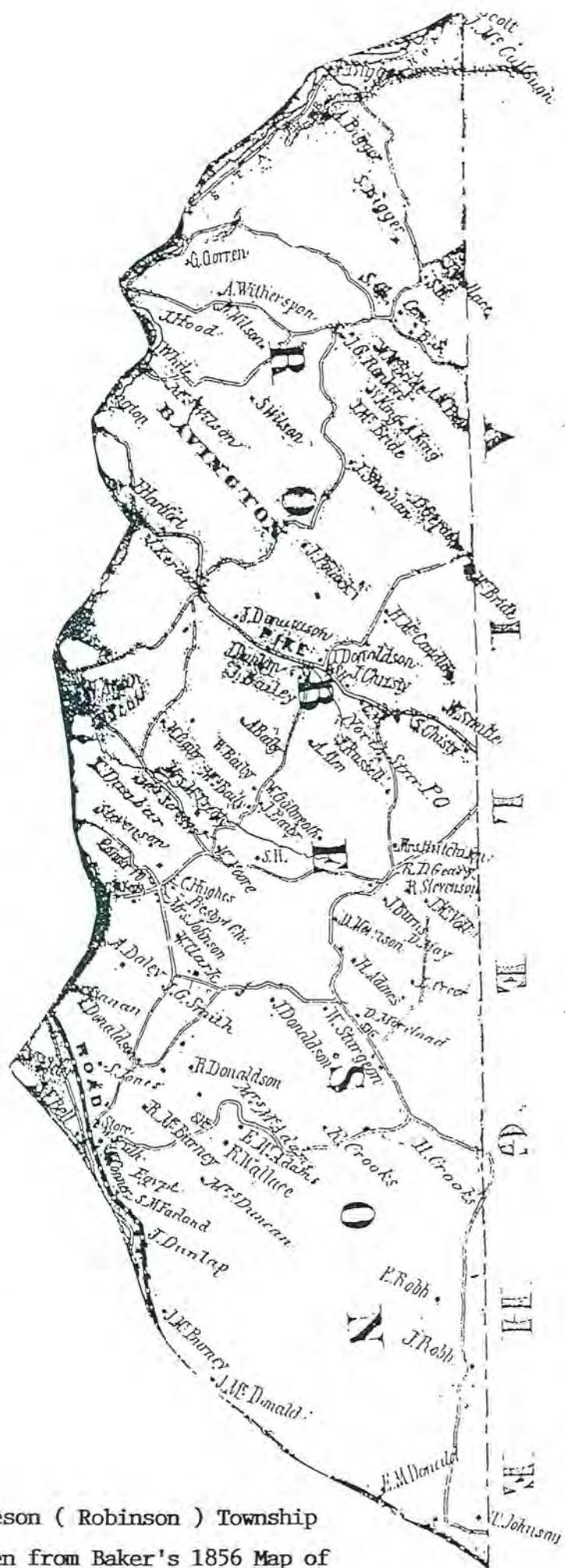
Millers Heirs

ROBINSON TOWNSHIP

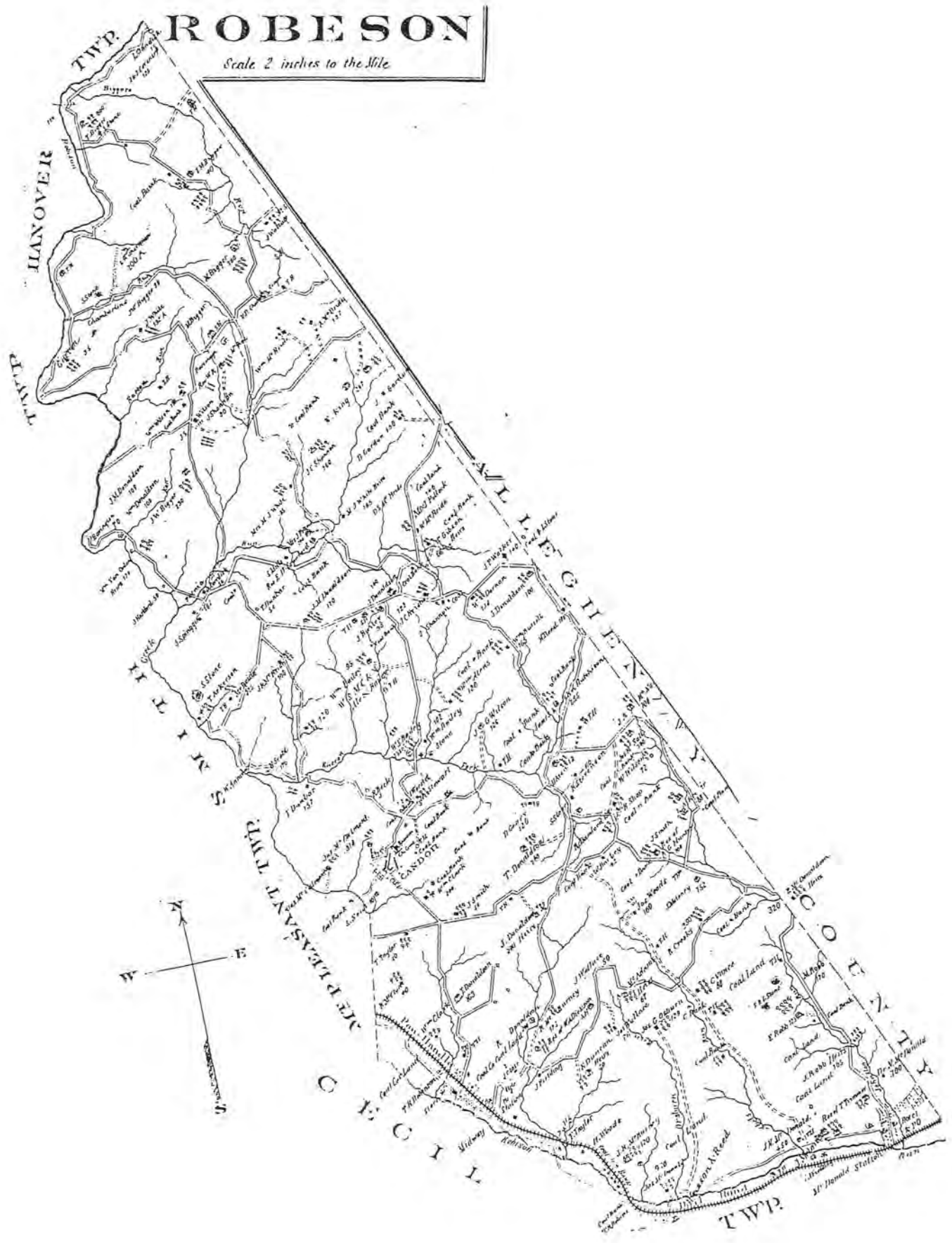
*John H. Campbell,
Chief Draftsman.*

Section of Robinson Township
taken from the Original Patent Maps
of Washington County





Robeson (Robinson) Township
 taken from Baker's 1856 Map of
 Washington, County, Pennsylvania



Robeson (Robinson) Township map
taken from Caldwell's 1876 Atlas

HISTORY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY

McDONALD.

McDonald is located 18 miles west of Pittsburg, on the P., C., C. & St. L. R. R., in corner of Washington County, adjoining Allegheny County, and about 18 miles northwest of Washington. Although only recently incorporated as a borough, (November 11, 1889), McDonald has had a place on the map of Washington County for more than 100 years. In the year 1775, one John McDonald came to this part of the country and took possession of a large tract of land, for which he had taken out a warrant which afterwards in the due course of time were patented. On a part of this land is now located the town of McDonald. Soon after coming here an Indian trading post was established on this land and John McDonald was appointed Indian agent. He was one of the judges of Youghiogheny County Court, Virginia, which held court in Washington County while Virginia claimed to own this region. He soon added to his original grant and finally owned 5,000 or 6,000 acres of land in this immediate vicinity. Ephram Johnston secured a government grant of land adjoining the McDonald patent on the east. On a portion of this land the first real town site of McDonald was laid out. In the fall of 1865, when the first train passed over the newly built Panhandle Railroad, a station was established here and was called McDonald. William Johnston was appointed first agent. The postoffice was at first called Havelock