

Source: An Historical Account of the Settlements of Scotch Highlanders in America by J. P. MacLean

### **Marvellous Escape of Captain McArthur.**

The following narration I find in the "Celtic Magazine," vol. I. 1875-76, pp. 209-213 and 241-245. How much of it is true I am unable to discover. Undoubtedly the writer, in some parts, draws on his imagination. Unfortunately no particulars are given concerning either the previous or subsequent life of Captain McArthur. We are even deprived of the knowledge of his Christian name, and hence cannot identify him with the same individual mentioned in the text.

Upon the defeat of the Highlanders at Moore's Creek, "Captain McArthur of the Highland Regiment of Volunteers, was apprehended and committed to the county jail in the town of Cross-Creek. But the gallant officer determined to make a death grasp for effecting his escape, and happily for him the walls of his confinement were not of stone and mortar. In his lonely prison, awaiting his fate, and with horrid visions of death haunting him, he summons up his muscular strength and courage, and with incredible exertion he broke through the jail by night, and once more enjoyed the sweets of liberty. Having thus made his escape he soon found his way to the fair partner of his joys and sorrows. It needs hardly be said that her astonishment was only equalled by her raptures of joy. She, in fact, became so overpowered with the unexpected sight that she was for the moment quite overcome, and unable to comply with the proposal of taking an immediate flight from the enemy's country. She soon, however, regains her sober senses, and is able to grasp the reality of the situation, and fully prepared with mental nerve and courage to face the scenes of hardship and fatigue which lay before them. The thought of flight was, indeed, a hazardous one. The journey to the sea board was far and dangerous; roads were miserably constructed, and these, for the most part, had to be avoided; unbroken forests, immense swamps, and muddy creeks were almost impassable barriers; human habitations were few and far between, and these few could scarcely be looked to as hospitable asylums; enemies would be on the lookout for the capture of the 'Old Tory,' for whose head a tempting reward had been offered; and withal, the care of a tender infant lay heavy upon the parental hearts, and tended to impede their flight. Having this sea of troubles looming before them, the imminent dangers besetting their path, you can estimate the heroism of a woman who was prepared to brave them all. But when you further bear in mind that she had been bred in the ease and delicate refinements of a lairdly circle at home, you can at once conceive the hardships to be encountered vastly augmented, and the moral heroism necessary for such an undertaking to be almost incredible, finding its parallel only in the life of her famous countrywoman, the immortal 'Flora.' Still, life is dear, and a desperate attempt must be made to preserve it—she is ready for any proposal. So off they start at the dead hour of midnight, taking nothing but the scantiest supply of provisions, of which our heroine must be the bearer, while the hardy sire took his infant charge in his folded plaid over one shoulder, with the indispensable musket slung over the other. Thus equipped for the march, they trudge over the

heavy sand, leaving the scattered town of Cross-Creek behind in the distance, and soon find themselves lost to all human vision in the midst of the dense forest. There is not a moment to lose; and onward they speed under cover of night for miles and miles, and for a time keeping the main road to the coast. Daylight at length lightened their path, and bright sunrays are pouring through the forest. But that which had lightened the path of the weary fugitives had, at the same time, made wonderful disclosures behind. The morning light had revealed to the astonished gaze of the keeper of the prison the flight of his captive. The consternation among the officials is easily imagined. A detachment of cavalry was speedily dispatched in pursuit; a handsome reward was offered for the absconded rebel, and a most barbarous punishment was in reserve for him in the event of his being captured. With a knowledge of these facts, it will not be matter of surprise that the straits and perplexities of a released captive had already commenced. Who can fancy their terror when the noise of cavalry in the distance admonished them that the enemy was already in hot pursuit, and had taken the right scent. What could they do! Whither could they fly? They dart off the road in an instant and began a race. But alas, of what use, for the tall pines of the forest could afford no shelter or concealment before the pursuers could reach the spot. In their extremity they change their course, running almost in the face of the foe. They rush into the under brush covert of a gum pond which crossed the road close by, and there, in terrible suspense, awaited their fate, up to the knees in water. In a few moments the equestrians, in full gallop, are within a gunshot of them. But on reaching the pond they slacken their speed, and all at once came to a dead halt! Had they already discovered their prey? In an instant their fears were relieved on this score. From their marshy lair they were able, imperfectly, to espy the foe, and they saw that the cause of halting was simply to water their panting steeds. They could also make out to hear the enemy's voice, and so far as they could gather, the subject was enough to inspire them with terror, for the escaped prisoner was evidently the exciting topic. Who could mistake the meaning of such detached phrases and epithets as these—'Daring fellow,' 'Scotch dog,' 'British slup,' and 'Steel fix him.' And who can realize the internal emotion of him whom they immediately and unmistakably concerned? But the fates being propitious, the posse of cavalry resumed their course, first in a slow pace, and afterwards in a lively canter, until they were out of sight and out of hearing.

