



## *A September Lake Superior Morning*



### Lake Breezes in the Vineyard- the Story of Captain Donald Sutherland McDonald



In his life time, Captain Donald Sutherland McDonald didn't think of himself as a symbol. His concerns lay with his family, his career, and his grape harvest. One of his big ambitions was to be home on his farm in North East, Pennsylvania, for the harvest instead of away at sea. An irony of fate brought him home for the 1905 harvest, but to be laid to rest, not to harvest grapes.

The life span of Captain McDonald, 1861-1905, symbolized the merging of Great Lakes and ocean commerce and its growth and importance to the economies of the United States and the world. For over 150 years, the lake ports have been seaports, with access and trade to the ocean. In 1824, Captain Samuel Ward of Newport, Michigan built the St. Clair, a schooner of 30 tons burden. He

loaded her with skins, furs, potash, and black walnut lumber for gun stocks and in June 1826, he started for New York City. He sailed the tiny schooner-rigged St. Clair from Detroit to Buffalo and eased into the new harbor which had been clear of the sand bar.

Arriving at Buffalo, Captain Ward took out her spars, lowered her masts so they would clear the bridges, and towed her through the Erie Canal to Albany with his own horses. She was then towed by steam down the Hudson River to New York City. He returned the same way to his home, making the voyage in eight weeks. The St. Clair was the first vessel to pass from the lakes to the ocean via the Erie Canal.

Deep water trade from the lakes had its beginnings when the brigantine Pacific sailed out of Cleveland in 1844 with a cargo of wheat bound for Liverpool. At the height of the gold rush in 1849, the barque Eureka cleared Cleveland for San Francisco carrying 59 passengers and a manifest of merchandise. She crossed Lake Erie, locked through the Welland Canal, ran with the wind down Lake Ontario, threaded her way down the St. Lawrence and through the canals. She sailed down the Atlantic, rounded Cape Horn, traveled up the Pacific and safely deposited her fortune seekers at the Golden Gate.

In 1850 the first lake steamer reached salt water when the propeller steamship Ontario churned out of Cleveland and took the long loop around Cape Horn for San Francisco. A flourishing trade between salt and fresh water developed during the 1850s. In 1854 John Thorson, a native Norwegian, sailed his brig Scott from Lake Michigan to Norway and back. In 1856, Lake Michigan farmers sent their grain directly to Europe on the steamer Dean Richmond. It loaded 14,000 bushels of wheat at Chicago and Milwaukee in mid-July and arrived in Liverpool on September 29th. In 1857 the Madeira Pet loaded hides in Chicago and staves in Detroit, and delivered them to Liverpool. In 1858 11 lakes ships crossed the Atlantic and in 1859 according to one account, 41 vessels cleared the lakes that year for London and Liverpool.

Even inland papers recorded lake-ocean commerce news. Oconomowoc, Wisconsin is about thirty miles inland from the port of Milwaukee. This geographical fact did not prevent the Oconomowoc Free Press of Thursday, June 2, 1859, from noting "that a vessel is now loading at Milwaukee with hard wood lumber for Hamburg."

The relationship between fresh and salt water sailors developed as gradually as a sand dune on a Lake Michigan Shore and sometimes deteriorated as quickly as

calm waters on Lake Erie. Some salt water sailors, a few of them secretly, others publicly, looked down their masts at Great Lakes sailors. After all, salt water was much more dangerous and challenging to navigate than lakes, they argued. They conveniently ignored the facts that the Great Lakes generate storms as ferocious as any ocean gale and the impact of a Lake Superior wave can be just as deadly as an Atlantic swell.

Other lake and ocean sailors recognized the fact that they were brothers united in navigating the deep, whether it be Huron or Pacific, and traded friendship and benefits. Countless Great Lakes sailors began their careers on the oceans, and countless ocean tars proved themselves on the lakes before moving on to salt. Captain William Callaway was an example of an ocean sailor transferred to the Great Lakes.

In a reminiscence at the Milwaukee Old Settlers club he summarized the interchangeability of the ocean and lake sailors. He said, "My next trip was on the ship Petrel, bound with passengers for New York. While we were lying in New York harbor, two sailors from the Great Lakes who came aboard to spin yarns, told us what good things they had to eat on the lake vessels. They said they had ham and eggs for breakfast, two kinds of meat and pie or pudding for dinner, and hot biscuits and cake for supper. They also said that when they wanted a drink, all they had to do was drop a bucket overboard and draw it up full of fresh, cold water. I thought they were awful liars, but found when I came to the lakes, after making three more voyages from England to this country and Canada, that they were about right. I came to the Lakes in the year 1857, and started my career as fresh-water sailor."

A spirit of camaraderie floated on the waves and in the winds blowing around and across the lakes, a feeling large and tangible enough to conquer the vast stretches of these inland seas. It connected passing ships and inspired captains to tie up next to each other at the dock so the men could visit. It touched the lock tender at Soo St. Marie and the light keeper at many an isolated light house and made them feel they were united in a common battle against the destructive forces of nature that sometimes possessed the lakes. For 150 years, the common trade on the lake gave men a character in common: endurance, enterprise, imagination, patience... As Great Lakes historian Walter Havighurst put it....."no other thousand miles of continent are linked so closely as the lakes basin. It has given inland men a wide sense of geography and a habit of thinking in large terms."

