

Captain James McPherson, The-Indian Fighter. ①

By Rev. Robert E. H. Peeples

Picture a young woman with long dark hair, sitting alone in the autumn Carolina sun just a few miles south of where we are, day-dreaming of her mother and father, John and Mary Miles, many miles away at their plantation on Coppins Creek near St. Andrew's Church on Ashley River. She wondered nostalgically about her younger sister, Mary, who had married Edward Rawlins the year before in 1719, now living in Charles Town, and their still younger sister Rosamond. Rosa had a likely boy-friend, too, Edward Perry, whom she might very well marry one day. Only gradually did Rachel become aware of silent movement to her right as three Indian braves, their bodies and faces smeared with red and black paints, stepped boldly from the woods quite near her. She sat paralyzed with fright, unable to move her legs beneath the long grey skirt she wore. But she had presence of mind enough to conceal her fear, lifted her head and looked unflinchingly, steadily, into their faces. Two of the warriors sprang forward to seize her, tomahawks aloft for a fresh scalp. Instantly the third brave restrained them:

"No! No touch! She Jimmy Squaw!"

And the three backed into the forest, disappearing instantly from the young wife's sight.

Jimmy was Captain James McPherson, the Indian Fighter, whose fame was such that even the Indian braves dared not molest his family for fear of reprisal. Indians carried off Captain Bull's wife and she was never heard of again; Indians never spared anyone. What an awesome reputation Captain Jimmy McPherson had! But then, the McPhersons were unique from their beginning.

In 1153 Diarmid, Chief of Clan Chattan in Scotland, died leaving no children, his heir being Gillicattan, his younger brother who was a priest, Abbot of Kingussie. Almost unbelievably, he secured a dispensation from the Pope and married a daughter of the Thane of Calder. Their grandson, Evan Baan (the "fair-complexioned") was the first called "MacPherson" which means "son of the parson". From Gillicattan and Clan Chattan the McPherson crest became "a cat sejant ppr."; their motto "Touch not the cat, but a glove", their chief seat Cluny Castle, Kingussie, Invernesshire, their chief being the "Cluny". In the 1680s James McPherson, a brother of the contemporary Cluny, came to South Carolina. It is remarkable that he apparently never applied for any land grant, there being none recorded in the Warrant Books 1672-79 or 1680-92. However, he and his wife Mary sold 1570 acres in St. James Goose Creek Parish in 1712 and in Dec. 1729 he made his will, leaving his wife Mary as Executrix, they then being of Dorchester District. No one has yet established the relationship between James McPherson and two other 17th century McPhersons: Evan McPherson whose daughter Elizabeth, born 1688, married Andrew Allen in 1706 and apparently was her father's sole heir, and William McPherson of Edisto Island who assigned a stock mark to John Fripp in May 1698, ultimately dying in Colleton County c. 1749.

By 1710 in both North and South Carolina the expansion of the English colonists had put serious pressure on the Indians. The Lords Proprietors had ordered that a new town be laid out, to be called "Beaufort Town" after one of their number. In June 1711 the Yamassee Indians complained that several white persons are settled within ye limits of their settlement whereby ye said Indians are damnified by ye stock of ye white men", for indeed the Assembly had clearly defined the "Indian lands" for the Yamasses

in an act dated 19 July 1707. Accordingly, the Board of Commissioners of Indian Trade ordered the following persons prosecuted for settling within the Yamassee lands: Thomas Jones, John Whitehead, Joseph Bryan, Robert Steele, John Palmer, Peter Haynes, Isaac de France, William Bray and Burnaby Bull. They also ordered Edmund Bellinger, II Landgrave Bellinger and Deputy Surveyor of Carolina, prosecuted for surveying part of said lands, as well as Captain John Cochran for selling a free Indian into slavery. But the Commissioners were powerless to stop the influx of colonists. Joseph Bryan was married to Janet Cochran, Burnaby Bull to Lucia, sister of the II Landgrave ^{Bellinger}, their position was unassailable.