and so remained until about 1869 or 1870 when it was changed to McDonald. Henry McCune was first postmaster. Mr. Thomas Johnston, father of Mrs. W. B. Morehead, platted a portion of his farm into town lots before the first attempt to build the railroad. Michael O'Hara had the first official plan of the town made and recorded in 1871. Among the first buildings erected was the McDonald Hotel, the first hotel in the town. It was built and conducted by Mr. William Johnston. Before the railroad came there were no signs of a town, no buildings except McEwen's grist-mill, a blacksmith shop and a dwelling-house, all three of which stood back of the present railway station.

Mr. S. S. Johns, the long-time railroad station agent, was elected first burgess. In 1890 the first town building, which contained the lockup and council chamber, was built on Washington Street.

In 1889-90 McDonald experienced its greatest impetus by the discovery of oil in this neighborhood. In the summer of 1890 the Royal Gas Company drilled two wells on the McDonald estate, two miles west of McDonald Station, finding a show of oil in the so-called Gordon sand. On the farm of Edward McDonald, west side of the borough, the same company struck oil and gas, the latter part of September, 1900. The well stood two months, was drilled through the fifth sand in November, torpedoed on December 20, and filled three tanks of oil in ten days. The tools were run down to clear it out, stuck fast and the pioneer venture of the McDonald region was ended, simultaneously with the ending of 1890. In May, 1891, the Royal Gas Company finished two wells on the Robb and Sauters tracts north of town, across the railroad track. The Robb proved a 20-barreler and the Sauters flowed 160 barrels a day from the fifth sand. Three miles northeast, the Mathews well produced 30 barrels a day from the Gordon sand.