This hair-breadth escape admonished our hero that he must shift his course and avoid the usual route of communication with the coast. The thought struck him, that he would direct his course towards the Cape Fear river, which lay some ten miles to the right; feeling confident, at the same time, that his knowledge of the water in early days could now be made available, if he could only find something in the shape of a boat. And, besides, he saw to his dismay that his fair partner in travel, however ardent in spirit, could not possibly hold out under the hardships incident to the long journey at first meditated. For the Cape Fear river then they set off; and after a wearisome march, through swamp and marsh, brush and brier, to the great detriment of their scanty wardrobe and danger of life and limb, they reached the banks of that sluggish stream before the sun had set, foot sore and dispirited, exhausted and downcast. But what is

their chance of a boat now? Alas, not even the tiniest craft could be seen. There is nothing for it but to camp in the open air all night and try to refresh their weary limbs and await to see what luck the following morn had in store. Fortunately for them the climate was warm, too much so indeed, as they had found, to their great discomfort, during the day that was now past. In their present homeless situation, however, it was rather opportune; and there was nothing to fear, unless from the effects of heavy dew, or the expected invasion of snakes and mosquitoes. But for these there was a counteracting remedy. The thick foliage of a stately tree afforded ample protection from dew, while a blazing fire, struck from the musket flint, defied the approach of any infesting vermin or crawling reptiles, and also answered the needed purpose of setting to rights their hosiery department which had suffered so much during the day. Here they are snug and cozy, under the arching canopy, which nature had provided, and prepared to do fair justice to the scanty viands and refreshments in their possession, before betaking themselves to their nocturnal slumbers which nature so much craved. But can we take leave of our pilgrims for the night without taking a glance at the innocent babe as it lay upon the folded plaid in blissful ignorance of the cares and anxieties which racked the parental breast. The very thought of its sweet face and throbbing little heart as it breathed in unconscious repose under the open canopy of heaven, was enough to entwine a thousand new chords of affection around the heart of its keepers, like the clasping ivy around the tree which gave them shelter, and to nerve them anew, for its sake, for the rough and perilous journey upon which they had entered. The fond mother imprints a kiss upon its cheek, and moistens it with tears of mingled joy and grief, and clasping it to her bosom is instantly absorbed in the sweet embrace of Morpheus. The hardy sire, it was agreed, would keep the first watch and take his rest in turn, the latter part of the night. He is now virtually alone, in deep and pensive meditation. He surveys with tender solicitude his precious charge, which was dearer to him than his own life, and for whose sake he would risk ten lives. He paces the sward during the night watches. He meditates his plans for the following day. He deliberates and schemes how he can take advantage of the flowing sheet of water before him, for the more easy conveyance of his precious belongings. The mode of travel hitherto adopted, he saw, to be simply impossible. The delay involved might be ruinous to his hopes. With these cogitations he sat down, without bringing any plan to maturity. He gazed at the burning embers as if in a reverie, and as he gazed he thought he had seen, either by actual vision or by the 'second sight,' in which he was a firm believer, the form of a canoe with a single sable steersman coming to his rescue. He felt tempted to communicate the vision to his sleeping partner; but, thinking it unkind to disturb her slumbers, he desists from his resolution, reclines on the ground, and without intending it, he falls fast asleep. But imagine his astonishment and alarm when he came to consciousness, to find that he had slept for three full hours without interruption. He could hardly realize it, the interval seemed like an instant. However, all was well; his wife and babe were still enjoying unbroken rest, and no foe had discovered their retreat; and withal, the gladsome light of day is now breaking in around them and eclipsing the glare of the smouldering embers. Up starts our hero much refreshed and invigorated, and exulting in surprising buoyancy of spirit for running the race of the new day