Captain Donald Sutherland McDonald symbolized this habit of thinking in large terms from the perspective of both lake and ocean sailor. He was born at Dunnville, Ontario in 1861, a son of James and Margaret Burgess McDonald. The

captain's father, James, was born in Scotland and his mother at Niagara Falls. Altogether, the McDonalds had six children. James was a grocer in North East and his brother, Hall, worked in the store with him. John was an assistant cashier at the First National Bank of Erie, Pa and Arthur was a bookkeeper there. Frederick worked in New York as correspondent of the First National Bank, and Annie lived with her parents in North East.

When he was two years old, Donald came to North East with his parents and attended the local schools until he was 16. In the summer of 1877, Donald followed his desire to be a sailor. He voyaged on Lake Erie on the steamer Georgian which his uncle, Captain John Burgess of Port Ryerse, Ontario owned and operated. He liked the life of the sailor so well that he stayed on for the season as a crew member. When the Georgian laid up for the winter, he decided "to go salt water" and went to New York. On November 11, 1877, he shipped out as a boy on the steamer State of Pennsylvania, bound for Glasgow, Scotland. From there on January 14, 1878, he shipped as ordinary seaman on the Norwegian brig Hilding, bound for the West Indies.

January 1878 turned out to be a bad month for sailing the North Atlantic. The progress was slow and erratic and on the tenth day of the voyage a storm carried away the lifeboats, top masts, sails, yards, and topside casks of fresh water. The captain decided to square away and run for the north coast of Ireland. He sighted the entrance to the Londonderry River off the north coast of Ireland, but the winds and the waves rampaged, and the shore seemed unattainable. When the captain tried to work the Hilding into the estuary, the remaining sails were carried away. The crew and ship were the mercy of the sea, and being driven toward the beach. The captain ordered the anchors to be dropped in seven fathoms of water, but the bottom was quicksand and the anchors would not catch. The ship's ensign was hoisted downward, the universal signal of distress.

The Hilding struck on rocks offshore, and the shock sent the foremast and all the headgear overboard. Only the lower mainmast stood. Two of the crew were swept away with the forward cabin, and the remaining nine made for the mainmast and its rigging. Donald McDonald and another sailor climbed to the grating around the trestle trees, and the captain, mates and the other seamen stayed in the netting underneath. The seas carried away the other cabin, bulwarks, and hatches. At midnight, the hull began to break up and the mainmast heeled over at a rakish angle.

The captain and the other men jumped into the sea and were drowned or killed by floating spars. McDonald and his young shipmate stuck to their perch. Throughout

the night wind, freezing rain and hail lashed them. People ashore stood watch, highlighted by flicking flames from the fires they had built on the beach. On the afternoon of January 27, 1878, Donald still clung to the broken mainmast of the Hilding. Finally, Captain James McCandless and a volunteer crew in a large fishing boat came to rescue him and one other Norwegian sailor.

Donald arrived in Ireland weak from exposure, without shoes, coat or hat and shirt and trousers torn in many places and heavy with sand and salt water. He was taken to a nearby farmhouse and put bed with two other survivors. Word of the rescue spread and Donald had barely stopped shivering when a fine carriage drove up to the farmhouse door. Lady Bruce, mistress of nearby Downhill Castle and estate, asked after the health of the survivors. When she discovered that Donald was a fellow Scot, she immediately whisked him away to Downhill Caste. There he ate ravenously, slept around the clock, and acquired new clothing.

At the insistence of Lady Bruce and her husband, Sir Harvey, Donald spent several weeks recuperating at Downhill Castle. Before he sent off for nearby Londonderry to seek another shipping berth, Donald promised his kind hosts that if he ever had a son, he would name him Bruce, in their honor.

From his castle haven, Donald went to Londonderry in the North of Ireland, and shipped on the merchantman Huntington, of Leith, Scotland. He remained eight months in the coast trade along the west shore of Ireland. Next he served as an ordinary seaman on the steamship Shumlee, built on the Clyde for the China tea trade. He sailed from Glasgow through the Suez Canal to Hong Kong, stopping at Singapore. At Hong Kong, the crew was all paid off because the ship was sold, and Captain McDonald remained ashore there for three months. He finally shipped on the bark Ida Melmore for Yokohama and San Francisco.

Captain McDonald stayed in San Francisco for a month and then sailed on the full rigged British ship Fiona to Hull, England. The Fiona carried a cargo of wheat and took 155 days to arrive at her port. When he arrived at Hull, Captain McDonald immediately traveled by rail to Edinburg and back to Glasgow. From there he went to Downhill caste to visit Sir Harvey and Lady Bruce for two weeks.

His pleasant visit ended, Captain McDonald returned to Glasgow and shipped for Melbourne, Australia, upon the full rigged ship Ben Crughen. He arrived safely in Melbourne and spent sixty days in the gold diggings south of Botany Bay. From

Sydney, New South Wales, he went on board the ship Hereward that carried a cargo of coal to San Francisco, and from there returned to London, England, the trip taking 140 days.