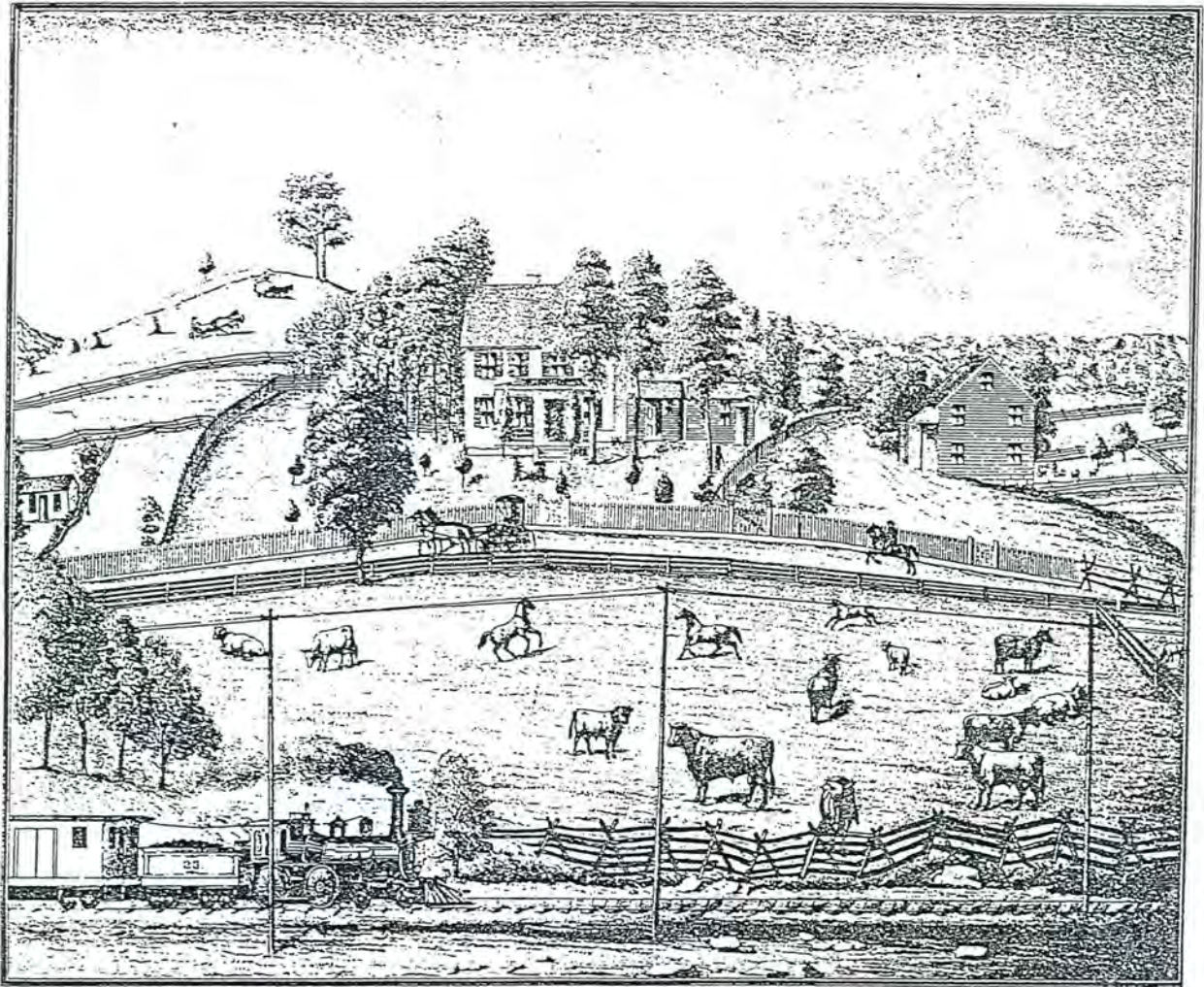
On July 1 it was drilled to the fifth sand, increasing the output 800 barrels a day for two months. Further probing the first week in September increased it to 11,000 barrels. Scouts gauged it at 700 barrels an hour for three hours after the agitation ceased. It yielded 400,000 barrels in four months, and was properly styled "Mathews the Great." The owners were James M. Guffey, John Galey, Edward Jennings and Michael Murphy. They built acres of tanks and kept ten or a dozen sets of tools constantly at work.

C. D. Greenlee and Barney Forst leased James Mevey's 250 acres a short distance northeast of McDonald just across in Allegheny County. A well was put down on the Mevey farm and on September 26, the fifth sand was cracked and oil gushed at the rate of 140 barrels an hour. The well was stirred a trifle on September 28 with startling effect. It put 15,600 barrels of oil into the tanks in 24 hours. This was without doubt the largest oil well ever struck on this continent and said to be the greatest white-rock-sand well in the world. On October 4, after a slight agitation by the tools, this mammoth well poured 750 barrels an hour for four hours, the best record of any production known up to that time. Scurrying for territory in the Jumbo field set in with a vigor unparalleled. Rigs were reared in town lots, in gardens and yards.

