

OLD FORT EDWARD

Before 1800

An account of the historic ground
now occupied by the Village of
Fort Edward, New York

WILLIAM H. HILL

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Property of
Derek H Gagnon

THE McCREA TRAGEDY

It would be impossible to write a history of Fort Edward without including an account of the massacre of Jane McCrea, but so much has already been written on the subject that I begin with an apology. Appleton's Encyclopedia of American Biography says: "No event, either in ancient or modern warfare, has received more versions than that of her death." This statement is not an exaggerated one, as the reader may prove by examining a bibliography prepared by the late James A. Holden, former State Historian, and published in Volume 12 of the New York State Historical Association's Proceedings. These books, which mention the McCrea tragedy in more or less detail, cover no less than fourteen pages of small type and considerable ink has been used in further discussion of the subject since the list was compiled.

JANE McCREA

I have already mentioned the few details which are known regarding the early life of the principal figure in this tragedy. The casual reader, who is unfamiliar with the details of her massacre, no doubt associates Jane McCrea with the heroines of the Revolution, but cold facts prove that she left the home of her patriot brother John against his wishes, for that of Sara McNeil, a staunch Tory. Her motives, however, were not of a traitorous nature, but merely those of a young woman more interested in her own love affair than in the patriot cause. She was the unwilling sacrifice whose death, occurring as it did at a critical moment, caught the popular fancy and extended its influence even to the British House of Commons, where Burke used it as an argument against continuing the war in America.

SARA McNEIL

Sarah Gordon Fraser was born in Invernesshire, Scotland, in 1722. Her father was Alexander Fraser and she married (May 10th, 1736) Archibald Campbell, her first husband, before leaving Scotland. With her husband, she left Scotland for America, the trip being made in his own ship, for the purpose of procuring the remains of Duncan Campbell and transporting them to Scotland for reinterment. Campbell died during the voyage and Mrs. McNeil did not return to Scotland, but settled in New York, where she married her second husband, James McNeil. Mr. McNeil died while she was still a resident of New York and it was not until after this event that she came to Fort Edward, where she had acquired a large amount of land. By her first marriage Mrs. McNeil had one daughter, Katherine, who married Robert Hunter (April 12th, 1750). They had one daughter Mary, or Polly as she was commonly called, who was two years of age when the voyage to America was undertaken. Mary

came to Fort Edward with her grandmother and later married Peter Tearse (September 14th, 1777). Mrs. McNeil was a first cousin of General Simon Fraser of Burgoyne's army.

The preceding facts are taken from an elaborate and privately printed volume published in 1910 by Katherine Campbell Norton Lewis, who claimed to be a great-great-great grand-daughter of Sara McNeil. Mrs. Lewis claimed to have in her possession the family records which established the above facts. According to the authoress, it was published to correct, as she sarcastically says, "the marvelous accuracy of a wonderful production—The Fort Edward Book, published in 1903 by one R. O. Bascom, with others equally reliable—a statement written by Asa Fitch relative to the Jane McCrea tragedy." Among those who derive pleasure from the pursuit of historical knowledge, an unprovoked attack of this nature, upon those who merely sought for facts with which to entertain the reader of local history, is sure to be looked upon as poor taste, to say the least, particularly when the authors, who were both deceased at the time her book was published, were unable to defend themselves, should they have cared to do so. The inconsistency of this act is shown by the authoress herself; for, after making the above statement regarding the accuracy of these publications, she proceeds to quote word for word in her article on Jane McCrea, the testimony of her father, Dr. Norton, regarding the appearance of the skeleton of Jane McCrea when it was removed to the State street burying ground, which testimony is taken from the manuscript of Fitch and published on page 71 of The Fort Edward Book. Moreover, Mrs. Lewis's account of the tragedy varies only in unimportant details from Bascom's account, excepting perhaps her attempt to make Jane a seamstress in the home of Mrs. McNeil at the time of her capture. But perhaps the coup de grace of the whole work is the lifting of Bascom's article, "The Legend of Duncan Campbell," in its entirety into Mrs. Lewis's book, that is, all but the author's name. The statement is merely made that the "facts contained in the foregoing account are taken from Volume 2 of the Proceedings of the New York Historical Association." If the authoress had taken the trouble to refer to this volume, she would have found the author was none other than "one R. O. Bascom." When Bascom republished this paper in his Fort Edward Book he added a note to the effect that Alexander Gilchrist *claimed* to be related to Duncan Campbell. Mrs. Lewis closes this chapter in her book by saying: "Alexander Gilchrist was *not* related to Duncan Campbell." An important fact!