After a stay in London, Captain McDonald shipped on the bark Shiner of Glasgow, which went on a voyage to Negapatam, Malay peninsula, then to Calcutta. From Calcutta he went to Liverpool and from Liverpool he went by rail to Glasgow. After another short visit with his friends at Downhill castle, he shipped from Glasgow to Montreal on the St. Patrick of the Allan line.

Now, it seems that Captain McDonald paused to take stock of his career. Between 1878 and 1881, he had circumnavigated the globe twice. He had studied navigation and earned his official papers as an able-bodied seaman and navigator. He decided to change directions . Now the wind would have a fresh water instead of a salt water feel to it. On April 2, 1881, he sailed on the St. Patrick from Glasgow, arriving back home in Montreal early in May. After a shore visit at his home in North East, Captain McDonald began his career on the Great Lakes.

In 1882 Captain McDonald shipped before the mast on the schooner Speedwell, and after four months he left her to go one trip on the schooner Mystic Star to Chicago. From her he went to the schooner Wells Burt, bound for Buffalo, and then obtained a watchman's berth on the steamer Havana, of the Cleveland Transportation Company. That winter he was shopkeeper on the Havana, and others of the same fleet.

The next season he was wheelsman on the Havana part of the time, and of the steamer E.B. Hale, of the Bradley fleet, the remainder of the time. During the winter of 1883 he obtained a license as first-class pilot from Captain Ben Stannard, local inspector of Cleveland. The captain served on schooners and steamers in a variety of capacities before receiving his license as a first-class pilot.

For the season of 1884, Captain McDonald served as second mate of the steamer Vienna, of the Cleveland Transportation Company, and in 1885 filled the same berth in the Sparta. In August of 1885 he became the second mate of the steamer Ohio, owned by Ryan & Johnson of Sandusky Ohio. For the next three seasons he was mate of the Ohio, and in 1889, mate of the Spokane. In 1890 he served as mate of the Wiley M. Egan, of the Fitzgerald fleet and in 1891, filled the birth of mate of the Kalagua which was owned by the Cleveland Cliffs Iron Company and commanded by Captain John Lowe. In 1892 he was mate of the Aurora and in

1893 he went ashore to work in real estate and fire insurance at North East.

In 1894, Captain McDonald commanded the Nyanza of the McBrier fleet out of Erie, Pennsylvania. In 1896, he was appointed master of the Emily P. Weeks when the McBrier group purchased her. In 1897, the ship's name was changed to the Sevona. She was to be the captain's final ship, but he had no premonition of going to the bottom of Lake Superior with his ship. He was enjoying his land and sea life too much to dwell on thoughts of lake storms and wrecks.

In the midst of his voyages, Captain McDonald had found time to establish a land life for himself. In 1888, he married Jessie M. Town and eventually they had two sons. True to his promise, the captain named their first son Bruce, in honor of Sir Harvey Bruce of Downhill Castle. The McDonalds named their second son Jay.

Every winter, Great Lakes vessels were ice bound and laid up for the season, so Captain McDonald found other things to occupy him on land. He and several fellow North East citizens loved to race with their sleighs on Main Street. The sport grew to be so popular that the town council passed an ordinance reserving Main Street for racing from 1:30 to 3:30 every afternoon, snow conditions permitting. The captain was outgoing, big, hearty, energetic and friendly. He was active in civic and church affairs and an entertaining host at many social gatherings during the winter. His activities were often reported in the columns of the local papers, the North East Sun, and the North East Breeze.

Captain McDonald also enjoyed land activity that proved to be profitable. He founded his own real estate firm and entered the grape growing business. He became a grape grower, buying into a boom in vineyard properties along the lake shore between Erie and Buffalo. In 1891 he purchased eleven acres of vineyard property east of Erie on the Buffalo Road. The French had introduced grapes to the new world when they established a settlement at Franklin, Pennsylvania 150 years ago. The Pennsylvania grape belt extended from Harbor Creek near Erie to Silver Creek, New York. Varieties of grapes flourishing in the grape belt included the Catawba, Sweet water and Malagas.

Captain McDonald had to entrust his acres to the care of a neighboring grower while he sailed the lakes, but he tended the grapes in spirit and supervised their growing and marketing. His neighbor shared one third of the crop revenue for his work on the captain's acres. As the captain's grape farming experience grew, so did

his farming revenue. In 1893, Captain McDonald was excited to note that his and other North East grapes were sailing the ocean as he once had.

On August 10, 1893, the Erie Dispatch noted that North East grapes were being sent to England as an experiment. The Liverpool car sold for 39 cents per basket and the London car from 45 to 57 cents. The freight from Pennsylvania to England was about 15 cents a basket, nearly 10 cents less than it cost to Seattle, Washington. The Dispatch said, "It goes without saying that the success of the Liverpool and London experiment is of much importance to the grape growers along the lake shore. The broad new field for marketing grapes must certainly have a tendency to enhance the future price in the Chautauqua belt. The sale in Europe will net some 6 or 7 cents more per basket than the fruit marketed this season in America."

The Dispatch also said the more than 25 years had gone by without a single failure of the grape crop in Northeast, and "now there is a good showing for a fine yield of fruit this coming fall."