By November 1 200 wells were drilling and 60 rigs building. Fifty-four October strikes swelled the daily production at the close of the month to 80,000 barrels. Greenlee and Forst had 30 wells drilling and 300,000 barrels of iron tankage. Guffey, Galey & Jennings had 15 or 20 wells. The Fisher Oil Company, who owned one-fourth of the Oakdale tract and the McMichael farm, had 16 wells, reaching for the jugular from which the Sturgeon and Baldwin spouters were drawing 10,000 barrels a day. William Tucker and John A. Steele had two producing largely and eight going down in the Mevey farm. J. G. Haymaker and Thomas Legget owned one gusher, nine drilling wells and 500 acres of leases. The Mevey farm and several of the wells just mentioned were over the line in Allegheny County, but were known as in the "McDonald Field."

The oil fields in this district in 1908 give employment to upwards of 500 men and average production per day is 8,000 barrels.

With the advent of oil McDonald experienced a boom. Town lots were sold like hot cakes. McDonald is now one of the best towns in Washington County. There are paved streets, substantial business blocks, handsome residences, two electric light plants and a water works and the inhabitants enjoy all the conveniences of modern life. The borough owns about \$40,000 worth of property, represented by the new schoolhouse, the Ferguson Hose House and the lockup properties. There is also a well organized fire company and police department, which give ample fire and police protection.



RESIDENCE & FARM OF HON. JOHN N. McDONALD, McDONALD STATION, WASHINGTON CO., PA.

ED McDONALD HOME Taken about 1876



JAMES McDONALD HOME NOW
(1971)



ED McDONALD HOME NOW
(1971)

First Presbyterian Church, McDonald, Pa.



First U. P. Church, McDonald, Pa.

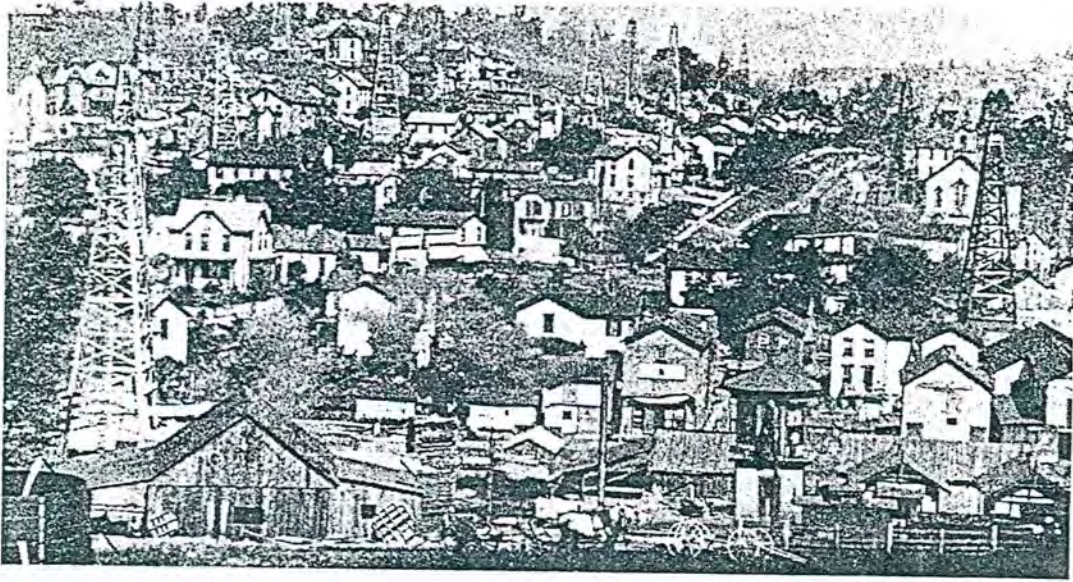


McDonald Hotel, McDonald, Pa.

