

The Phoenix Hotel, built in 1885, was once a hot spot in downtown McDonough, until 1913, it became too hot and burned down. Unlike its namesake, the hotel was not rebuilt from the ashes. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rounds)



John Prindle Scott, below, famous composer and musician, lived in McDonough and often put on concerts for the locals. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rounds)

## Sylvanus Moore – McDonough's Founding Father

Sylvanus Moore, McDonough's first settler, married Elizabeth Curtis of Oxford in December of 1797. Their wedding trip consisted of the journey to their wilderness home.

Mr. Moore soon took over the agency of Ludlows lands in this town because Henry Ludlow, by dissipated habits, became incapacitated for that

trust. After the completion of the state road to Ithaca, he (Mr. Moore), opened an inn to accommodate the tide of emigrants who passed over it in search of homes in the Genesee country. Soon he needed to add on to his home. It was the first public inn in McDonough and was opened in 1799. Mr. Moore continued this hospitality for many years.

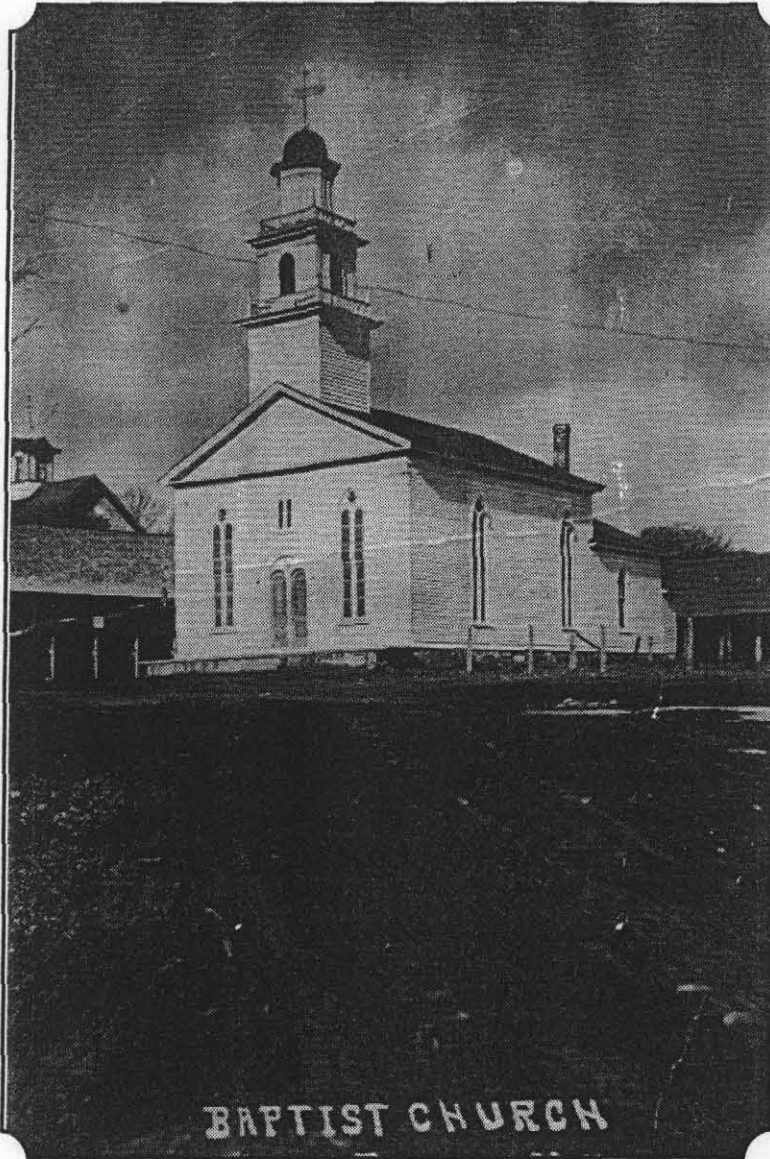
Having paid for his farm and having sons large enough to manage it, he gave them the farm and bought the Ludlow mill property together with 100 acres of land and so managed the mill. It was the first mill in the town and was purposed to help promote settlements in the locality. He soon rebuilt the mill and bought 380 more acres of land to supply lumber for the

mill. Continuing to invest in lands, Sylvanus Moore acquired 1,100 acres free from debt.