now ushering in. He withdraws a gunshot from the camp: and what does he descry in the grey dawn but, apparently, a small skiff with a single rower crossing the river towards them, but a short distance down the stream. The advancing light of day soon confirmed his hopes. He at once started in the direction of the skiff, having armed himself with his loaded musket, and resolved to get possession of it by fair means or by foul. A few minutes brought him to the spot, and to his great astonishment he found himself in the undisputed possession of the object of his wishes, a tiny little canoe drawn up on the beach. In connection with the night's vision he would have positively declared that there was something supernatural in the affair, but having marked the bare footprints of its late occupant on the muddy soil, and heard the rustling of leaves in the distance, calling attention to the woolly head of its owner getting out of sight through the bush, and making his way for a neighboring plantation. He could explain the event upon strict natural principles. The happy coincidence, however, filled him with emotions of joy, in so readily securing the means of an earlier and more expeditious transit. He retraces his steps and joins his little circle, and in joyous ecstasy relates to his sympathetic spouse, just aroused from her long slumbers, the tenor of his lucky adventure. There is now no time to lose. The crimson rays of the rising sun peering through a dense morning atmosphere and a dense forest, are reflected upon the surface of the stream to which they are about to commit their fortune, and admonish them to be off. They break their fast upon the remnants of the dry morsels with which they last appeased their hunger. This dispatched, they hasten to the beach, and speedily embark, seating themselves with the utmost caution in the narrow hull, which good luck and Sambo had placed at their disposal, and with less apprehension of danger from winds and waves than from the angry billows of human passion. A push from the shore and the voyage is fairly and auspiciously begun, the good lady seated in the prow in charge of the tender object of her unremitting care, and giving it the shelter of her parasol from the advancing rays of the sun, and the skilful Palinurus himself squatted in the stern, with a small paddle in his hand, giving alternate strokes, first to the right and then to the left, and thus, with the aid of the slow current propelling his diminutive barque at the rate of about six knots an hour, and enjoying the simultaneous pleasure of 'paddling his own canoe.' Onward they glide, smoothly and pleasantly, over the unruffled water, the steersman taking occasional rests from his monotonous strokes, while having the satisfaction of noting some progress by the flow of the current. Thus, hours passed away without the occurrence of anything worth noting, except the happy reflection that their memorable encampment was left several leagues in the distance. But lo! here is the first interruption to their navigation! About the hour of noon a mastless hull is seen in the distance. Their first impulse was fear, but this was soon dispelled on discovering it to be a flat or 'pole boat,' without sail or rigging, used for the conveyance of merchandise to the head of navigation, and propelled by long poles which the hardy craftsmen handled with great dexterity. It was, in fact, the steamer of the day, creating upon its arrival the same stir and bustle that is now caused by its more agreeable and efficient substitute, the 'Flora Macdonald.' The sight of this advancing craft, however, suggested the necessity of extreme caution, and of getting out of its way for a time. The Highland royalist felt greatly tempted to wait and hail the crew, whom he



felt pretty sure to be his own friendly countrymen, and who, like their sires, in the case of prince Charlie, thirty years before, would scorn to betray their brother Celt, even for the gold of Carolina. Still, like the royal outlaw in his wanderings, he also deemed it more prudent to conceal his whereabouts even from his most confidential friends. He at once quits the river, and thus for a good while suspends his navigation. He takes special precaution to secure his little transport by drawing it a considerable distance from the water, a feat which required no great effort. The party stroll out of the way, and up the rising beach, watching for a time the tardy movement of the 'flat.' Tired of this they continue their slow ramble further into the interior, in hopes, at the same time, of making some accidental discovery by which to replenish their commissariat, which was quite empty, and made their steps faint and feeble, for it was now considerably past noon. As 'fortune favors the brave' they did succeed in making a discovery. They saw 'the opening' of a small plantation in the forest, an event which, in Carolina, is hailed with immense satisfaction by those who chance to lose their way in the woods, as suggestive of kindness and hospitality. Nothing short of such a treatment would be expected by our adventurers as a matter of course, if they could only afford to throw themselves upon the hospitality of settlers. In their situation, however, they must take their bearings with anxious circumspection, and weigh the consequences of the possibility of their falling into the hands of foes. But here, all of a sudden, their path is intercepted by the actual presence of a formidable foe. One of the pursuers? No, but one equally defiant. It is a huge serpent of the 'Whip snake' species, which never gives way, but always takes a bold and defiant stand. It took its stand about fifty yards ahead, ready for battle, its head, and about a yard of its length, in semi-erect posture, and displaying every sign of its proverbial enmity to Adam's race. It has no poison, but its mode of attack is still more horrible, by throwing itself with electric speed in coils around its antagonist, tight as the strongest cord, and lashing with a yard of its tail, till it puts its combatant to death. Knowing its nature, the assailed levels his piece, and in an instant leaves the assailant turning a thousand somersaults until its strength is spent, and, is at last, wriggling on the ground.