I have perhaps digressed too far from my subject, but Mrs. Lewis's book is so hard to obtain, owing to the small edition, that I have thought it worth while to review this subject. How much faith we may place in her account of Mrs. McNeil, I am not prepared to say, but it is probably correct in a general way. According to these dates Mrs. McNeil was married when fourteen years old and her daughter Katherine, presuming she was born the first year of the marriage, when not over thirteen years old. The trip to America must

have been after 1758, the year in which Campbell died at Fort Edward. Just what brought Mrs. McNeil to Fort Edward does not appear, but it was probably a family tie among the inhabitants of the Scotch (Argyle) Patent. Our early records show her to have been a large land owner in this vicinity, Holden claiming that her grants extended north as far as Lake George and were worth the large sum (for that day) of eighty thousand dollars.

THE JANE MCCREA HOUSE

Considerable discussion has arisen in past years over the site of the house from which Jane McCrea went to her death. The house now occupied by the Oppenheim family and also known as the "old Rogers place," which stands directly opposite the present Episcopal Church, was always considered as the site of this historic building until about fifty years ago, when the theory that the southwest corner of Broadway and Bridge street was the right spot began to be exploited. All of this discussion, however, was founded upon tradition, and it was not until last year that Miss Sue Wade, of the Washington County Clerk's office, found the first definite proof of its location in an unrecorded deed which proved that in 1776 Mrs. McNeil owned the land on which the Oppenheim house now stands. The quit-rent list of the Argyle Patent, which I have already mentioned, also shows that in 1789, lot 141 was still owned by Sara McNeil and Mary B. Tearse. It would be of interest to know the owner of the lot in the Bayard Patent, just south of lot 141, at this time. I have also found another clue which might give absolute proof of this location, but which I have been unable so far to follow up. The petition mentioned in the following letter is possibly still in existence, although I am unable to locate it in the New York State Library, and it would very likely mention Mrs. McNeil's residence and its location.

General Washington to Brigadier-General Stark on October 8th, 1778: "The subject of Mrs. McNeil's petition comes under the notice of the quartermaster-general, General Mifflin, who was in that office at the time the grievance complained of was committed. He has lately had one million of dollars put into his hands for the purpose of discharging all demands; and I see that Colonel Hughes is appointed to adjust and settle all those in the State of New York. To him, therefore, Mrs. McNeil must apply. * * * I would not have you build barracks at Fort Edward. The troops now there may winter at Saratoga, where are good barracks for three hundred men." (Memoirs of Gen. Stark, page 192.)

The house now standing on this site is generally believed to have been built by Peter B. Tearse, probably near the close of the Revolution. Whether it included any part of the older house is not apparent, though this is doubtful owing to the fact that the first structure was quite sure to have been constructed of logs. The cellar, however, appears to have been built for many years and

might well have hidden the old colored slave and her child who are supposed to have escaped capture when the Indians appeared. The original gambrel roof has disappeared and several rooms have been added to the house since it was first built.

THE MASSACRE

On the morning of July 27th, 1777, the American outpost near the top of the hill had been driven in by a band of Indians and British rangers. Jane McCrea, who was then at the home of Mrs. McNeil, did not follow the retreating Americans, for Mrs. McNeil was related to General Fraser, who led the advance guard of Burgoyne's army, and Jane also had a friend among the enemy, a former resident of Fort Edward by the name of David Jones and generally considered to have been her fiancé. One or possibly two days prior to this event, a small band of Indians had massacred the Allen and Barnes families, also a man named White, in the vicinity of Argyle, and it was no doubt the same savages who appeared suddenly on the 27th at the McNeil home and made both Mrs. McNeil and Jane McCrea prisoners. The object of this attack has never been proved, but it may have been that the Indians, feeling reasonably safe from attack, decided to make a spectacular raid in the face of the American rear guard and earn both praise and money for their daring. Of the other victims, the Allen massacre is vividly described by a native historian, Arthur Reid, of Argyle, in a pamphlet, now quite rare, entitled, "Reminiscences of the Revolution or LeLoup's Bloody Trail from Salem to Fort Edward." (Utica, 1859.) No record remains of the other victims, although the John Barnes mentioned as second lieutenant of the Charlotte County Militia, September 21st, 1775, was probably the head of the Barnes family. (See Holden, page 408.) White is described in some of the local histories as John White, "a solitary victim of this Indian raid." Two other characters, who appear in several narratives of the McCrea massacre, are Peter and Alexander Freel, but no definite trace of them has ever appeared beyond this incident. They are usually described as residents of Fort Edward at the time of the massacre, and Peter Freel has been mentioned as residing in the Doctor Smyth house.