The close of the 1893 season saw more than a million baskets of grapes shipped at North East - which did not include those marketed in wagons. Some of the vineyards yielded so bountiful that the fruit brought over a hundred dollars an acre. "The total amount of cash that has come into the Chautauqua and North East grape belt from the sale of grapes the 1893 season was about half a million dollars" said the Dispatch.

The captain's real estate ventures also profited. The Dispatch said, "Never were real estate transfers so lively here as during the past winter and spring. Never was there so much building and rebuilding and beautifying of private residences as at present."

During the winter of 1901-1902, Captain McDonald sold twenty-eight farms and finally in 1905, he joyfully moved his family out to his farm, which he had named "Snug Harbor." Throughout the winter he envisioned fragrant grape vines blooming on his eleven acres, even though he would not be home for the September harvest.

But that year, 1905, proved to be a little different for Captain McDonald. He enjoyed his grapes a little longer than usual because of his ship, the Sevona. Early in 1905, the Sevona went to the Buffalo dry dock to be lengthened to 72 feet. In the marine world, this was a time of lengthening boats to keep them competitive with the new generation of longer vessels. Workers made other improvements on the



Sevona such as new boilers and an electric lighting system with a single generator for power. Her tonnage capacity was increased to 4,800 compared to her previous 3,300 tons.



In the meantime, Captain McDonald worked on his grapevines until June 29, 1905, when the Sevona was ready to sail. The Erie Evening Herald reported that she was "practically a new boat." She loaded her first cargo of the season, hard coal taken on at the Lackawanna dock in Buffalo. She hauled iron ore from Lake Superior ports to Buffalo, Erie, or Cleveland, returning with coal. She also took "guests"- relatives or friends of either the owners or Captain McDonald. The guests snapped pictures which always showed Captain McDonald wearing a derby hat.

On August 24, 1905, the Sevona took on her last car of coal in preparation for a voyage up the lakes to Duluth, Minnesota. Her owner James McBrier ushered two young ladies aboard. The ladies, Kate Spencer, and Lillian Jones were both from Erie and family friends of the McBriers. Owner McBrier stayed aboard as far as Marine City, Michigan, along the St. Clair River. Then, he left his guests in care of the genial Captain McDonald.

The voyage to Duluth proved exciting to Kate and Lillian. They quickly became friends with the other two women aboard, Mrs. William Phillipie, wife of the chief engineer, and Louise Cluckey, second cook and wife of the steward, C.H. Cluckey. The weather remained balmy all of the way up the lakes and the Sevona arrived at Duluth on Monday, August 28, 1905, which happened to be Captain McDonald's 45th birthday.

The Sevona had to be unloaded of her coal cargo and the hold swept clean before she could be loaded with a special grade of ore consigned for Cleveland. The passengers went sightseeing in Duluth and Superior and lounged around the deck in warm weather while they waited.

Chief engineer Phillipie recorded in his log that the Sevona departed the ore dock on Friday September 1, 1905, at 6:03 p.m. For a time, Captain McDonald practiced shooting with the girls, using a 22-caliber target rifle he had bought in

Duluth for his son Bruce. But by the time dusk settled over the lake, the wind had quickened and the waves picked up speed. By now, The Sevona sat with the Apostle Islands off to the starboard and the Devil's Island Light a pinpoint over the rolling waves. At 9:00 Captain McDonald went aft to consult with chief engineer Phillipie.

None of the mariners on Lake Superior on the night of September 1, 1905, dreamed that a fierce storm had formed, descended over the steamer tracks, and was about to savage vessels steaming over the surface of Lake Superior. Before midnight, the winds had grown to gale strength and whipped the waves into watery mountains.

At two o'clock Saturday morning, Captain McDonald stood watching the waves break over the Sevona's bow and wash over her deck. The Sevona had passed Devil's Island, some 68 miles out from the Allouez Bay dock, and beyond Outer Island, the easternmost of the Apostle group. The storm raged so violently that Captain McDonald decided to turn the Sevona around and try to find shelter behind one of the Apostles.

He turned the Sevona around and retraced her course. Pursued by billowing waves, he didn't find shelter. At 5:45 a.m., Steward Cluckey came into the dining room and told everyone to put on their life preservers. Meanwhile, the captain and the watchmen tried to see the Raspberry Island Light through the wind and rain. The light towered 72 feet above the water, but they couldn't spot it in the mix of rain, wind, and spray. Captain McDonald desperately searched for the lee of one of the Apostle Islands, he didn't care which one.

Captain McDonald almost escaped Sand Island Shoal, a wicked granite ridge which had sixteen feet of water over it in good weather. This weather was anything but good, and the wind had whipped the water into waves that uncovered the ridge. The Sevona struck the shoal and broke in two.

The after end of the Sevona seemed to be firmly planted on the shoal and temporarily the cabin offered protection from the wind and cold, so Captain McDonald ordered the ladies and crew out of the lifeboats and into the dining room. He detailed two men to keep the lifeboats from being smashed against the hull. He ordered the distress signal to be blown on the whistle, hoping that the light keeper on Sand Island would hear and telephone Bayfield for a rescue tug. The whistle blew only briefly, because the water in the boiler room put out the fires.