The discharge of the musket was the signal to those within hearing that somebody was about. It awakened to his senses an old negro, the honest 'Uncle Ned,' and brought him to the edge of the 'clearing,' in order to satisfy his curiosity, and to see if it was 'old Massa' making an unceremonious visit to the farm of which Ned was virtually overseer. Our disconsolate party could not avoid an interview even if they would. They summoned their courage and affected to feel at ease. And truly they might, for Ned, like the class to which he belonged, would never dream of asking impertinent questions of any respectable white man, his known duty being to answer, not to ask, questions. Our weary party invited themselves to 'Uncle Ned's' cabin, which stood in the edge of the clearing close by, and turned out to be a tidy log cottage. The presiding divinity, of its single apartment was our kind hostess, 'Aunt Lucy,' Ned's better half, who felt so highly charmed and flattered by the visit of such distinguished guests that she scarcely knew what she was saying or doing. She dropt her lighted pipe on the floor, hustled and scraped and

curtsied to the gentle lady over and over, and caressed the beautiful little 'Missie' with emotions which bordered on questionable kindness. This ovation over, our hungry guests began to think of the chief object of their visit—getting something in the shape of warm luncheon—and with this in view they eyed with covetous interest the large flock of fine plump pullets about the door. There was fine material for a feast to begin with. The hint was given to 'Aunt Lucy,' and when that aged dame became conscious of the great honor thus to be conferred upon her, she at once set to work in the culinary department with a dexterity and skill of art which is incredible to those who are ignorant of the great speciality of negresses. There was sudden havoc among the poultry, and fruit and vegetables found their way from the corn field in abundant variety to the large chimney place. Meanwhile the captain shouldered his piece and brought, from an adjacent thicket, two large fox squirrels to add to the variety of the feast, extorting from the faithful Ned the flattering compliment 'b' gollies, Boss, you is the best shot I ever see'd.' Preparation is rapidly advancing, and so is the appetite of the longing expectants. But such preparation was not the work of a moment, especially, from the scantiness of Lucy's cooking utensils. So the guests thought they would withdraw for a time in order to relieve the busy cook of all ceremony, and at the same time relieve themselves of the uncomfortable reflection of three blazing fires in the chimney place. After partaking of a few slices of a delicious water-melon, they retired to the shade of a tree in the yard, and there enjoyed a most refreshing nap. In due course the sumptuous meal is ready; the small table is loaded with a most substantial repast, the over plus finding a receptacle upon the board floor of the apartment, which was covered with white sand. It is needless to say that the guests discharged their duty with great gusto, notwithstanding the absence of any condiments, save pepper and salt, in their case hunger being the best sauce. Who but an epicure could grumble at the repast before them? What better than stewed fowls and squirrels, boiled rice, Indian hoe cake and yams smoking hot from the ashes, squashes, pumpkin pies and apple dumpling, and all this followed by a course of fruit, peaches and apples, musk and water-melons, all of a flavor and size inconceivable by any but the inhabitants of the sunny climes which brought them to maturity. Her ladyship could not help making the contrast with a service of fruit upon an extra occasion in her home circle, which cost several golden guineas, and yet was not to be compared with that furnished for the merest trifle by these sable purveyors—so much for the sun rays of the latitude. There was, however, the absence of any beverage stronger than water, not even tea, a name which the humble hostess scarcely comprehended. But a good substitute was readily presented, in the form of strong coffee, without cream or sugar. It was now drawing late in the afternoon, and our party refreshed and delighted with their adventure, must begin to retrace their steps towards the canoe. The reckoning was soon settled. A few shillings, the index of the late regime of George in the colony, more than satisfied all demands, and surpassed all expectations. But the fair visitor was not content, without leaving an additional, and more pleasant memento. She took a beautiful gold ring, bearing the initials B.J.C., and placed it upon the swarthy finger of 'Aunt Lucy,' with many thanks and blessings for her kindness, on that eventful occasion. This kindly expression was heartily reciprocated by the negress, and

