People fascinate local historian

By MAGGIE HANNAH Herald staff writer

had an unusual name started one of Halton Hill's better known journalists on the road to public recognition, although his love of people did a lot to turn his research into something saleable.

John McDonald lived in Dolly Varden for 19 years and his curiosity grew until one day in I'm accessible," he says. 1971 when he decided to look into the background of the little community with the strange name. He went to the library expecting to pick up a book and find out about it. Neither Georgetown nor Acton library possessed what he wanted. He talked to Herald publisher Walter Bichn but newspaper files had little to offer either. He finaly began tracking down former residents of the area and listening to their memories and stories they had heard as children which were handed down from people who remember the Dol-

ty in its heyday. His research turned up two theories for the name. The first, which he has heard from several sources, says that it was named after a woman of ill repute who lived up in the hills near the Dolly and committed suicide by pouring kerusing on herself. The second is John's own theory and stems from the fact that many of the residents of the area come from a part of London, England described in Dicken's novel Barnaby Rudge. The leading female character in the novel was Dolly Varden and women wore Dolly Varden fashions right up into the early 1920s, he says. Thus he suspects that the community was named after Dolly.

LIME KILNS

The community centred around lime kilns and had about 100 hands at its height. The kilns were opened in the 1860s and finally closed in 1931 with the advent of modern techno-

"People fascinate me," John says, and his many interests seem to bear this out.

John graduated from Ryerson in 1971 after studying Radio, Television Arts. His most important courses, however, he says were the evening courses in public relations and personnel relations which he took on his own. He is still working on intensive study courses in Management Studies from Sheridan College. He started with Gage Stationery in Georgetown in 1974 and is personnel manager with DRG,

the firm that took Gage over. John's interest in people led him to run as a Ward 3 Living in a community that representative for Halton Hills council in the election and he topped the polls not only for his ward but for all the candidates running in any single ward. Now he is anxious to get on the job although he expects it will take time to get into the

> routine of things. "I hope people will realize John is also an avid jogger

and chuckled about the number of cars he had to push out of the snow Monday morning while he was out for his run. "I guess I'll have to take a quieter street next time it

storms," he says. John was born in Milton in 1947 and came to Dolly Varden at the age of five. He got his elementary education in a oneroom school at the corner of

Highway Seven and the Fourth Line, Bannockburn School is now a house but John remembers the school concerts there when he was a child.

SCHOOL CONCERTS "I guess my most embarrassing memories of those school concerts come as I get older," he laughs. "We were square dancing or something and I had long underwear on. I roll it up so it didn't show but it slipped while we were moving around."

Another member of that community remembers a much younger John with plenty of freekles, at least one missing front tooth and a thorough disregard for his audience. John was in the first grade that year and it was his first concert. His good trousers must have been a bit big for they started to slide in the

middle of his recitation. John stopped right there to hitch them up, gave the audience a big grin and continued with his recitation. The expert wiggle used to settle the offending pants nearly brought the house down, the lady says, and no one ever did hear the rest of his recitation. They were too busy laughing.

John's musical career began when he sang in the Halton Music Festivals.

"There was this other kid named John Mc., something or-other. I can't remember the last part," he says. "He always won. Every year when they'd call out the name I'd hope that maybe this year I'd beat him, but I never did."

Even if the festival adjudicators didn't favour him he went on to begin singing with a band during his second year at

Acton High School and continued singing during his last two years of secondary education, which he took in Georgetown, and right through Ryerson. Now he is singing with a band called The Dolly Varden Revue which does mostly 60s music, contemporary rock and country and western music, he

John is a member of the Esquesing Historical Society and has been with the group since it was organized in 1975. When he was campaigning for the election he hoped people wouldn't think he was interested only in the past since his work with the society and his historical writings seemed to be his most visible claims to

BALTON SKETCHES His book, Halton Sketches, resulted from his research on

Dolly Varden, he says. "So much of the Dolly's history overlapped into Limehouse that I got involved with researching Limehouse too," he says. "The Limehouse spread out into Acton and Georgetown."