Emanuel Luick, keeper of the Sand Island light, one of the six lighthouses built on the Apostles to guide ships through or around the islands, heard the whistle. But keeper Luick couldn't do anything about it. The one small boat he had was a skiff, which would not have lasted in the water. The light did not have a telephone so that Keeper Luick could call the authorities in Bayfield for help. It was now seven o'clock on Saturday morning and still no sign of rescue craft.

Instead of dying down, the storm seemed to grow in intensity and power. By 9 o'clock the water had washed away the skylight, and water was knee high in the boat. By 11 o'clock, the water burst in and the stern of the Sevona listed to starboard. The doors were so battered and twisted that the only way out of the collapsing dining room was through the starboard windows.

Once again, while Mr. Phillipie directed, the four ladies were lowered into the large lifeboat. Adam Fiden took the tiller, and Adam's son deckhand Nick Fiden, climbed in too. Joining them were steward Cluckey and firemen Otto Schmidt, Neil Nelson and Gretten Retner. Charlie Scouller took charge of the small boat and joining him were William Long, Paul Stockel, Edgar Ryder, George Slade and one-armed oiler, Harry Van Vlack. Phillipie and Fiden tried to maneuver the large lifeboat toward the bow to pick up Captain McDonald and the other six men, but the waves rolled completely over the broken hull, and drove the lifeboats steadily away.

The larger boat with Mrs. Cluckey taking a turn at the oars and the two young lady passengers bailing, reached the mainland of Wisconsin, fourteen miles from Bayfield. The smaller boat, with deck hand Charlie Scouller standing at the tiller and one-armed Harry Van Vlack bailing with his cap, rammed ashore on Sand Island.

After landing on the shore, the eleven from the boat in charge of engineer Adam Fiden encountered a homesteader hunting for a missing cow out in the wind and rain. He led them through the mud and rain and rushing streams to a lumber camp. The lumbermen welcomed them and sat them by hot stoves while the cook prepared food for them. The crew and passengers ate and slept. They had arrived at the lumber camp at 7:30 p.m. on Saturday - 13 and a half hours after the Sevona had been stuck on Sand Island Shoal.

The storm still raged. Rain beat down and the streams continued to rise. The storm swept the length of Lake Superior, building up mountainous waves that swallowed ships. Before it abated, the storm would claim 43 lives.

Because of the storm, chief engineer Phillipie couldn't travel to Bayfield on Saturday night, but managed to arrange for a lumberman with a horse and wagon to start out early Sunday morning. The trip took nearly all day and it was five o'clock Sunday afternoon when the fishing tug Harrow left Bayfield with a worried chief engineer Phillipie pacing the pilothouse. He hoped against hope that the forward end of the Sevona would still be impaled on the Sand Island Shoal, with Captain McDonald fuming impatiently in the pilothouse.

When they finally reached the shoal, chief engineer Phillipie saw the after end of the Sevona battered and flattened, but the forward end was gone. There were no signs of life on Sand Island and the seas were so high that landing on it to search was impossible.

What chief engineer Phillipie didn't know was that after Charlie Scouller and the men in the small boat had rammed ashore on Sand Beach, they quickly found an abandoned cabin and built a fire to dry their clothes. A nearby Norwegian homesteader gave them food and water and after an exploratory trip, brought them the sad news that the Sevona had disappeared.

On Monday morning, Charlie and his men heard a whistle blowing and ran down to the beach. The lake had calmed and the tug R.W. Currie had come looking for them. They boarded the tug and joined in the search for the rest of the passengers and crew of the Sevona. They found wheelsman Nels Salverson, lifeless on the beach on Sunday afternoon. Shortly after that, they found Captain McDonald lying on the sand. Before dark, two more of the Sevona's forward crew were found - first mate Louis Darwin and wheelsman Otto Willett.

Captain McDonald had been known to be carrying about \$1,500 with him, but half buried in the sand near his body, the rescuers found just a single dollar bill. The captain was as penniless as when he had been shipwrecked from the stricken brig Hilding.

Light keeper Emanuel Luick of Sand Island who had witnessed the wreck and heard the distress signals, pointed out that if he had possessed a telephone he could have called Bayfield and summoned a rescue tug in time to save everybody. He said that he had seen Captain McDonald and his men leave the bow of the Sevona later on Saturday on an improvised raft. It broke up in the surf while still distant from the island. He said that he could have saved them if the lifesaving station had

been equipped with a larger boat and he had another man to help launch it.

The Captain made his last voyage home to North East. Flags hung at half-mast and the entire community turned out to pay their respects. Many business closed for the afternoon and hundreds of people gathered at "Snug Harbor" to say goodbye to the captain. As the captain was being buried, horses clop clopped fragrant wagon loads of grapes into town. Captain Donald Sutherland McDonald was finally home at Snug Harbor for his grape harvest.

Captain Donald Sutherland McDonald is buried alongside his wife Jessie and his son W. Jay McDonald in North East Cemetery, North East, Pennsylvania.

1870 census in North East PA

Name Age

Jas McDonald 41

Margrett McDonald 33

William McDonald 12

James McDonald 8

Donald McDonald 10

John McDonald 4

Elizabeth McDonald 1

## Sevona Sidebars

The Sevona left Allouez, Wisconsin on September 1, 1905, carrying a cargo of iron ore and bound for Erie, Pennsylvania. She carried a crew of twenty men and four women. Late that night a storm roared through the area, the wind reaching gale force strength by midnight.

