



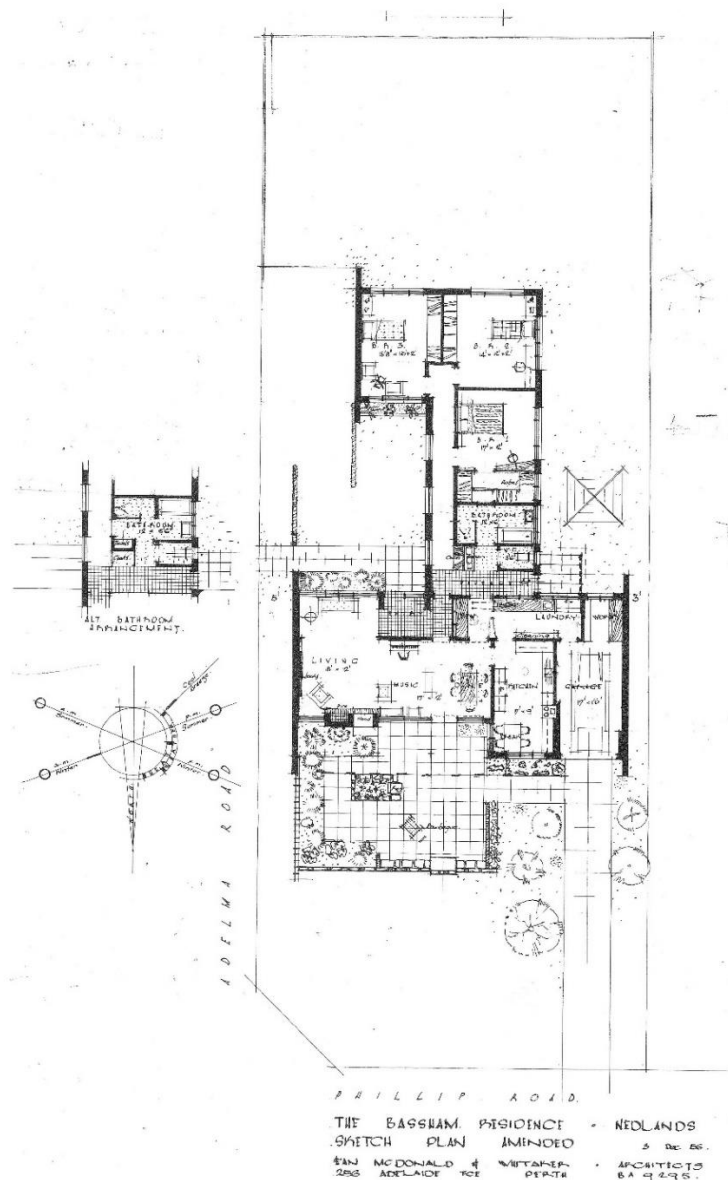
Ean McDonald (centre) as a PTC student with Peter Grigg (left) and John Lidbury (right); and in later years (*Phi*, Architectural Students of WA Magazine 1950, p.8; *The West Australian*, 28 September 2011, p.49)

**Ean Lawrence McDonald** (1918-2011) was born 3 September 1918 in Melbourne, the eldest of three children to painter Edward G. McDonald and his Western Australian born wife Eva nee Symonds. Ean's father was a merchant seaman from Scotland, and young Ean grew up in the Melbourne suburb of Newmarket. He was thirteen years old when the Great Depression brought the family to Perth, a three-week drive in an Essex motor car. His father then worked odd jobs, including as a gold prospector with his brothers-in-law.

Ean left Perth Boys' School at fifteen years old to help support the family. He enjoyed Sea Scouts, joined the naval reserves in 1938 and was called up to the Royal Australian Navy for Second World War (1939-1945) service in late 1939. He spent the entire war at sea, finishing as a lieutenant and assistant surveyor. In all, he had some 25 years with the naval reserves, finishing in the rank of lieutenant-commander. When the war ended, he capitalised on government sponsored education opportunities for returned servicemen, completing his Leaving Certificate and studying architecture in the newly-founded (1946) course at Perth Technical College (PTC).

In May 1942, McDonald had married Claire Arundel Hatton at the Ross Memorial Church in West Perth. By the late 1940s, he was operating a Belmont chicken farm, assisted by two of his young children, and selling eggs to market on his way to study. While studying architecture, Ean worked with the architectural firms Forbes & Fitzhardinge, and Marshall Clifton & Leach. Post-graduation he joined Oldham Boas & Ednie Brown and Partners.