Whatever the reason, the captives were hurried along the road towards the top of the hill, Mrs. McNeil on foot, as it is said, and Jane on horseback. It has been claimed that the party was pursued and fired upon by the Americans who were posted at the fort, but it should be remembered that the fort was not in use at the time and that Arnold, who commanded the rear guard, was then encamped on the heights below the village. If any American soldiers were nearby, it would naturally have been a small outpost near the lower part of the present village. Mrs. McNeil is said to have been *very corpulent and unable to mount a horse*, still it is claimed that the savages watched the flash of the American rifles and *threw their prisoners to the ground each time* to avoid the bullets. Such a tale needs no further comment.

Historians of this affair have generally stated that Mrs. McNeil and Jane were separated at "the fork in the road" by their captors, but I believe that I have proved earlier in this volume that the old road ran diagonally up the hill from about where the Methodist Church now stands to a point south of where Burgoyne avenue joins Case street and that no other road up the hill existed at the time. Mrs. McNeil did not know of Jane's death until some time after her arrival at the British camp, where the Indians had conducted her as a prisoner, not knowing that she was a relative of General Fraser. I believe that the separation was caused by Mrs. McNeil having been a short distance in advance of Jane, and, as she reached the top of the hill and turned north along the old road which followed the present Burgoyne avenue, she naturally lost sight of the party at the rear.

My theory also includes the assumption that Jane was killed just south or southeast of the bridge where Broadway now crosses the Delaware and Hudson railroad tracks. This is not an original idea, but one which has steadily been gaining favor in late years and a quantity of evidence will be found in the many detailed accounts of this affair to support such a theory. There is no doubt that a large spring existed just west of the present Murray home and about where the stone wall now stands. Near this spring were doubtless gathered the rival bands of Indians who are said to have been sent by Lieutenant Jones to conduct Jane McCrea to the British camp. The fact of his sending such an escort has been questioned, but in either event the sight of the young woman in the hands of her captors aroused the interest of the other party of Indians, who came from their resting place and gathered about the captive. An argument then ensued which ended in one of the party killing the subject of the dispute, probably by shooting her as she sat upon her horse and finishing the murderous deed with his tomahawk as she fell to the ground. Her scalp, carried to the British camp as was customary, gave Mrs. McNeil and Lieutenant Jones their first news of Jane McCrea's death.

With further regard to the location of the spring and the massacre, anyone familiar with the so-called "Jane McCrea spring," which is just west of the Jane McCrea monument on upper Broadway, will realize that a band of Indians gathered about this spring would have difficulty in observing the old roadway; moreover this spring owes its fame principally to George Harvey, who advertised the spot and converted the old "Jane McCrea tree" into countless canes and similar souvenirs which found a ready sale at one time. The careful reader will also find statements by old residents to the effect that Jane's body was found near the other spring.

I have purposely omitted from this account many details which I feel it would be useless to repeat, since they have been rewritten so many times. For those who desire to read a very complete summary of the evidence I would recommend the account of James A. Holden, previously mentioned. Bascom's Fort Edward Book and Wilson's Life of Jane McCrea are also considered

as authorities and well worth perusing. In the back of the latter volume will be found an interesting advertisement of Harvey, describing the above mentioned souvenirs, which were then on sale at the Crystal Palace in New York. The remainder of this chapter I have devoted to reprinting various articles which are either original or very pertinent to the subject.