Mr. Moore was early commissioned captain of a military company and held his commission until he became the oldest member of his regiment. He represented the town as supervisor some eight or ten years and was magistrate for a number of

years. Sylvanus was an expert marksman and there is a story that he hit three deer with one shot, replenishing the meat tub and supplying his neighbors as well. Not bad shooting after a hard day's work.

"McDonough Anecdotes," Taken from James H. Smith's "History of Chenango and Madison Counties"



**T**he McDonough Baptist Church. Notice the adjoining sheds for horses and wagons. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rounds)

# McDonough's Quiet Country Atmosphere May Belie its Busy Past

By RUTH ROUNDS  
McDonough Town Historian

*(Taken in part from James H. Smith, "History of Chenango and Madison Counties," "French's Gazetteer," 1860 and "Directory Chenango County," 1869-70)*

**T**wo hundred years ago in the early spring, a young man came upon a small settlement which turned out to be Oxford. He had finally arrived at his destination after a long hard trek from Simsbury, Conn. As he trudged along he saw some Indians and there was smoke from scattered campfires. He was no doubt tired and hungry and a good hot cup of coffee would sure hit the spot.

He didn't get very far into the settlement before he heard coughing and soft moans. Sickness had somehow crept along the river bottoms. It was the fever. Now what would he do? Maybe he should just go back to Connecticut.

As he was planning his departure from this beautiful but fever afflicted area, a man approached him

"Hello, my name is Henry Ludlow and I understand you're looking for a place to settle down."

Shaking the proffered hand of friendship, the young man from Simsbury introduced himself. "Sylvanus Moore, here and yes, I am looking for a good place to settle and build a home." As the two men talked it was agreed they would set out to look at some land Mr. Ludlow had for sale.

Making their way into the dense wilderness they found directions by marked trees and Sylvanus did find a parcel of land that suited him. An agreement was made, provisions were

purchased with Mr. Moore's last few shillings and the first white settler of McDonough began the hard but exciting task of carving out a home and beginning a new settlement. This settlement began in 1795.

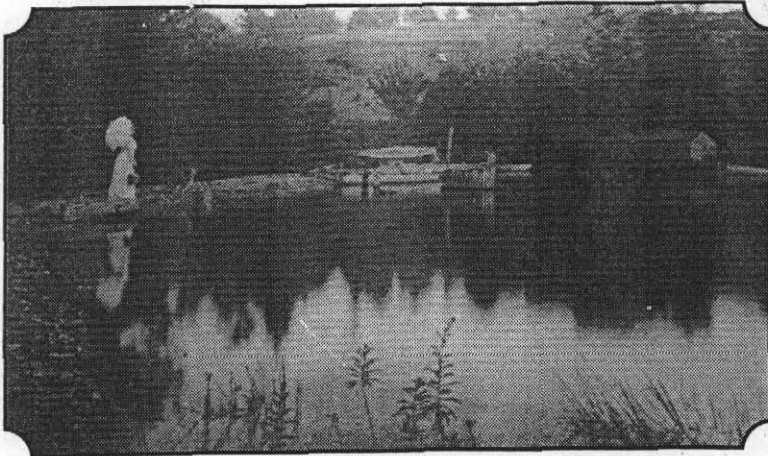
Others soon came along to join Sylvanus in settling this frontier. Some of those first adventurers were Captain Joshua Burke, Nathaniel Locke, Benjamin Ketchum and his brother-in-law, Benjamin Kenyon. Loring and Emory Willard also came along. Later, Locke lived in Oxford, Burke went back to Vermont and the Willards formed a settlement on Cayuga Lake. But Sylvanus Moore lived and died in McDonough around Lake Ludlow area.

Commodore Macdonough was a great naval hero who had, in the battle of Plattsburg, won a higher fame than any other naval commodore of the war - British or American - and down to the Civil War was the greatest figure in naval history. So on April 17, 1816 our town was set off from Preston and given the name Macdonough in honor of this great man.