President of the Architectural Students Association and winner of the E.G. Cohen Medal in 1951, McDonald was one of just three individuals who completed the fifth year of the architecture course at Perth Technical College in that year, along with fellow ex-serviceman Herbert Watson (Bill) Jones (1917-2000) and the somewhat younger Edwin James Whitaker (1928-2013). Ed Whitaker (no. 230) and Ean McDonald (no.231) both registered with the Architects Board of WA in March 1952, followed by Jones (no.238) in July. Ean was very compatible with the architectural and business sensibilities of Ed Whitaker, and the two men formed the practice McDonald & Whitaker in the later 1950s, with the firm running until around 1976.



Lester Bassham Residence of 1956, built on the s-w cnr Philip and Adelma Roads Dalkeith  
 (*Modern Houses*, 1997, p.53).

McDonald & Whitaker were successful in the growing WA economy of the 1950s and 1960s. They undertook a variety of commissions, and the ex-naval navigator McDonald always considered orientation a primary driver in his design work. Quoted in the 1997 UWA study *Modern Houses*, he noted that “I never designed anything without putting a north point on it and considering morning and afternoon sun, summer and winter, the north-west breezes backing around to the south-west and the cool breeze from the south-west and the pleasant summer morning suns and the nasty summer afternoon suns; and I don’t think any one of my houses ever got built without taking those things into full consideration ...”



Hackett Hall in Draper Street Floreat was opened in 1960 (Google 2020).

Located in Floreat Park, Hackett Hall was named after a new housing subdivision that was established in the 1950s, this in turn was named after Sir John Winthrop Hackett, prominent citizen and former Chancellor of the University of WA. The hall was designed by McDonald & Whittaker and built for £13 500, providing a community meeting hall for the people of Hackett Estate. Facilities in the hall included a stage and lighting equipment for amateur theatre group productions. During the day the hall was used for a play centre as well as badminton courts. Hackett Hall was officially opened by Dr Buller Murphy, the widow of Sir John Hackett, on 18 June 1960.

Reflecting upon his architectural work in later years, McDonald wrote that ... “I got out of housing as soon as I could. Too many heartbreaks and frustrations. I developed my practice around Commercial Industrial work wherever possible, but like most of us in those days, the net was wide. Apart from the odd Toilet Block, School, Housing Complex, Hospital, Factory, Office, Shopping Centre, Church, Hall, Cathedral, and a couple of Memorials, we tackled whatever came in through the door – gratefully, and confidently.”



Blackboy Hill Memorial at Innamincka Road Greenmount in 2011 (HCWA P1130001).

At Blackboy Hill in Greenmount, in 1962 McDonald designed a memorial to WA servicemen who trained there before overseas duty during the First World War (1914-1918), and the orientation and placement of the monument also utilises the surveyor-navigator McDonald’s astrological skills.

As McDonald notes, the firm designed a variety of building types including community centres and halls. The archives collection of the Australian National University has a 1963 new building design at 1100 Hay Street, West Perth by McDonald & Whitaker for the scientific firm H.B. Selby Australia Limited. To further illustrate the diversity of the firm’s commissions, the striking Anglican Cathedral of the Holy Cross at Geraldton (largely designed by Whitaker) was completed in 1964, and in 1968 the practice completed designs for the Dianella Plaza Shopping Centre.



Mount Hawthorn Community Centre at 197 Scarborough Beach Road Mt Hawthorn (May 1962 photo by Fritz Kos, SLWA 340,553PD).



Holy Cross Cathedral at Geraldton was completed in 1964 (Geraldton Library 756)

Illustrating the manner in which McDonald & Whitaker capitalised on the growth of the State in the post-war period, the State Records Office of WA holds files on various government works by the firm in the 1960s and 1970s, including for: 1967 Offices at Three Springs; various projects at schools including in 1968 at Rossmoyne Primary School, 1969 East Coolbellup Primary, 1969 North Beach Primary, 1969 Koongamia Primary, 1969 Rossmoyne Primary, 1969 Marmion Primary, 1970 North Lake (East Coolbellup) Primary, 1970 Darlington Primary, 1970 Hamersley Primary, 1971 Kapinara Primary, 1971 North Beach Primary, 1971 Rossmoyne Primary, 1973 Darlington Primary, 1973 North Lake Primary, 1973 Attadale Primary, 1973 North Beach Primary, 1973 Rossmoyne Primary, 1973 Coolbellup Primary, and in 1974 at Millen Special School.

However as the WA building industry went into depression in the 1970s, many architects turned to other occupations. Ean opened a sports clothing business, Golden Medal Sportswear, and Ed Whitaker became a vigneron at Margaret River. McDonald was a natural leader who supported community organisations, invariably as president or chairman. For 15 years, he was a councillor on Perth City Council. As well, he was an inventor, and in the late 1970s was President of the Inventors Association WA branch. Remarkably, a number of personal achievements were completed after quadruple heart bypass surgery in 1986. Three years later, he took up scuba diving and qualified as an ocean-going master mariner. Then, as his 79th birthday approached in 1997, he was navigator for Susie Maroney when she became the world's first person to swim 180km between Cuba and the USA. He repeated the effort in June of the next year, when Maroney swam the 207km from Mexico to Cuba.

A prolific writer, McDonald's titles include *Finders keepers, or, Terra to let, or, Who put Australia on the map?* (2003) about European exploration of the continent before Captain Cook. He also wrote *Flip Side War* (2005), a light-hearted account of the less serious side of war, and an unpublished novel, *HMAS Arafura*, loosely based on the demise of a ship that could be the ill-fated HMAS Sydney. His autobiography *90 Not Out* catalogued challenges facing servicemen post-war. He wrote a handbook on coastal navigation and, at 86 years of age, was still lecturing at TAFE on navigation.

Ean McDonald contracted lung disease and died in Mercy Hospital, Mt Lawley on 15 August 2011, aged 92 years.. He had three children with Claire, before divorcing after 34 years in 1976, when he married Cheryl Kimberley. He was survived at his passing by Cheryl, sons Bruce (b Adelaide), Ric (b Wagin) and daughter Jilanne (b Perth), stepsons Kim and Mark, seven grandchildren and two great-grandchildren.

McDonald was a member of a relatively small but highly influential group of post Second World War graduates from the fledgling formal architectural education course at PTC. Ean and his contemporaries' work will benefit from greater analysis and documentation in the future. Their built legacy includes many works that will form a generous portion of the cultural heritage of the second half of the Twentieth Century in WA.

References:

MCDONALD EAN LAWRENCE : Service Number - F2669 : Date of birth - 03 Sep 1918 : Place of birth - MELBOURNE : Place of enlistment – FREMANTLE

'Marriages – McDonald-Hatton', *The West Australian*, 28 May 1942, p.1 (Claire Arundel Hatton).

'People and Parties', *The West Australian*, 22 May 1951, p.12 (ASA President, T-Square Ball).

'Perth Technical College Exams', *The West Australian*, 20 December 1951, p.9.

SROWA, Ref AU WA S132- cons3512 McDonald, E., 1953-02-16 - 1953-12-04 (PTC staff).

'Proposed new building, 1100 Hay Street, West Perth', AU NBAC N220-1029, H.B. Selby Australia Limited, Australian National University.

'McDonald, Councillor Ean Lawrence, VRD AAPTC CD'; *The Way 79 who is who: synoptic biographies of Western Australians*, editor: Margaret A. Sacks, Crawley Publishers, Nedlands, WA, 1980, p.242.

London, Geoffrey and Richards, Duncan; *Modern Houses: Architect-designed Houses in Western Australia from 1950 to 1965*, School of Architecture, UWA, 1997, pp.31, 53.

Ean McDonald letter, 10 September 1997 to 'Katrina Chisholm et al', Katrina Chisholm records.

House designs 1951-1965 by Ean McDonald, Excel spreadsheet, Katrina Chisholm records.

Torrance Mendez, 'The old man, the sea, the city and a surprise', *The West Australian*, 28 September 2011, p.49.

Contributing author: John Taylor

Heritage Committee meeting approval: 17 September 2020 Last updated 17 September 2020

**Citation details:**

Taylor, Dr John J., 'Ean Lawrence McDonald (1918-2011)', *Western Australian Architect Biographies*, <http://www.taylorarchitects.com.au/Biographies.html> accessed DATE.