He published his findings in local newspapers starting in 1974 and two years later they were released as a book.

"I started out with my research in a cardboard box on a corner of the bookshelf," he says, "and now I have a five-drawer filing cabinet and I'm thinking of getting another

"I wouldn't want to guess how many people I've talked to. Most of the good pictures I have, have come from people who have left the area. The people I've met are one of the most gratifying things about doing the history," he adds.

John says he has begun interviewing people and is already 16 of 17 chapters into a second book on the area. While it will contain a continuation of the type of material in his original work, it may also touch lightly on the Depression as Halton residents knew it.

"I wish more people could understand what past generations have gone through," he says. "I feel it would help them to appreciate more what we have as a result of their

Although it is very much a thing for the future he hints that he may one day do a book on the depression.

John's grandmother was a Scott from Limehouse and her family will be included in the

next book he says. Part of that story will tell how his Roman Catholic grandfather from Pricevill left his church to marry his staunchly Presbyterian grandmother in 1899 and more or less cut himself off from the rest of his family as a result of it.

BACK TO CHURCH "But he went back to the church once a year," he says, "Just to keep in touch, I

John's father, Russell, was one of nine children and spent his life in the area. He worked at Domtar for 18 years along with such familiar people as Tom Hill and Russ Miller. He

died in 1967. John is the eldest of nine children and they all still live near by "between Crusen's Corners and Brampton," he

says. He has a three-year-old son also named John.

Most of his life was spent in a house on a lot off his grandmother's farm at the Dolly. She sold the farm in 1963 or 1964 and it is now part of Indusmin Quarries.

Before the farm was sold however, John remembers an old tramp who lived in one of the unused kilns at the Dolly. PERFECTLY HARMLESS

Alec Shaw must have been quite an old man, John says, and he suspects that he probably had some sort of psychiatrict problem but he was perfectly harmless and enjoyed talking to youngsters.

"They tried to keep him in the Manor in Millon but he wouldn't stay. He said he lived in trenches in the First War so long that he couldn't stand

being cooped up in a civilized house. I don't know if he was shell-shocked or what was wrong with him." John says. "He had the kiln lined with cardboard and he always had a fire going. I can smell the smoke from it just talking to you. I haven't though about

him in years." "The township dump was at the back of Grandma's farm and he used to go back there and scrounge for food in the garbage. I remember we took him up the remains of our lurkey one Christmas. He was kind of taken back by it."

"I don't know what happened to him, whether he moved on or they put him in an institution, or what. I just know he wasn't there when they started quarrying after the farm was sold."

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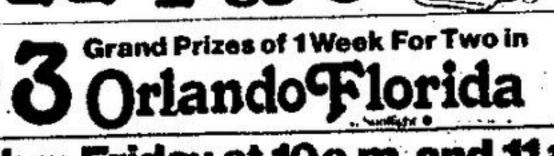
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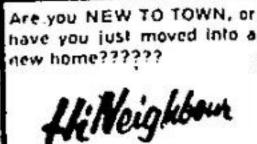
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JOHN MCDONALD

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dential chair. "That may be true," FDR said, "but look what I've got on it.



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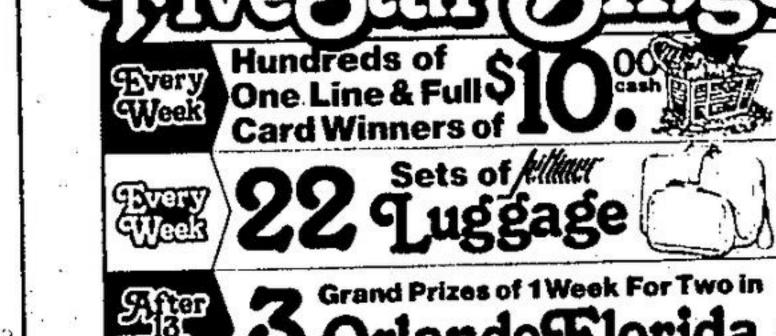






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