responded by a flood of tears from her eyes, and a volley of blessings from her lips. The party bade a final adieu to their entertainers, and they had to veto their pressing offer of escorting them to the river. Off they went, leaving the aged couple gazing after them, and lost in amazement as to who they could be, or whither they were going, and all the more astonished that the mysterious visitors had supplied themselves with such a load of the leavings of the repast.

The navigation was at length resumed, and onward they glide as before, without the sight of anything to obstruct their course. Their prosperous voyaging continued till about midnight, for they resolved to continue their course during the whole night, unless necessity compelled them to do otherwise. Long before this hour, the mother and child resigned themselves to sleep, which was only interrupted by occasional starts, while the indefatigable steersman watched his charge, and plied his vocation with improving expertness. At this hour again, in the dim light of the crescent moon, a second 'pole boat' was discovered making towards them, but which they easily avoided by rowing to the opposite side of the river, thus continuing their course, and escaping observation. In passing the 'flat' an animated conversation was overheard among the hands, from which it was easily gathered that the escape of the rebel was the engrossing topic in the town of Wilmington, the place of their departure, and towards which the rebel himself was now finding his way as fast as the tide and paddle could carry him. At present, however, he felt no cause of alarm. One of the hands speaking in vulgar English accent was heard to depone, 'By George if I could only get that prize I'd be a happy man, and would go back to old h-England.' To this base insinuation a threatening proof was administered by other parties, who replied in genuine Gaelic idiom and said, 'It's yourself that would need to have the face and the conscience, the day you would do that;' and they further signified their readiness to render any assistance to their brave countryman should opportunity offer. Those parties were readily recognized from their accent to be no other than Captain McArthur's intimate acquaintances, Sandie McDougall and Angus Ray, and who were so well qualified from their known strength and courage to render most valuable assistance in any cause in which their bravery might be enlisted. If he only gave them the signal of his presence they would instantly fly into his service and share his fate. However, it was deemed the wisest course to pass on, and not put their prowess to the test. Hours had now passed in successful progress without notice or interruption; and they are at long last approaching Wilmington, their seaport, but a considerable distance from the mouth of the river. The question is how are they to pass it, whether by land or water, for it is now approaching towards day. What is to be done must be done without a moment's delay. It is at length resolved to hazard the chance of passing it by canoe rather than encountering the untried perils of a dismal swamp. The daring leader puts his utmost strength to the test, striking the water right and left with excited vigor. His feeling is 'now or never'; for he knew this to be the most critical position of his whole route; unless he could get past it before break of day his case was hopeless. The dreaded town is at length in view, engendering fear and terror, but not despair. Several large crafts are seen lying at the