On September 2, 1905, at about 6 a.m., the Sevona ran aground on Sand Island Shoal, and broke in half. No other ship was in the vicinity to aid the Sevona and the crew members on the stern section boarded the lifeboats. Crew members on the bow section were separated from the lifeboats and hastily built a raft out of hatch covers and doors. They all drowned in the storm.

In 1909, the United States Army Corps of Engineers worried about the Sevona navigational hazard blew it up with dynamite. Following the explosion, salvagers recovered parts of the ship and brought them to shore. The remainder became a popular site for scuba diving. The Wisconsin Historical Society, the Apostle

Islands National Lakeshore, and the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources jointly manage the wreck site. The Sevona wreckage site was added to the National Register of Historic places in 1993.

## The Scanner

Volume 29, No. 4, January 1997- An Excerpt from an article about the Emily P. Weed/Sevona by Robert J. MacDonald

In 1897, EMILY P. WEED underwent a change of name, becoming (b) SEVONA. It has been suggested that the ship may have been named for a park in Italy, but we have no idea why James McBrier would ever choose a name such as that for his flagship, and we suspect that there must have been some other derivation for the name. We will never know for sure. What we do know, however, is that SEVONA continued to carry cargoes such as iron ore, coal, grain, copper bars and package freight. Sometimes she would sail with barrels of flour in the hold and cedar shingles on deck.

It was reported during the spring of 1897 that SEVONA's three boilers were removed and two others installed, not only for fuel economy but also to achieve a saving in weight that would permit the steamer to carry more cargo. It also was reported that, in May of 1897, Buffalo shipyard workers went to Erie and made "some additional changes in her machinery". We would like to be able to describe these new boilers for our readers, but the fact is that we can find no information about them at all. In fact, the 1899 Great Lakes Register (Bureau Veritas) still showed the ship carrying her original boilers. This may just have been a paper error, but that same register did show the boat under the new name which she also received in 1897, and indicated that she last had been "seen" (inspected) in May 1897, so it seems peculiar that the new boilers were not also recorded.

In any event, it was at about this same time that SEVONA underwent a change that did make her considerably more modern in appearance. The second and fourth masts were removed completely. They served no useful purpose anyway, and so their loss did not affect the ship's operation, except to make her less likely to foul any shore-mounted loading or unloading equipment. She also may have run for a season or two as SEVONA with the dark-coloured spar deck cabins, but then the upper portion of each house became white, and only a dark band remained near deck level. Only the boiler house remained all dark.

During 1898, the Detroit Dry Dock Company drew up some preliminary plans for the lengthening of SEVONA's hull. For some unknown reason, this particular

project was never followed through. It does, however, confirm in what high esteem her owner held SEVONA, especially since much larger steel-hulled vessels then were being built by lake shipyards. SEVONA appears to have been free of accidents while operating under her new name until an incident in 1900. A press item, however, was datelined Detroit, June 29, 1900: "The steamer SEVONA, bound up, collided with the schooner ISHPEMING, also bound up, off Grosse Pointe. The ISHPEMING is damaged about the bows and the fore rigging is carried away. The SEVONA is not injured. The ISHPEMING came here for repairs. "

The January 5, 1905, issue of "The Marine Review" reported that "... during the past week, the American Ship Building Co. received instructions to lengthen the SEVONA... at the Buffalo yard. By mid-March, the company's No. 1 drydock at Buffalo was readied to commence the lengthening of SEVONA. This was the first major ship lengthening ever carried out at a Buffalo shipyard.

When the work was finished, SEVONA was 372.5 feet in length, and her tonnage was 3166 Gross and 2258 Net. Temporary Enrollment Certificate No. 76 was issued for the ship at Buffalo on June 5, 1905, but this was surrendered after the ship made her delivery voyage from the Buffalo shipyard. Permanent Certificate No. 84 was issued to document enrollment of SEVONA at Cleveland, Ohio, on 8th June 1905, and it showed that the steamer's home port was Fairport, Ohio. (We have commented many times in the past on the apparent interchangeability of Cleveland and Fairport as registry/home ports for locally-owned lake freighters. ) In any event, the sole owner of SEVONA was shown as the Pennsylvania Steamship Company, of Mentor, Ohio, as sworn for the enrollment by the company's 2nd vice-president, who just happened to be Capt. John Mitchell, himself a prominent vessel owner and designer. McBrier was still the principal of the new owning company.

Captain Beggs, who was master of Mitchell's steamer MAJOR, (a) JOHN MITCHELL (I)(02), was asked by his friend, Captain McDonald, to come over and look at the lengthened SEVONA. On viewing her, he stated: "I don't like her; she is like a snake". Presumably, he was referring to her relatively narrow beam for a ship of that length.

On Wednesday, June 28, 1905, the rebuild SEVONA loaded her first cargo, hard coal, at the Lackawanna docks. More uneventful trips were made during the summer of 1905, but the coal which she loaded on August 24th at Cleveland for Duluth would be the last cargo that SEVONA ever delivered. Aboard, in addition to SEVONA's regular crew of 21, were two women passengers and the wife of the

chief engineer, William Phillipie, of Buffalo. A fourth woman was Louise Cluckey, second cook and the wife of the steward.