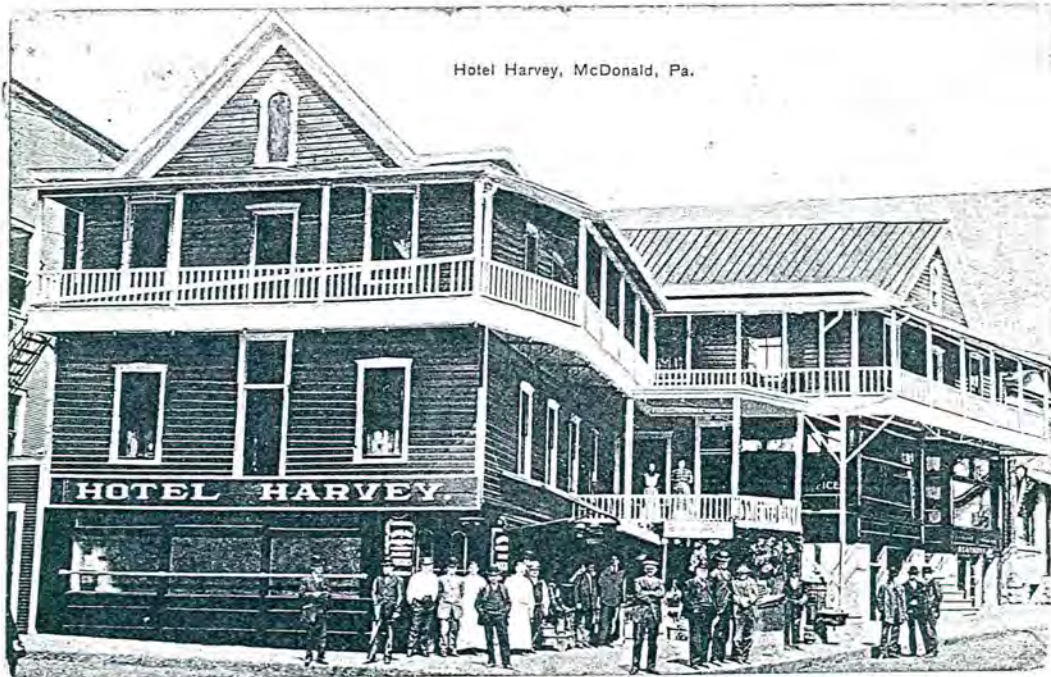


The High School, McDonald, Pa.