wharf, and lights are reflected from adjacent shipping offices. Two small boats are observed crossing the river, and in rather uncomfortable proximity. With these exceptions the inhabitants are evidently in the enjoyment of undisturbed repose, and quite unconscious of the phenomenon of such a notorious personage passing their doors with triumphant success. Scarcely a word was heard, it was like a city of the dead. Who can imagine the internal raptures of our lucky hero, on leaving behind him, in the distance, that spot upon which his fate was suspended, and in having the consciousness that he is now not far from the goal of safety. Even now there are signals which cheer his heart. He begins already to inhale the ocean breeze, and from that he derives an exhilarating sensation such as he had not experienced for many years. He gets the benefit of the ocean tide, fortunately, in his favor, and carrying his little hull upon its bosom at such a rate as to supersede the use of the paddle except in guiding the course. The ocean wave, however, is scarcely so favorable. It rocks and rolls their frail abode in such a way as to threaten to put a sad finish to the successful labors of the past. There is no help for it but to abandon the canoe a few miles sooner than intended. There is, however, little cause for complaint, for they can now see their way clear to their final terminus, if no untoward circumstance arises. They leave the canoe on the beach, parting with it forever, but not without a sigh of emotion, as if bidding farewell to a good friend. But the paddle they cling to as a memento of its achievements, the operator remarking—'It did me better service than any sword ever put into my hand.' A few miles walk from the landing, which is on the southern shore of the estuary, and they are in sight of a small hamlet, which lies upon the shore. And what is more inspiring of hope and courage, they are in sight of a vessel of considerable tonnage, lying at anchor off the shore, and displaying the British flag, floating in the morning breeze, evidently preparing to hoist sail. Now is their chance. This must be their ark of safety if they are ever to escape such billows of adversity as they have been struggling with for some days past. To get on board is that upon which their hearts are set, and all that is required in order to defy all enemies and pursuers. Not thinking that there is anything in the wind, in this pretty hamlet, they make straight for the vessel, but they go but a few paces in that direction before another crisis turns up. Enemies are still in pursuit. A small body of men, apparently under commission, are observed a short distance beyond the hamlet as if anticipating the possibility of the escaped prisoner making his way to the British ship. Nor is the surmise groundless, as the signal proves. In their perplexity the objects of pursuit have to lie in ambush and await the course of events. Their military pursuers are now wending their way in the opposite direction until they are almost lost to view. Now is the time for a last desperate effort. They rush for the shore, and there accost a sallow lank-looking boatman followed by a negro, on the lookout for custom, in their marine calling. A request is made for their boat and services, for conveyance to the ship. At first the man looks suspicious and sceptical, but on expostulation that there was the utmost necessity for an interview with the captain before sailing, and important dispatches to be sent home, and a hint given that a fee for services in such a case was of no object, he at once consents; the ferry boat is launched, and in a few minutes the party are off from the shore. But the military party observing these movements begin to retrace

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their steps in order to ascertain what all this means, and who the party are. They put to their heels and race towards the shore as fast as their feet can carry them. They feel tantalised to find that they have been sleeping at their post, and that the very object of their search is now halfway to the goal of safety. They signal and halloo with all their might, but getting no answer they fire a volley of shot in the direction of the boat. This has no effect, except for an instant, to put a stop to the rowing. The boatman gets alarmed as he now more than guesses who the noted passenger is, and he signifies his determination to put back and avoid the consequences that may be fatal to himself. The hero puts a sudden stop to further parley. He flings a gold sovereign to the swarthy rower, commands him simply to fulfil his promise, but to refund the balance of change upon their return from the ship—'he must see the captain before sailing.' To enforce his command the sturdy Highlander, who was more than a match for the two, took up his loaded musket and intimated what the consequences would be if they refused to obey orders. This had the desired effect. The rowers pulled with might and main, and in a few minutes the passengers were left safe and sound on board the gallant ship, and surrounded by a sympathising and hospitable crew. The fugitives were at last safe, despite rewards and sanguine pursuers. But their situation they could scarcely realize, their past life seemed more like a dream than a reality. Our brave heroine was again quite overcome. The reaction was too much for her nerves. In being led to the cabin she would have fallen prostrate on the deck had she not been supported. And who can wonder, in view of her fatigues and privations, her hair-breadth escapes and mental anxieties. But she survived it all. Sails are now hoisted to the favoring breeze, anchor weighed, and our now rejoicing pilgrims bade a lasting farewell to the ever memorable shores of Carolina. In care of the courteous commander they, in due time, reached their island home in the Scottish Highlands, and there lived to a good old age in peace and contentment. They had the pleasure of seeing the tender object of their solicitude grow up to womanhood, and afterwards enjoying the blessings of married life. And the veteran officer himself found no greater pleasure in whiling away the hours of his repose than in rehearsing to an entranced auditory, among the stirring scenes of the American Revolution, the marvellous story of his own fate: the principal events of which are here hurriedly and imperfectly sketched from a current tradition among his admiring countrymen in the two hemispheres."—John Darroch.

The close of the Revolution found the First Battalion of the King's Regiment of New York stationed at Isle aux Noix and Carleton Island with their wives and children to the number of one thousand four hundred and sixty-two. The following is a list of the officers of both Battalions at the close of the War: