

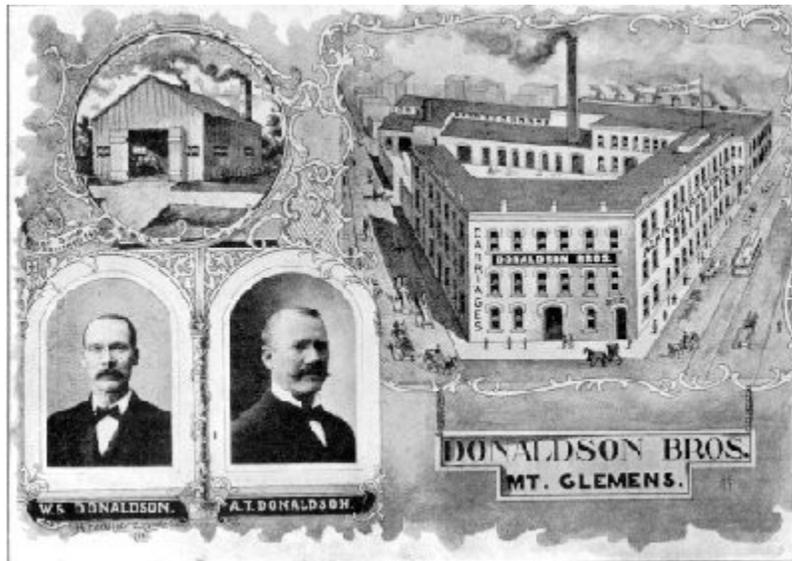
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Local History Sketches

Donaldson Brothers Agricultural Implements

by James and Ruth Donaldson

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Mount Clemens's largest industry during its first decades as a city was Donaldson Bros., manufacturers of agricultural implements, carriages, wagons and sleighs. The company started as a blacksmith shop in 1859, which 18-year-old **William Samuel Donaldson** as owner. His brother, **Andrew Trew**, joined him in 1862, and they moved into a larger building and began to manufacture wagons.

Rye Donaldson Heine, granddaughter of William, in her paper read to the Macomb County Historical Society on January 29, 1971, told of their growth: "In 1870 [they] erected a large blacksmith shop, 40 x 50 feet, on property adjacent to their shop on Front and East streets. They then began the manufacture of carriages, buggies and sleights. Their business developed so rapidly that in 1871 they erected a foundry, 54 x 52 feet, in which to make their own castings. With the foundry in operation, they began to manufacture agricultural implements" Some items produced by the firm were hitching posts, window weights, cauldron kettles, school seats and field rollers.

Donaldson Bros. erected a larger foundry in 1875, employing 30 men, and in 1883 a three-story addition was made to the plant. An article in the November 16, 1883, *Mount Clemens Monitor* described the new factory: "On the first floor were a carriage repository, offices, and storage rooms. A Middleberry elevator, large enough to give standing room to an omnibus, runs from this floor to the top of the building. The second floor is devoted entirely to wood working, with the exception of one room where is stored a large amount of fine stock for carriage building. . . .The third floor is devoted entirely to painting and trimming."

The company was building a nationwide reputation and published an annual trade catalog in both English and German. At fairs where plowing contests were held, the Donaldson plow was a winner. A society note in the December 18, 1885, **Mount Clemens Monitor** commented, "Donaldson Bros. have completed a large sleigh for **Henry Lodewyck**, to be used for pleasure parties. It will carry 20 persons conveniently." On June 17, 1887, the same paper reported that Henry Lodewyck has a "beautiful new \$200 double carriage made by Donaldson Bros."

By the turn of the century, the company was manufacturing 27 different kinds of plows, 12 kinds of cultivators, 5 harrows, corn planters, sugar beet weeders and road scrapers in addition to wagons, carriages, drays and bobsleds. The firm used many thousands of feet of lumber annually, all seasoned oak, and more than 2,500 tons of pig iron. Employment was furnished to 125 men. Two examples of the extent of Donaldson Bros.' business near the end of the century may be found in the *Mount Clemens Monitor*. According to a June 8, 1894, report: "Donaldson Bros. shipped four carloads of cultivators to one firm this week. They also made a shipment to Europe." And on May 8, 1903: "Donaldson Bros. are making four mammoth trucks for the Murray Cartage Co. in Detroit, and other for men in Buffalo. It is almost as much of a job to build one of these trucks as it is to build a small house, and the fact that the work comes to Mount Clemens speaks well for our home concern."



The 95-year-old Donaldson Foundry burns on July 27, 1954
(photo courtesy of *The Macomb Daily*)

On August 25, 1909, Donaldson Bros. celebrated its 50th anniversary with an all-day excursion on the *Mineral City*. After William's death in 1918, the business began to decline. As Mrs. Heine wrote in her paper, "The firm struggled along, trying to keep a few old employees, but with the death of Andrew in 1937, Donaldson Bros. was dissolved. On July 27, 1954, fire broke out in the ancient three-story building. Once the principal industry of Mount Clemens, the old Donaldson foundry housed only two bump shops and an auction store when flames finally wrecked the building. This ended the 95-year history of Donaldson Bros. Now the property where once stood Donaldson Bros. is part of the Mini-Mall."

For more information about the Donaldson family and the Donaldson Bros. firm, we recommend:

- Donaldson, Ruth S. and Nelly D. Longstaff. *William and Susan (Hendren) Donaldson: A Genealogy and Family History of their Descendants*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : The Authors,

1984.

- O'Shea, Si. "Fire Destroys Foundry Landmark: Old Donaldson Carriage Works Now But A Shell," *Mount Clemens Daily Monitor-Leader*, July 28, 1954, p.1.
- "Large Funeral is Seen For A.T. Donaldson," *Mount Clemens Advertiser-Monitor*, May 28, 1937, p.1.
- "Donaldson Brothers Founded in 1859: Held Peak of City Industries For Many Years," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.3, p.25.
- "Donaldson Bros. Was Once Largest of Mt. Clemens' Business Houses," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.3, p.26.
- "A.T. Donaldson is One of City's Oldest Citizens," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.3, p.25.
- "W.S. Donaldson First President of Tool Firm," in *Pageant of Progress*. Mount Clemens, Mich. : Nellis Newspapers, [1928], sec.3, p.26.
- "A Successful Affair," *Mount Clemens Monitor*, August 27, 1909, p.8, col.5.