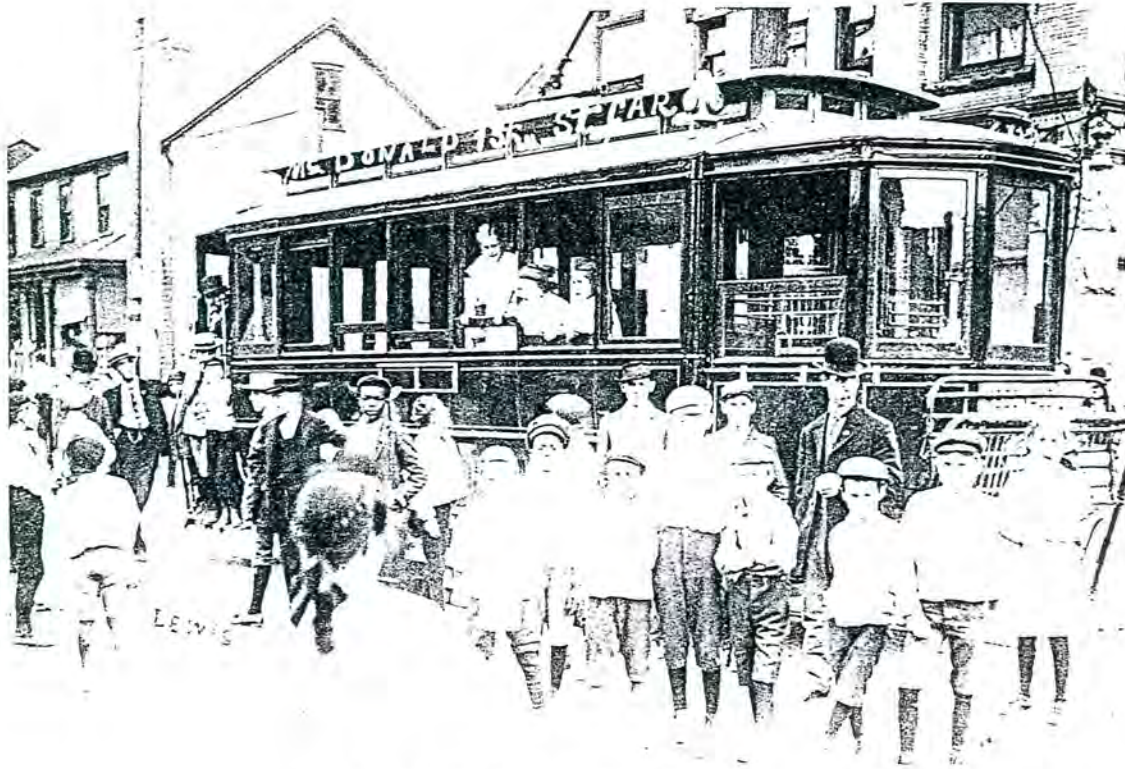




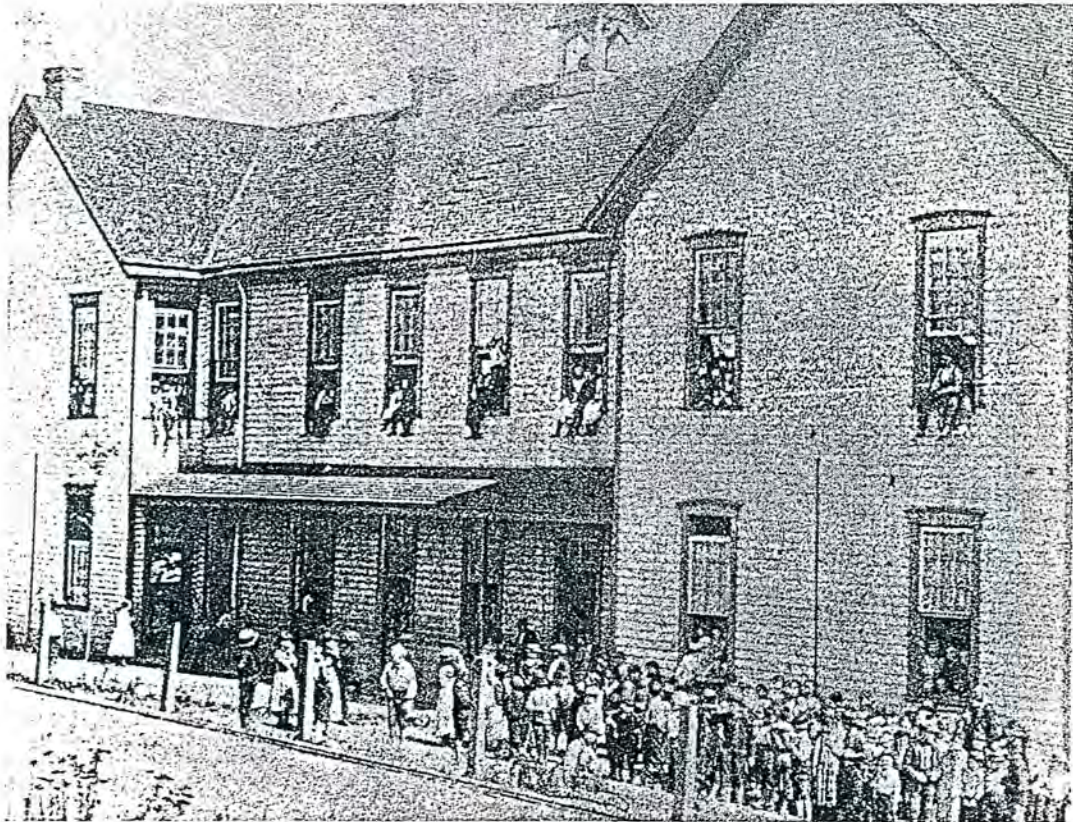
*McDonald during oil boom
of 1890's.*



Hotel Harvey, McDonald, Pa.



McDonald's first street car.



*McDonald Public School.
Early 1900's.*

"Pioneers John & Martha McDonald"
taken from
Robinson Run Sketches

The Western Pennsylvania Historical
Magazine, Vol. 36

Part of an address given by
Milton M. Allison at a John McDonald
Family Reunion 16 September 1950

From 1770 to 1773, some seventeen or more families came from Nottingham parish (Presbyterian), around Colora, Cecil County, Maryland, to take up land in the Chartiers watershed. Among them were the James Ewings who homesteaded at the mouth of Robinson Run near the present West Carnegie.² Eventually a minister whose name was to become a household word throughout this western frontier area, and who was pastor to many of these people, Doctor John McMillan, migrated west from Fagg's Manor, Chester County, in eastern Pennsylvania. He settled, as you know, south of Canonsburg, and established among others, the Chartiers or "Hill" Presbyterian Church, also Jefferson Academy and Jefferson College at Canonsburg, now incorporated with Washington and Jefferson. Doctor McMillan is represented here today by our Cousins Lesnett, who are his descendants through Thomas Dell Lesnett, Sr., a great-grandson of the educator. Whether John McDonald came as a member of the group of migrants from Nottingham parish or was influenced by them to come I do not know. At any rate, the year 1773 found him in possession of his homestead tract, called Mount Pleasant, which is the present McDonald family property at the western corporation limits of the borough of McDonald. In December, 1775, having meanwhile improved the land, he "moved out," whence the chronicle does not state, "to live thereon."

In his new home bachelor John, aged thirty-six, began to realize that "it is not well for man to live alone." The little lovebugs, however, seem to have conquered him gradually and over a period of four years. At the age of forty, having wooed, he wed the beloved Martha, who is described as a "bonnie, redhaired lassie," aged seventeen. (Maybe he was waiting for her to grow up). She was the youngest daughter of Colonel and Mrs. Joseph (Nobile) Noble II, who with most of their family and several slaves had come from Prince Georges County, Maryland, in 1772, to take up land upon which developed Noblesburg, now Noblestown. On the site of the present-day United Presbyterian

Church in that place, Colonel Noble, an Episcopalian, erected a little log chapel which he designated in true catholic spirit, "a house of prayer for all people." Therein on April 28, 1778, John McDonald and Martha Tarvin Noble were married by Dr. John McMillan.

Our Father John was very like the "Father of our Country," G. Washington, of whom it is said: "If he liked anything more than land, it was more land." At his death on January 17, 1815, John McDonald left real estate to his wife and children in amount of 5,911 acres, including 1,000 acres at Mount Pleasant, 1,000 acres in the adjoining Primrose Hill plantation, 1,111 acres at Mill Creek (Hookstown), 2,000 acres at West Logstown, now Aliquippa, and 800 acres across the state line in Brooke County, Virginia, now West Virginia. His will was witnessed by Judge James Allison and is on file in the courthouse at Washington, Pennsylvania. His specie wealth increased a lot after the Revolutionary War. He was one of the substantial depositors and perhaps also an incorporator of the Bank of Pittsburgh, which opened its doors in November, 1814 (chartered in 1813-14) as he held \$15,000 worth of its capital bank stock (a large amount for those days). He also owned human chattel to the extent of fourteen negro slaves.