There was a delay of several days in obtaining a cargo of iron ore out of the Lakehead and, accordingly, SEVONA did not clear the piers at Superior until 6: 03 p. m. on Friday, September 1st. (There are those who would suggest that she never should have sailed on a Friday and, in retrospect, it would have been much better had she not sailed. ) SEVONA was bound for Erie. She cleared Superior just ahead of the Provident Steamship Company's JAMES H. REED and, as the ships passed, their masters exchanged greetings. The REED's master later said that their normal trip to the Soo would have taken 28 hours, but on this occasion that same trip took 60 hours. The REED would not deliver her 7, 800-ton ore cargo at Erie until September 7th.

The weather on Lake Superior early on the evening of September 1st was generally favourable. There was no wind, but a heavy ground swell was running. Captain McDonald went aft about 9: 30 p. m. to see the chief engineer and remarked that they were liable to get some sea when they got down a little further. In fact, they would soon find themselves sailing into the teeth of a vicious northeasterly gale. Finding that the situation was deteriorating rapidly, at about 2: 00 a. m. on September 2nd, the master alerted the passengers that he was going to turn the ship around, and that they should put things so they would not fall on the deck with the movement of the ship. At 4: 00 a. m., he sent four men to assist the passengers back to the after cabin. With one man on each side, the inner one holding on to a life line stretched between the winches, they quickly escorted the two passengers to the safety of the dining room.

At 3: 00 a. m., the captain had passed the word for the chief to stand by in the engine room as they made the turn to come about. The turn successfully accomplished, the chief went up on deck to look around and found Mate Darwin standing atop No. 10 hatch; he was considering changing the tarps on the three after hatches because they were old, but the chief talked him out of doing it under those conditions. The Anchor Line passenger steamer TIONESTA saw the lights of SEVONA after she had made her turn. Someone else "saw" her, too, but under different circumstances.

Captain W. W. Wilkins, of Erie, was sailing McBrier's steamer NYANZA at this time; he later indicated that on two occasions during the night of September 1-2, he had dreamed that the SEVONA was in trouble. At 5: 30 a. m., SEVONA started to pitch heavily. At 5: 45 a. m., the engine room received a signal for one-half speed. About five minutes later, the ship struck the Sand Island Shoals in the Apostle Islands, with a "terrific splitting crash", and two more followed in quick



succession. After she made her turn to run back for shelter, it would appear that SEVONA had deviated to port from the prescribed course, and found herself in shoal water. The chief engineer, in a statement which he gave later, said that he felt that SEVONA had broken at No. 4 hatch on the port side when she struck the shoal.

The rope to the valve of SEVONA's steam whistle was tied down to sound a signal of distress, and the whistle blew until all of the steam was gone, but there was no one to render assistance in that weather. When the first lifeboat was being lowered, the chief engineer saw Captain McDonald and Mate Darwin standing in the lee of the pilothouse. He waved to them to come aft before the break in the hull spread, but they paid no heed.

The second lifeboat was launched with some difficulty as they could not lower it from the port side and they had to drag it over to the opposite side. A water tank had to be removed to make passage for the boat across the deck, and the men also had to cut away the lashings of some of the stays to the smokestack. (This most likely is why the stack was washed away by the seas, whereas the mainmast remained standing on the wreck, as did the battered steel boiler house.

The last words heard from the captain, speaking through a megaphone, were "hang on as long as possible". Captain McDonald had required frequent boat drills aboard SEVONA, and the crew who were aft on the wreck found this experience to be of great benefit to them in their time of distress. Unfortunately, however, all of the able seamen were up forward on the wreck with the captain and the mate. After the boats were lowered, some of the crew tried holding them off the wreck and keeping them bailed out.

It was then decided, however, to have everyone come back aboard and stay as long as possible in the shelter of the dining room. But this safe haven did not last for long, as the wooden cabin started to go to pieces with the pounding of the seas, and the skylight broke inward. Those inside had to leave by climbing through the windows on the lee side of the cabin, as it was impossible to go through the door on account of the heavy seas.

Deckhand Charles Scouller, of North East, Pennsylvania, took charge of the smaller lifeboat. He was the only one of the six men in the boat who had any experience in handling small boats, and one of them, oiler Harry Van Vlack, from Erie, had an artificial arm and could not assist in rowing but could only help with the bailing. Scouller found that he could not ship the lifeboat's rudder, as the pintles would not fit properly into the gudgeons, so he threw it away and used an oar to

steer the boat. The larger boat soon was lost from sight, and Scouller and his crew tried rowing to the lee of York Island, but they could make no headway.

Accordingly, Scouller turned the boat and ran with the sea toward Sand Island, which lay approximately 1 5/8 miles from the wreck. They managed to round a rocky point and enter a small bay, and they went the last few hundred feet riding one great breaker. These six men made it safely to the shore of Sand Island, and on Monday, September 4th, they were taken off by the tug R. W. CURRIE.