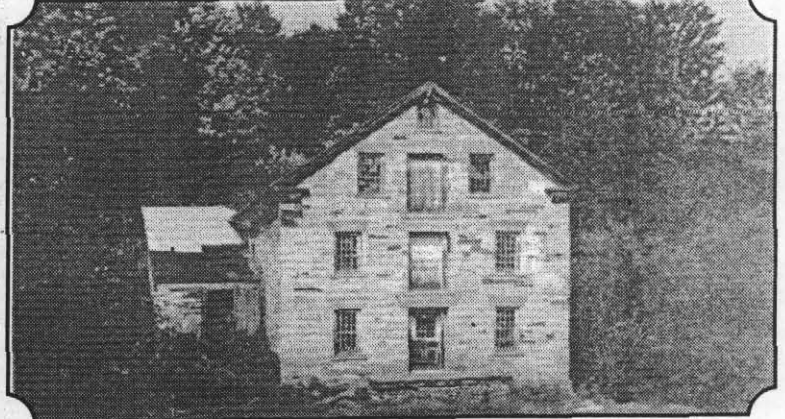
"What's so great about McDonough," you might ask, "that it should be named after a great hero?" Well sit back, put your feet up and I'll tell you all about it.

McDonough is an interior town with hills, ridges and valleys. It is well-drained by streams, basically the Genegantslet, Ludlow and Bowman. With a vast woodland and lakes, the natural resources were available for power. Rocks from the Catskill group provided a good source for quarries and hunting and fishing was a ready source for food and recreation. The land, being good for grazing, made dairy a chief branch of agriculture and in the 1800's McDonough boasted of three creameries. In 1858 we had 374 horses, 1,009 oxen, 1,535 cows, 2,143 sheep and 535 swine. We

CONTINUED ON PAGE 17



The blissful serenity of Geneganslet Lake, near the dam, circa 1900. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rounds)



The McDonough Grist Mill, built in 1820 by Gates Wilcox. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rounds)



The McDonough Union School was built in 1914 and functioned until 1964, when the schools merged with Oxford. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rounds)

## Floods, Fire Contributed to Erosion of McDonough's Industry and Business

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 16

had 177 bushels of winter grain, 18,274 bushels of spring grain, 4,448 1/2 bushels of potatoes, 16,153 bushels of apples, 164,985 pounds of butter, 1,805 pounds of cheese and 3,448 1/2 domestic cloths in yard. We also had industry such as sawmills, a gristmill, two tanneries, a woolen mill, a foundry and machine shop, two carriage shops, three blacksmith shops (two more in East McDonough), a tailor shop, a millinery shop, a shoe shop, an eye glasses shop, five stores, a paper mill and two hotels (one more in East McDonough). We also had doctors, a lawyer, carpenters, an undertaker, many farmers, a photographer, two post offices, a leather manufacturer and a feed store, at least two cooper shops, a cabinet and cheese box shop, two harness makers and shoemakers.

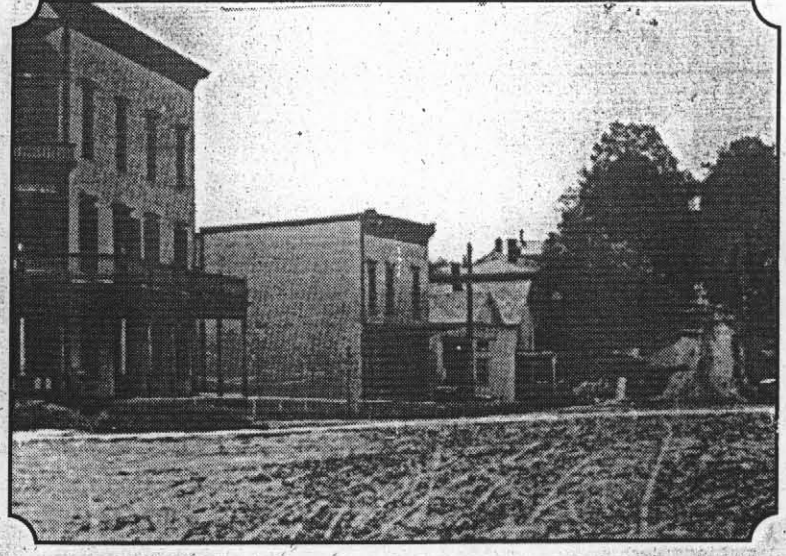
One could come to McDonough to do all manner of shopping, trading, see the doctor, get the mail, tend to any business needed, have dinner and stay over at the hotel, go to the springs spa and on Sunday, go to church. There was at least one in East McDonough (Free Will Baptist) and Baptist and Methodist