John McDonald figures somewhat in the minutes of the Yohogania County court, where his name is misspelled in careless transcription to read "McDaniel." He was a gentleman justice of the court. He was also a ranger on the frontier during the War for Independence. I suggest that a military marker be placed at his grave here in Candor churchyard. He was one of the founders of this Raccoon Presbyterian Church wherein we meet today, which dates, I believe, from 1778.⁴ He also is credited, if I am correct, with one of the largest cash gifts made in his time to the support of the new Jefferson College, Canonsburg.

⁴ Margaret S. Sturgeon, in her *History of Raccoon Presbyterian Church*, states on page one: "Ours is one of the oldest churches in Western Pennsylvania, as proved from the following extract culled by permission from the private journal of Rev. Jno. McMillan, D.D., which reads as follows, '1778—1st Sab. of Dec., preached at Raccoon from *Rom. 8, 6*. Rec'd £7 - 10 - 6.'" Similar entries indicate that McMillan preached "at Raccoon" in June, 1780, and "at Mr. McDonald's place" the following month.

Now as we come back to Father John and Mother Martha, aged forty and seventeen, respectively, let us trust that the none-too-young husband did not entertain the mistaken notions of those whose policy concerning wives is expressed in the saying, "Takem young, treatem rough, tellem nothing." But when his mother-in-law first visited the newlyweds at Mount Pleasant she was "moved with indignation" at the sight of her daughter, of all people, out at the creek washing clothes with the darkies. Let us suppose that her Martha was at the creek by her own choice. Time proved her an excellent housekeeper which included, no doubt, the oversight of her female slaves.

The first coming of the stork to Father John and Mother Martha was on this wise. The "merry month of May," 1779, was not so merry on Robinson Run. Marauding Indians from Ohio were expected that spring. Lack of militia protection at Fort McDonald, a stockade for the protection of the local settlers and their cattle built near John's cabin, invited tragedy. As late as 1781, according to relevant records in the *Washington-Irvine Correspondence*, the fort was not adequately munitioned or garrisoned. Fearing a raid in the dark of the moon of this particular night with a blessed event impending, a hurried trip was made on horseback by John and Martha the four or five miles northwestward through the woods to the protection of Sister Mary Noble Beelor's home here in what is now Candor village. This home, a stockaded farmhouse, was that of Captain Joseph Beelor, his mentioned wife and family. It is listed as Fort Beelor in the *Frontier Forts of Pennsylvania*, by George D. Albert, and was located, according to the Reverend Van Emmon Stevenson, who was a lifelong resident of this community, across the field in front of Raccoon Church over to the southeast at the western edge of the present manse property. The next day, May 10, 1779, twin sons were born to the McDonalds and named Andrew and William.

James McDonald, the fourth son of John and Martha Noble McDonald, was born on August 29, 1783. He became a colonel of militia and that title attached to him. He inherited the 1,000-acre estate adjoining the Mount Pleasant plantation to the west on Robinson Run. When the Pittsburgh-Virginia railroad (now the Panhandle Division of the Pittsburgh, Cincinnati, Chicago and St. Louis Railroad) was laid through the property in 1852, the station established there was named Primrose after the James McDonald home called Primrose Hill. "Beautiful for elevation" and a "joy to behold" is the situation of that big sixteen-room house with family and servant quarters. Conspiring to please the eye are the type and arrangement of buildings, the brook below the hill skirting the house grounds to the east, the spring, the sloping lawn and the driveway, the stately old trees, the mammoth sycamore at the springhouse, the pines and the elms. In essential points the place is the same today as it was a hundred years ago. It stands now as it was then without a rival as an attractive country estate (unless it be Mount Pleasant with its golf links) along the railroad right-of-way from Pittsburgh to Steubenville. The house was remodeled to its present proportions in 1892 or 1893. There are still extant pictures of it before that time. Whether this original brick house was the one to which Colonel James brought his bride, Julianne Cooke (born December 17, 1799), after their marriage in 1827, I do not know.

At Primrose Hill, the colonel and his lady maintained the easy, hospitable ways of life, in the manner of the slaveholding society of the old ante-bellum South, and their four children were brought up in that tradition. Financial income was largely from sheep and general farming supplemented by revenue from rents, bonds, and mortgages. There were two daughters and two sons: Martha Melvina, born on October 9, 1828; Margaretta Jane, born on June 27, 1833; John James Cooke, born on March 5, 1839; and Noble, familiarly known as "K," born on March 13, 1841. This letter was adopted by Noble as a first name. It was "simply that and nothing more," not even a dot to make it an initial. This explanation I received from the "letter man" himself. Into this home was brought as a baby at the death of his mother, who was a niece of Aunt Julianne's, Silas Gault, born April 13, 1853, who while never adopted as a son was thereafter considered a member of the James McDonald household, being familiarly known as "Gotty." In 1855, the noted artist, David G. Blythe, spent several weeks at Primrose Hill and painted portraits of Colonel James, his wife and their four children. These portraits, the property of our cousin, Mrs. Lucy Mitchell Laughlin Gault, now hang in the galleries of the Butler Art Institute of Youngstown, Ohio.