STANDISH'S ACCOUNT

Samuel Standish, in his application for a pension as a Revolutionary soldier, made the following statement regarding the McCrea massacre:

"The next morning after the battle of Fort Anne, we marched to Fort Edward and while there, with others, were called on to relieve a guard on a hill north of the Fort. Went and relieved the guard, had not been there long before we heard an Indian scream and instantly was fired upon by them. We ran towards the river and Fort, and before I arrived, I met three Indians coming from the river between me and the fort who all fired upon me, but missed me, when I was taken prisoner by them, taken up the hill again near a spring, was there stripped of my hat, coat and handkerchief and pinioned by them and after a short time I saw a party of Indians coming with two women. They came up the hill to a spring and they seemed to be in a quarrel. They shot one of the women and scalped her. This woman I knew to be Jennie McCrea. I had seen her before. The Americans had offered to take her down the river. She had refused to go, said she was not afraid to stay. The other woman was old Mrs. McNeil, aunt of Miss McCrea." (The last statement is in error. Mrs. McNeil was not related to Jane McCrea.) According to Mrs. McNeil's statement she was not present when Jane was killed, as this account states. (Standish's account would imply that the quarrel was between the Indians who captured Jane and Mrs. McNeil, rather than between the rival bands.)

DAVID JONES

The following quotation is taken from a letter dated February 14th, 1921, written by Mrs. C. H. Jackson, of Brockville, Ontario, Canada, to the late James A. Holden, of Glens Falls. It was copied through the courtesy of Mrs. Holden and I believe was never published by her husband.

"My mother was a great-niece of Jane's lover (David Jones). One of my mother's sisters told me in childhood that she had seen a piece of Jane's hair and that it was of a light color, a golden red. My grandfather's signed account of Jane McCrea's murder, as told to him by his father Daniel Jones, a brother of Lieutenant David Jones, is as follows: 'It was finally arranged that they (Jane and David) should meet at a house a short distance from the respective encampments of the contending forces, where a clergyman was to have solemnized their marriage, and Miss McCrea in accordance with that ar-

rangement left her residence at Fort Edward and proceeded alone in the direction of the appointed place of meeting. Scouting parties of Indians being then frequently out, it was apprehended by Lieutenant Jones that she might possibly be intercepted by some of them and thus become greatly alarmed, if not injured, and he accordingly in his solicitude for her safety procured the services of an Indian chief of intelligence in whom he had confidence and who was made acquainted with the nature of the case, to keep watch of her, at such a distance, however, as not to create alarm in the mind of Miss McCrea, but to be near enough to render her assistance in case of emergency.

"It so happened that she was taken prisoner by a party of Indians without any intention on their part of doing her harm, and the friendly chief, in order to insure her safety, soon after approached them for the purpose of affording her protection in case of need. It was reported at the time that a dispute arose among the captors as to which one of them should have the honor of conducting her into the British camp as prisoner. One of the party, more barbarous than his fellows, in order to settle the dispute in true Indian style, and at the same time gratify his own savage nature, drew his tomahawk and slew her before the arm of the friendly chief could be raised to save her. This report was vehemently denied by the Indian party, who alleged that her death was caused by a shot from those in pursuit of the Indians, who had that morning surprised and slain an American officer, and was intended for them, but unfortunately by mischance struck down its fair and innocent victim, and that the tragic scene was then consummated by one of the savages according to Indian custom, removing her scalp, not having, as they asserted, an opportunity of taking her body into the camp. (This is no doubt the basis on which the theory of Jane's death by an American bullet was founded.)

"It was said by some that the fear of exasperating the Indians and rendering them hostile had its weight in giving credence to their representations. One thing, however, is certain, that the sad and melancholy occurrence occasioned a great sensation in the British camp and cast a gloom over the mind of Lieutenant Jones that never passed away. Subsequently to the peace of 1783, he settled in upper Canada on the St. Lawrence and not far from the present site of Ogdensburgh and on the opposite bank of the river, where he died suddenly soon after, as it was supposed, from being overheated, but more likely from an affection of the heart.

"The substance of this account was learned from Lieutenant (Solomon) Jones, another brother, who was in the British camp at the time Miss McCrea was killed, corroborated by the statement of Mrs. Corley, wife of Colonel Corley, who afterwards resided near Brockville until her death, but who at the time of the tragedy, being then a single woman, lived with Jane McCrea at Fort Edward.