in McDonough Village. Later, there was an Episcopal Church too. A Presbyterian church was formed, but building wasn't completed. There were nine schools available to teach your children (supposing you moved here) and if your animals wandered off we had town pounds to keep them until claimed.

I know what you're thinking. "What in the world happened to all of it?," since much of it is gone. Well, there were two floods and the first one took out mills along the creek and the second one did much damage as well. We still had dairying and stores, a doctor and our churches, but we lost our big hotel owned by William Brown and it was replaced by "The Phoenix." Both hotels were lost by fire.

In the 1900's there was a sawmill, a battery box factory and we continued to have stores; Brown and Tucker and Emerson's General Store were the two main ones. Emerson's had a post office and telephone exchange. Tucker's store had a tin shop (with homemade sap buckets) and was well known for good cuts of meat. Tucker's store also had a post office at

CONTINUED ON PAGE 18



Postmaster and merchant Jacob P. Hill built Hill House in the 1830s. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rounds)

West Main Street, downtown McDonough, around the turn of the century. (Photo courtesy of Ruth Rounds)

# McDonough: Proud to Be in Chenango

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 17

one time. Both stores offered a good supply of general merchandise. The Morse and Purdy Feed Store supplied feed and other dry-good essentials.

Ford Factory Built Homes was a good source of employment in the 1900's, 1919-1979. It was the first in the country to make prefabricated, factory built buildings. We're sorry it closed and is no longer in business.

We had a wonderful school in town for many years and the whole town was saddened with it closed in 1964.

As we sit here quietly and reflect on what we once had, what was once here and now only a vision from the street recollection of by-gone

days, we could easily become discouraged. But that must never happen.

In 1998 we now have the "Bowman lake" public campsite and the private lakes of Genegantslet and Ludlow. We still have hunting and fishing and the "Finger Lakes Trail" runs through our town. We have a good general store in the village and a nice little store in East McDonough. We have a fine Italian restaurant and other small shops such as "Art Canor's Furniture" and "Wendy's Beauty Shop." We also have other small shops at people's homes. We have a bed and Breakfast place and a nice park and tennis and basketball courts as well as a small park in East McDonough. We have a good fire station and emergency

squad and a good town barn with dependable professional workers. We have an active grange, girl scouts (Brownies), a Senior Center, American Legion, a women's club, a recreation committee, an Improvement Committee and a food closet. We have a good post office and town meetings that people participate in. We have good bussing to a good school and we have fine churches. We can boast of good authors of books and other people talented in art, carving, crafts and music who grace our town.

Let's not forget the tallest living decorated Christmas tree in the area which illuminates and colors our crossroads during the Christmas season.

Any community has its share of

eye-sores and problems, but I think, in McDonough, the good far outweighs the bad. If you don't think so, I invite you to walk or slowly drive on Route 220 on the hill heading into McDonough from Smithville Flats and take a good look at the village with the church steeples, fields, cluster of houses and barns. Enjoy the view of rural beauty and breathe the air - no smog here.

Oft times, when driving from Oxford towards McDonough, I look out at the trees and countryside and try to envision what it must have been like for Sylvanus Moore to start out walking all alone with a hatchet, his clothes, a knife, fork and tin plate, now penniless, but determined to make a home, a life and help start a settlement. He was com-

mitted to make a good life in a beautiful, but untamed place though he had practically nothing to work with. I have to ask myself, "Can we do any less?"

As we celebrate the bicentennial of Chenango County and 182 years of being a town, we have a great opportunity to make a difference.

Sylvanus and Betsy Moore saw a potential and working with others helped to create a wonderful town. Now, we the people of McDonough in 1998 welcome our friends and neighbors near and far to come and visit, stay a while and really get to know us. We're a nice country town and we are proud to be a part of Chenango County.