Fortunately, at the time when the family, consisting then of Melvina, John James, K, and "Gotty," were beginning to be "land poor," very valuable deposits of oil, gas, and coal were found underlying much of the 1,000-acre tract, and oil drilling was begun about 1893. Margareta Jane had died nearly twenty years before, on July 24, 1874, and Melvina, "Viney," did not live to enjoy the benefits of this "find," for she died on July 5, 1893, at the Columbian Exposition, or first World's Fair, in Chicago. But John James lived until October 27, 1914, and K until July 21, 1920. Meanwhile, ninety-seven gas and oil wells were brought into production on the James McDonald property.

For many years K made horses his hobby and bought and bred but seldom sold blooded racing stock. He trained on a private one-mile track in the meadow before the homestead. At one time he was in possession of forty-eight head. John James was of scholarly tastes, a book-lover though not a great reader, and made himself responsible for the commissary and other matters of housekeeping and entertaining. The house was elegantly furnished throughout. There were lovely antiques and imported chinaware. Most of the time both a housekeeper and a caretaker were employed. During much of my boyhood Jimmy Walker and wife served in these capacities. The dairy farm across the road toward the east was managed separately, the Seabrights being the farmers there for years.

K was the director of two banks, the First National of McDonald and the First National of Burgettstown, and John James, I believe, had a seat on the Pittsburgh Stock Exchange. In all their business and social relationships they were men of probity and honor. Both were of affable and kindly disposition and were beloved by children and young people. They maintained family prayers and were adherents of Raccoon Church.

From 1910 onward the brothers were in Erie most of the time. There K put up for several years at Hotel Fischer, and for a considerable period John James was a patient in St. Vincent's Hospital, where he died. The first Mrs. Silas Gault, "Cousin Annie," was a native of Erie and in her last years she and her husband had taken up residence there. Silas Gault, who died on September 13, 1933, is survived by his second wife, our cousin, Mrs. Lucy Mitchell Laughlin Gault of Hookstown and Erie. By terms of a will read in the back parlor at Primrose Hill on the day of K's funeral, it was shown that Silas Gault fell heir to all of K's property whatsoever. Coal to a considerable amount was sold for a

price reported to be in excess of \$600,000. Before his death, Gault lost the entire estate and died practically penniless. Mrs. Lucy Gault, as the last mistress of Primrose Hill, has preserved many valuable keepsakes, irreplaceable records and little papers, personal pictures and such, along with the portraits by Blythe. I am indirectly indebted to her for certain "memorabilia" in my possession.

The James McDonald family is now extinct and the mortal remains are buried in the family lot in Candor churchyard. I write as one of the closest friends John James C. McDonald ever had. My brother Samuel was even more intimately acquainted with both of the McDonald brothers to whom he was very dear: a request for his legal adoption by one of the brothers was refused by our mother. It is because of this close friendship that I have written thus at length concerning the James McDonalds.

(8) *Edward McDonald*, the youngest son of Father John and Mother Martha was born on August 13, 1792, at Mount Pleasant as were all of the family except the twins. He married Margaret Nesbitt and lived on at Mount Pleasant, which 1000-acre homestead he inherited. His wife died in 1839, and sometime later he married Margaret Snodgrass. He was a member of the Pennsylvania Legislature and was locally known as "Squire." He was also active in the work of the Presbyterian Church. His property, by direct descent of inheritance, is now owned by Mr. Nesbitt McDonald, who is here today. The town of McDonald was named for the Edward McDonalds, upon whose land much of the town was laid out.

Oil Centennial Revives Local Interest



The above picture, from the morgue of "The Record-Outlook", gives some idea of the scope of the oil industry in its early days in McDonald. The reproduction of the drawing, which was made in 1897, shows the numerous wells in the area. Close inspection will show street names and residences which still exist. Some of the wells shown are still in production, although producing only a dribble compared to the initial output.

McDonald.—The land on which this village is located was originally a part of the McDonald lands. The plat for the town was laid out in November, 1871, by M. O'Hara, under direction of Mrs. F. A. O'Hara, W. A. Edelbum being the surveyor. It contained four hundred and thirty-eight lots, each twenty-five by one hundred and twenty feet. An addition of forty lots was made to the plat July 7, 1873, by Michael and Francis O'Hara, and of one hundred and nine lots July 11, 1873.

Before the town was platted, Henry C. McEwen (about 1860) built a saw-mill and "chopper" at the place, and two years later a grist-mill was added. About the time of the grading of the railroad through this

section William Johnson built the first house in the town, and started the first hotel. The post-office was established at this place first under the name of Havelock, and later changed to McDonald. Henry C. McEwen was the first postmaster appointed. He was succeeded by William Johnson, James Ewert, Jerry Fife, John Larimer, Theodore McD. McCloy, and J. D. Sawters, who is the present postmaster. William Johnson opened the first store. The town at present contains three stores, post-office, church (Episcopal), express- and telegraph-office, depot, grist-mill, and academy.

HISTORY OF WASHINGTON COUNTY, PENNSYLVANIA.

EDITED BY

BOYD CRUMRINE.