"Signed—'David Jones, July 5, 1859.'

Indorsed—'Dunham Jones' (son of Doctor Solomon Jones).

"Mrs. Corley, the friend of Jane McCrea, was Miss Jemimah Butler, who died shortly after coming to Brockville in 1784 for in 1787 Colonel Corley was married again. She was buried with her two children in Brockville in the first graveyard at that place. I may add that I have in my possession a paste and silver knee buckle which was worn by Lieutenant Jones and which I prize highly."

EDWARD CRANE'S REMINISCENCES

The following statement is contained in a newspaper article dated 1882, written or dictated by Edwin Crane, one of Fort Edward's former residents:

"The day after her (Jane McCrea's) capture the body was found covered with brush in front of the premises of David Underwood (now occupied by the Murray home). Up about half the length of the wall which forms the terrace in front of Underwood's residence, a pine tree used to stand and was there since I can remember, but it has been gone these many years. A spring also there was at the spot, but that is no longer to be seen, save that its locality can yet be determined by the ice which forms there each winter. Mr. Gilchrist and Albert Baker both united in fixing this as the place where the body was found. Both claimed they had been told by actors in those stormy scenes that Jane's body was found there." (An old resident, William Hitchcock, claimed that the spring on the Underwood place failed when the railroad cut was made just west of this spot. He is also authority for the statement that Jane McCrea's body was found in the brook, long since disappeared, which ran from the spring down the hill.)

THE BURIAL

Holden (page 452) says: "Colonel John McCrea, Jenny's brother, had been left behind in charge of the rear guard and now lingered with the last batteau load of stores, in waiting for the remains of his sister. Two women, whom he had brought from his home opposite Fort Miller for that purpose, prepared the body for burial."

Seth Allen, long a resident of Fort Edward, told me that his grandmother often repeated the statement to him as a boy that "Tommy Sherwood's mother helped to lay out Jane McCrea for her burial," and Mrs. Sherwood had also told her that "the murder occurred on Burgoyne avenue." Mr. Allen added that the present Broadway did not come into use until about 1830. This statement regarding the scene of the murder is one of several that are based upon tradition, but which deserve consideration. Unfortunately, however, no two of them agree in all of their details and the reader can only select that one which suits his fancy best. It is possible that the other of the two women, mentioned above as having prepared the body for burial, was the Mrs. Corley mentioned in Mrs. Jackson's letter on David Jones.

JANE MCCREA'S ORIGINAL BURIAL PLACE

The following tradition of the original burial place of Jane McCrea is taken from an interesting letter written by the late Norman Bell Sprague to the Hon. Edgar Hull of this village:

"I am a great-grandson of one of the early settlers of Fort Edward—Epaphras Bell, who resided in Fort Edward Centre when it was part of the town of Argyle. One of his sons, Warren Bell, was my grandfather and my other grandfather, Arad Sprague, was an old resident of the town and proprietor of the "Black House Tavern" for a number of years, the Spragues and Bells living on adjoining farms.

"On the massacre of Jane McCrea, her burial, together with the British soldier, Tobias VanVechten, who was killed at the same time, was on great-grandfather Bell's farm, and a tradition in the family has it that great-grandfather Bell and a neighbor, John Durkee, made the pine coffin in which she was interred. Another statement, of which I have no positive proof, was that great-grandfather was a captain and paymaster in the Revolutionary army and was with Ethan Allen at Ticonderoga, and that they were brothers-in-law, having married sisters by the name of Palmer, great-grandmother's name being Lucy.

"While I was a resident of Fort Edward an aunt from Albany, Eunice Belle LaGrange, came to visit at our home, and while she was there I went with her down the river road to see her brother Sidney Bell, and while we were passing the old Bell farm she pointed out to me the place where Jane McCrea was buried, and at the time related to me this story in regard to the removal of the remains.