The second and larger lifeboat cast off from the wreck at about 11: 00 a. m. on Saturday, and it contained eleven people, including the four women. Assistant engineer Adam Fiden took charge of this boat. Drenched by the rain and the waves, they rowed and bailed well into the afternoon before the boat landed in Little Sand Bay on the Wisconsin mainland. They ran in headed to the beach, but the boat turned over sideways and threw everyone out. Nevertheless, all eleven persons made it safely to the shore, and the group then made its way overland two miles to a camp.

One of the local residents went a half mile to telephone Bayfield for assistance, but found that the wires were down as a result of the storm. At 7: 00 a. m. the next day, Sunday, Chief Engineer Phillipie, with a man and a team, started out for Bayfield, which lay twelve miles distant. He arrived there at 2: 30 p. m., hired the tug W. G. HARROW, and sent a telegraph message to James McBrier in Erie to inform him of the fate of the SEVONA.

Phillipie left Bayfield on the tug at 5: 00 p. m. for the wreck. No one was found on board, and the forward end of the ship, thought to be so secure, had broken off and sunk. Meanwhile, Captain McDonald, the two mates, two wheelmen and two watchmen had attempted to reach the shore of Sand Island using some of the wooden hatch covers as rafts, but they all were overturned in the breakers and all seven men were drowned. Their bodies subsequently were recovered.

It was determined that Captain McDonald had left the SEVONA carrying approximately \$1, 500 in cash with him, but when his body was recovered, only a single bill was found near him. A few weeks later, a resident of Bayfield was arrested and charged with robbery. Captain McDonald had only just celebrated his 45th birthday on August 28th, 1905, and he had spoken of retiring to his farm, Snug Harbor, located just east of the town of North East, Pennsylvania.

Keeper Lewich of the Sand Island Lighthouse saw the SEVONA go on the reef and heard her signal of distress, but was powerless to render aid. There was no telephone from the light station to the mainland, and the keeper felt that if he had had a good boat and some extra help, he could have gone to the wreck and rescued

the seven men who were lost. Under the circumstances, however, all he could do was watch.

After the weather improved, and while the wreck remained a novelty, the little steamer SKATER did a good business running excursions out to the SEVONA, charging fifty cents per person for the trip. Several photographs of the battered stern section of the SEVONA, all that was left above water, show sightseers standing on the deck.

In later years, a local resident who had been out to the wreck recalled that she had an uneasy feeling whilst aboard, because she could feel movement of the wreck whenever any sea disturbed it. The Reid Wrecking Company, of Port Huron and Sarnia, eventually purchased the wreck of SEVONA from the underwriters and, using the big steam tug OTTAWA, (a) BOSCOBEL (03), built in 1881, recovered the boilers and some of SEVONA's other machinery. Reid also worked periodically on SEVONA during the 1906, 1907 and 1908 seasons. The wreck was dynamited by the U. S. Army Corps of Engineers during the summer of 1909, and more scrap metal was retrieved from the wreck site during 1917 by a Duluth diver, J. B. Wanless.

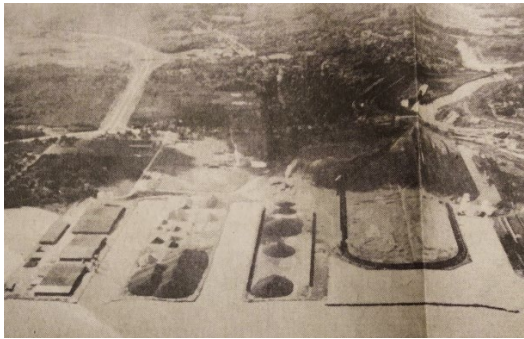
## The Sevona Memorial Cottage



Sam Fifield, a former Lieutenant governor of Wisconsin, owned a summer resort on Sand Island and salvaged some of the Sevona wreckage. In 1905, he built a house on Sand Island with the salvaged material, naming it Sevona Memorial Cottage. Sevona Memorial Cottage was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1976 and to the Wisconsin State Register

of Historic Places in 1989.

# Pinney Dock



Pinney Dock Back in the Day



Pinney Dock 2023

Specifications: 310 acres located on Lake Erie Storage Capacity: 200 acres of open storage (seven million tons) 400,000 sq. ft. of warehouse space 7,500 NT of bulk cargo silo storage

Commodities Handled: Iron Ore, Limestone, Salt, Fertilizer, Pig Iron, Steel, various Bulk Commodities and General Cargoes

Access: Marine service via three fully dredged slips and six docks totaling 15,000 linear feet of vessel berth space (28' draft) Accessible by Lake Erie; Highway access from Ohio SR11, Interstate 90 and Ohio Turnpike; Rail access from Norfolk Southern and CSX Terminal Services: Loading and Unloading Services by Vessel, Tank Truck and Tank Car Approximately 49,000 Linear Feet of Rail Trackage Available Unit Train

Capabilities Terminal Address 1149 East Fifth Street Ashtabula, OH 44005-0041 440-964-7186 Business Address One Terminal Road Carteret, NJ 07008 732-541-5161.

Kinder Morgan provides energy, transportation, and storage services in a safe, efficient, and environmentally responsible manner for the benefit of people, communities, and businesses. Delivering Energy to Improve Lives and Create a better world.

Printed by Pinney Dock editor: Kathy Warnes [kathywarnes@gmail.com](mailto:kathywarnes@gmail.com)