

John MacDonald came to Gananoque from New York in 1817 to join his brother Charles McDonald. Charles had begun a lumbering and general store business in 1809 and it was a prosperous merchantile. John became a full partner and the business name was C and J McDonald. The business expanded and eventually controlled a large part of the lumber trade of the Gananoque River having controlled the water power along the west side of the Gananoque River.

By 1824 the two brothers had a large amount of thriving businesses including a flour mill, saw mill, grain mill, homes, cattle etc. Charles died in 1826 but John maintained the business that Charles once began. In 1831, the company sent 10,000 logs of sawn timber to Montreal and Quebec, 20,000 barrels of flour and 10,000 bushels of wheat.

The McDonald House was built in 1831 when John McDonald married Henrietta Maria Mallory. He was 43 at the time. Henrietta was a step granddaughter of Colonel Joel Stone. The McDonald house had a number of formal rooms that lent themselves to contemporary life.

Reception and Kitchen

What is used as the kitchen and reception area for the Town today is thought to be the parlour and drawing room in the day. Not too much information has been recorded about this area.

The Town Hall has seven fireplaces in the building. The portrait above the mantle in this room is Williams Byers, first Mayor of Gananoque.

Treasurer's Office

The Treasurer's Office today, was once the original dining room with a chandelier of crystal and frosted glass that was made in England circa 1945, as well as the fireplace with its one piece marble hearth stone. The ceiling was seen for the first time in many years during the summer of 1978 when the room was stripped of tiles and wallboard that had been applied in the 1950s. The grapevine and fern leaf medallion and cornices, though damaged, were sharp and clear and were expertly restored.

The desk is a late regency style circa 1849 and the bookcase came from Montreal circa 1840.

The gentleman over the fireplace is William Stone McDonald, a nephew of Henrietta and John. William eventually took over the business of C & J McDonald from his uncle in 1851. He ran it as C and J McDonald until 1852 when he changed the firm to William Stone McDonald.

Accounts

This room was originally used by the McDonald family as the kitchen and was connected to the dining room with a door. A wall has since been placed to accommodate offices. When the room was stripped in 1978, a diagonal line of darkened brick on the inside wall clearly indicated that there was a secondary staircase.

This room and the next door room were wide opened and had been used as a court room.

Center Hall and Staircases

There have been minor alterations since 1831 to this area of the home. The spacious hall and wide entrance is grand. The ceiling mouldings and medallions here are all original. There are cherubs in the centre of the flat arches of the downstairs and upstairs halls and lion heads in the corner boxes of the door frames. This is also the original staircase.

On the wall are Shakesperean pictures published by the Shakespeare Society in London, 1879 – 1905 with newer frames

The traditional wallpaper is typical of a house in the 1830s along with the tables on the first floor and the sofas on the second floor.

Hanging on the west wall of the upstairs hall, are pictures of all the previous Mayors of Gananoque.

Council Chambers

This was originally the ballroom or double drawing room. It can be divided into two rooms by pulling across the tall mahogany doors. The dolphin arm type chandelier, seen both in this room and the double room, has been rewired and restored to provide brilliant light when necessary. The mahogany dining table with many leaves was put together and refinished by local craftsmen. The chairs around the table are not antique, but reproductions from the era of the house. The fireplace in this room as well as the next room is original as is the mantle. The lamps on the mantle are “argand” lamps from Montreal, circa 1820

The portraits above the mantle are our hosts, John and Henrietta McDonald and the second portrait is of Charles McDonald, great-nephew of John McDonald who eventually bought the house and gave it to the Town. The portrait of Charles was given to the Town in 1979 by relatives, the Belleville family.

The map on the wall is one of the earliest maps of Gananoque, made in 1885.

CAO's Office

In all likelihood this room was the master bedroom, it is now the CAO's Office. The large leather top oak partner's desk was made in Ireland in 1840. Most of the furnishings in this office are of the 1830s including the book case. A set of books published in 1882 and once owned by Charles McDonald is in the bookcase. The Deputy Clerk's office was once a large bathroom. And again in this room we see the dolphin arm type chandelier.

The portrait above the mantel is Colonel Joel Stone, founder of Gananoque. It is estimated that the portrait was done in about 1790. Colonel Stone remained loyal to King George III and was granted the lands that Gananoque sites on in recognition of his loyal service to the crown. He took control of the area in 1792 and started clearing and settling the land. Colonel Stone was born in 1749 and died in 1833

On the table is a wooden writing desk that once belonged to John McDonald. It's much like a briefcase today.

Third floor

It was common for wealthy families to have a female servant around the age of 14 or 15. It is thought that this room was used as servants quarters. In one of Henrietta's letters to John, while he was away on business in Montreal, she hoped that he would soon find her some red onion seed and another servant, preferably a 14 or 15 year old girl to help her with the baby.

School Room

The McDonald's opened their own school room to educate not only their own children but other children in the community.

The McDonald's had six children: Frances Georgiana, James Forsyth, Emma, John, Herbert Stone and Adelaide.

The wallpaper in this room is the original wallpaper and was handpainted. It has been restored by Queen's University students. The student desk on the left is the original and the one on the right is a copy. The teacher's desk, books, lamps, paintings, slates and other items are all original. The lamp on the teacher's desk is called a spirit lamp because the fluid in it is made up of turpentine and alcohol. It cannot be blown out but must be snuffed out.

John McDonald became involved in various projects including navigation projects for the dams and locks on the Gananoque River. A larger project was Commissioner for the Improvement of the St. Lawrence in 1836. The projects associated with this position included the Long Sault Canal near Cornwall and the extension to other sections of the river. This position proved to be a bickering and scandalous job and eventually the government ceased operations.

Politically, John McDonald was appointed a Legislative Councillor in 1839 until 1848 when he forfeited his seat for non-attendance. He was preoccupied with his business affairs and the St. Lawrence Canals were underway again and he found little time to attend Legislative Sessions after 184

John McDonald was born February 10th, 1787 and died January 18, 1860 at the age of 72.

Henrietta McDonald was born January 27th, 1807 and died April 9, 1900 at the age of 93. Henrietta lived in the house until her death.

In 1911, the house was deeded to the Town by Charles McDonald (nephew) provided that the house be used for public purposes. The house and grounds are to be maintained in a proper and creditable manner.

The house has been used for court, jail, library, Town Council meetings and today the Town Administration Offices.

In 1977 – 1979, major renovations and restorations were undertaken with the assistance of grants and donations. They were designed to bring out the best of the house. In 1978, the false ceilings (installed in 1950) were removed and the ceiling could be seen again.

A number of streets in Gananoque are named after John and Henrietta and their children.