"She said she was then about ten years of age and had been spending a few days with her grandmother, and that while there, some people from Fort Edward came to see her grandmother and told her that they wanted to remove the remains of Jane McCrea to the old burying ground in Fort Edward, but that they did not know where she was buried and would like her to show them. She said grandmother was not at all inclined to do so, but finally stated that if they would let the British soldier alone as he was well enough off where he was, she would show them. They assured her that they would not disturb him, so she said grandmother, who was quite lame, got her cane and went with them down the road from the house some two or three hundred feet and putting her cane on the spot said 'You will find her there.' She said it proved to be the right place, and when they took the remains up they gave grandmother a lock of Jane's hair, but she never knew what disposition was made of it after grandmother's death.

"Relating this story one time at Lake George to Mr. Clifford Allen, of Glens Falls, and saying that I thought her first burial place should have a monument or marker at least, he said: "There is a monument at or very near the

place you describe, but I have never stopped to see whose it is, and if you will come to Glens Falls we will go and find out.' A few days later we made the visit and found that it was the monument of the British soldier, Tobias VanVechten, erected by the D. A. R. of Fort Edward, and it is located on the opposite side of the road, about fifty feet or so from the spot pointed out by my aunt as the place where Jane McCrea was buried." (VanVechten was an American (not a British) lieutenant.)

REMAINS REMOVED TO THE STATE STREET CEMETERY

An article from a Troy newspaper, dated January 28th, 1851, contains the following account of the removal of the remains of Jane McCrea from their original burial place to the old cemetery:

"It was in April, 1822, when the ceremony of reinterment took place at Fort Edward, as conducted by the unfortunate Hooper Cumming, and not in the summer of 1826, as related in your paper. The writer was at Fort Edward the day of the reinterment and left there for Whitehall and on the way met many wagons loaded with passengers to witness the solemnities of the day. The graves of Miss McCrea and Lieutenant VanVeghten were on the east side of the river. In excavating for the canal, her remains were removed a little distance, and from thence, in the year above mentioned, removed to their final resting place at Fort Edward."

RESULT OF THE MCCREA MASSACRE

"The terror excited by the Indians, instead of disposing the inhabitants to court British protection, had a contrary effect. This was chiefly occasioned by the murder of Miss McCrea, a young lady of the neighborhood of Fort Edward. This melancholy transaction made a great noise in Great Britain and America at this time." (Lamb's Journal, page 145.)

In the examination of the Earl of Harrington by General Burgoyne, the following statements relating to the McCrea tragedy were made by the witness:

Q. "Does your Lordship remember General Burgoyne's receiving at Fort Anne the news of the murder of Miss McCrea?"

A. "I do."

Q. "Did General Burgoyne repair immediately to the Indian camp, and call them to council, assisted by Brigadier General Fraser?"

A. "He did."

Q. "What passed at that council?"

A. "General Burgoyne threatened the culprit with death, insisted that he should be delivered up, and there were many gentlemen of the army, and I own I was one of the number, who feared that he would put that threat in execution. Motives of policy, I believe, alone prevented him from it; and if he had

not pardoned the man, which he did, I believe the total defection of the Indians would have ensued, and the consequences, on their return through Canada, might have been dreadful; not to speak of the weight they would have thrown into the opposite scale, had they gone over to the enemy, which I rather imagine would have been the case."

Q. "Do you remember General Burgoyne's restraining the Indian parties from going out without a British officer or proper conductor, who were to be responsible for their behavior?"

A. "I do."

Q. "Do you remember Mr. St. Luc's reporting discontents amongst the Indians, soon after our arrival at Fort Edward?"

A. "I do."

Q. "How long was that after enforcing the restraints above mentioned?"

A. "I can't exactly say; I should imagine about three weeks or a month."

Q. "Does your Lordship recollect General Burgoyne's telling Mr. St. Luc that he had rather lose every Indian than connive at their enormities, or using language to that effect?"

A. "I do."

Q. "Does your Lordship remember what passed in council with the Indians at Fort Edward?"

A. "To the best of my recollection, much the same exhortation to act with humanity, and much the same rewards were offered for saving their prisoners."

Q. "Do you recollect the circumstance of the Indians desiring to return home at that time?"

A. "I do, perfectly well."

Q. "Do you remember that many quitted the army without leave?"

A. "I do, immediately after the council, and the next morning."

Q. "Was it not the general opinion that the defection of the Indians, then and afterwards, was caused by the restraint upon their cruelties and habits of plunder?"

A. "It was."

The following letter came to my attention after the foregoing chapter on Jane McCrea had been written. It was published in the October 30th, 1830, issue of the New York Mirror, and was written in reply to an article which appeared in the October 9th issue of the same year. The author of the first article stated that Jane McCrea was killed by a volley from American soldiers in pursuit of the Indians who had captured Jane McCrea, and that Mr. Baker, who was with the American scout, came up just as she was breathing her last. He also claimed that her body and that of a young American lieutenant were buried under the pine tree where she fell. The above points have already

been reviewed in this chapter and we will therefore consider only the reply, which reads as follows:

Baldwinsville, Oct. 13, 1830.

Dear Sir:

The communication respecting Miss McCrea, copied into your paper from the Boston Palladium, is incorrect in many particulars. I was born and "brought up" in the town of Fort Edward, my parents being among its first settlers. In the month of June, 1761, my grandfather purchased the lands on the east side of the Hudson river, opposite Fort Miller. Both forts were at this period occupied by a British garrison; and Miss McCrea, being a relative of the commanding officer at Fort Miller, made her home at that fortress, where she became intimately acquainted with my grandfather's family, and this intimacy continued until a short period before her untimely death.

In the meantime a young gentleman of the name of Jones was paying his addresses to Miss McCrea, and it was generally understood that a reciprocal attachment existed between them. As the progress of the revolution, however, rendered it expedient for Mr. Jones, as it did for many others, to take a decided stand, either for or against the mother country, he unfortunately chose the side of loyalty, repaired to Canada, received a captain's commission, and subsequently joined the army of Burgoyne. It appears, however, that his political apostacy did not tend to lessen him in the eyes of his mistress, for while in Canada he still kept up a correspondence with her by letter.

In the autumn of 1777, when the hitherto successful army of Burgoyne had reached Fort Anne, Miss McCrea was at Fort Miller; and my grandfather (who, with most of the inhabitants of that town, retreated with their families to Bennington or Williamstown) requested Miss McCrea to accompany his family, but she refused, saying that she intended to go to Fort Edward. He therefore left her, with several other females, at Fort Miller. Captain Jones was at this time with the British at Fort Anne.

Miss McCrea proceeded to Fort Edward, or rather to the old yellow house, which is yet standing, where she secreted herself in the cellar for three or four days, with an old woman, whose name is not mentioned. During this time she contrived to inform Jones of her place of concealment, who immediately dispatched a party of Indians to bring her to him, at Fort Anne. He furnished them with a horse for her conveyance, and assured her by letter that she might safely confide in the fidelity of her conductors, to whom he had promised a large reward if they conveyed her in safety to Fort Anne.

The Indians proceeded on their embassy, reached the old yellow house without interruption, delivered the letter, and were soon on the road to Fort Anne with Miss McCrea, mounted on the steed her lover had sent for her accommodation. The party arrived unmolested at the spring which then flowed under the large pine, on the Sand Hill, a few rods from the present junction of the feeder with the northern canal at Fort Edward. Here, it ap-

pears, they met another party of Indians, from Burgoyne's camp, whose cupidity had been excited by a rumor of the rich reward offered by Jones and who were determined to obtain a share of it. The result of this unexpected and unreasonable demand was a violent quarrel between the two parties of Indians.

At this unfortunate moment they discovered an American scout crossing the river within sixty or eighty rods of them. Alarmed for their own safety, the Indians now thought it necessary to leave the road and take to the woods. For the lady to accompany them was deemed impractical and so, to end the dispute and prevent further embarrassment, one of the savages pulled her from her horse and struck his tomahawk into her skull. He then tore off her scalp and cut off her bosom which he suspended to a small tree. Having committed this deed of barbarity, he fled to the English camp with the scalp of his hapless victim. The scout came up and finding Miss McCrea in this awful situation, they hastily covered her with earth and leaves.

At this time Burgoyne's army was on its way to Fort Edward, which had been previously evacuated by the Americans. Here the disconsolate lover, Captain Jones, caused the mutilated body of his beloved Janet to be placed in a coffin and concealed in a baggage wagon, intending to convey the relics to Fort Miller, or to Albany should Burgoyne succeed in reaching that city.

The army moved on along the east bank of the Hudson, and the next day being very warm, they halted at a small creek three miles south of Fort Edward. During their stay at this place some general officer discovered Miss McCrea's remains in the baggage wagon and ordered them removed immediately and buried on the spot. A grave was prepared by the side of the road and a Mrs. Saunders, who was present, put a cap on the head of the corpse and made such other little arrangements as time and circumstances would permit. This lady, who witnessed the hasty interment, has always resided near the spot since that eventful period.

In the spring of 1822 the body of ill-fated Miss McCrea was disinterred by a company of young men of that town, who associated for the purpose. The site of her humble grave having been pointed out to us by the Mrs. Saunders before mentioned, we caused her relics to be conveyed to Fort Edward and placed them in a splendid coffin which was solemnly deposited in the graveyard near the old fort. A discourse was delivered on the occasion by the late Rev. Hooper Cumming. I officiated as pall bearer and many connections of the deceased were also present from Ballstown and other parts of Saratoga County.

Mr. Baker, mentioned in your paper, was at the period of the above catastrophe a boy in search of some stray cows and happening to be near the scene of the tragedy, witnessed the particulars as I have related them. The description of Miss McCrea's person, as given in the Boston Palladium, and copied into the Mirror, is very erroneous. She was not handsome and had a blemish in her

eyes totally incompatible with our idea of beauty. I am, sir, with great respect and high estimation of your valuable paper, yours respectfully,

N. P. (N. Paine?)

This letter is of interest for several reasons. The first part, which describes the McCrea tragedy, is of course based on tradition, like all similar accounts, and contains several errors according to present day theories, but the last part is the narrative of one who participated in an important local event. It is one of the earliest detailed accounts by a local person, and while it is only initialed the author no doubt was a descendant of the Paine family, who were among the first to settle in Fort Miller in the town of Fort Edward, as he states.

The first statement of particular interest in this narrative refers to Jane McCrea's relation "to the commanding officer at Fort Miller" and her early residence at that post. Colonel John McCrea would be our first thought, but he did not become a military figure until several years later during the Revolution, nor does it appear from what little evidence can be gathered that he came to the town of Fort Edward until between 1765 and 1770. If some other person is referred to by the author, then it is barely possible that Jane preceded her brother to this part of the state and that his attention was thus attracted to his future home. The fact that he places Jane as still at Fort Miller in 1777 would tend to lessen belief in the above statement, as it seems most probable that she was then living with her brother, John, at his house opposite the mouth of the Moses Kill. The only clue to this statement which I have found is the statement in Sylvester's History of Saratoga County (p. 401), that "Isaac B. Payne lived nearly opposite the mouth of Moses Kill." This of course was also the approximate location of John McCrea's home a few years later, and it is possible Jane lived at this house before that of her brother was completed, though there is nothing to indicate that Isaac Payne commanded Fort Miller.

The account of the massacre does not correspond with the generally accepted story, inasmuch as the writer starts her from the "old Yellow House" (now the Baldwin house) on her last journey, instead of from Mrs. McNeil's home, and, while he mentions "an old woman" as her companion, yet no mention is made of such a companion on the journey. The discovery of the American scout crossing the river from the spring would be impossible unless the intervening ground had been devoid of brush and timber. The general details of the actual killing, however, follow other credible accounts quite closely, nor can we absolutely prove that all of the statements are not correct, though constant research seems to point to other facts. It will be noted here that the Baldwin or "old Red House" is also called the "old Yellow House" as suggested in the description of that famous landmark. The location of the Jane McCrea spring is also indicated at the brow of the first hill rather than the generally accepted spot.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this letter is that which relates to the burial of Jane McCrea. While I do not recall ever having seen or heard the question asked, yet I have often wondered why the victim of this tragedy was buried directly in the line of march of the British army, providing her brother John removed her remains down the river, as most accounts declare. John McCrea was a patriot and his home was but a few miles below this spot and on the opposite bank of the river, which would have been a much more logical place for him to have placed the grave. This account is the first I have ever seen that offers even a suggestion of an answer to the question and it deserves consideration, although another unanswered problem still remains in the burial of the American, Lieutenant VanVechten, at the same spot. Is it possible that a British soldier and not Lieutenant VanVechten is buried at this historic spot as stated in Mr. Sprague's letter, and that an early confusion of names has misled later day historians?