The First Indian War erupted in September 1711 when the Tuscaroras under King Hancock killed or captured some 200 colonists in North Carolina. In October Col. John Barnwell, Maj. Alexander Mackay, Capt. John Bull, 30 militiamen and 500 still-friendly Indian allies. By April 1712 the Tuscarora stronghold was taken and a peace signed which ultimately resulted in the removal of the Tuscaroras to New York State. James McPherson's reputation was established in North Carolina.

The South Carolina crisis came on good Friday, 15 April 1715 at Pocotaligo when old Thomas Nairne (the Yamassee agent), John Wright, Thomas Ruffly, Capt. John Cochran, William Bray, Samuel Warner, altogether some 90 colonists, traders, planters and their families were surprised at daybreak with the Yamassee war cry and slain. The Indians had painted their faces and bodies in red and black rays to resemble devils coming out of hell. The red signified war and the black meant death without mercy to their enemies.

Fortunately, two men escaped to spread the alarm. Within hours nearly 400 colonists saved themselves by crowding aboard a smuggler's vessel recently captured in Port Royal Harbor. While one band of Yamassees burned Port Royal, another

towns in St. Bartholomew's Parish east of the Edisto where another 200 settlers were killed. (4)

Governor Craven rushed from Charleston to mobilize the militia of Colleton County and established martial law. Three days later at the Saltketcher his 240 militiamen routed a force of more than 500 Yamassee warriors. Pocatoligo was recaptured and by autumn the Yamasses had withdrawn to Sapelo Island whence they continued to raid coastal plantations for several decades.

For his outstanding service in the Yamassee War James McPherson was rewarded with a tract of former Indian lands in what would become in 1745 Prince William Parish. On 15 Dec. 1716 the Assembly passed an act to establish the Rangers "to guard ye Frontiers of this Province against ye incursions of our Indian enemies". Captain McPherson was then 28 years old, apparently a Captain in the Colleton County unit of the militia and living on a plantation which he would refer to in his will as "my old plantation (500 acres) at Saltketchers". With much stock to manage and vast new landholdings to clear and cultivate, anxious to marry and raise a family, he nevertheless responded to the call of the Assembly and devoted himself unreservedly to organizing and commanding the small but amazingly effective force which was to guard South Carolina's southern and western frontiers for twenty-five years. With their Scout Boats they ranged up and down the coastal waters as far south as the Altamaha (present Darien, Ga.), then considered the

western boundary of South Carolina. The South Carolina
Rangers played a vital role still not yet fully appreciated
in safeguarding the English colonists against both
Indian and Spanish incursions.

Nevertheless, these incursions and raids continued.
Shortly after his marriage in 1720 the incident occurred
which I described above. And two years later, during a
particularly desperate defense against an Indian raid, his
wife Rachel was bravely helping by loading muskets, passing
them up to Jimmy who did the sharpshooting. In the heat
and excitement of the siege, she repeatedly pushed her hair
back from her forehead with the back of her right hand.
Shortly afterwards she gave birth to their first son, James, whose
hair perversely stood up in front throughout his life.

In 1724 their son, John, was born at their Prince William
Parish plantation, followed by a daughter, Elizabeth, in 1727 and
a 3rd son, Joshua in 1730.

In July 1731 the Journal of the Council of South Carolina
records that Captain James McPherson and his scouts were
ordered to conduct the Indian chieftain, Dog King, and three or
four of his followers from ^{Palachacola} ~~Palichucicola~~ garrison on the Savannah
River to Charleston to be received by Governor Robert Johnson.

The following year Governor Johnson ordered that ^a lieutenant
and twenty men be added to the Rangers under Captain James
McPherson's command; (that) the Rangers be divided into parties
of twenty to patrol the frontier alternately and visit the out
settlements of Pom Pon (Edisto) to encourage the people to
stay where they were, also (the Rangers were) to find

two particular Indians, a Yamassee and a Creek, long in the Province, and encourage them to stay, as they might prove useful. At all times latest news of proceedings (were to) be sent directly to the Governor."

In August the Indian threat continued. The Journal of the Council notes that after a Mr. Catell reported that some Creek Indians who had resided in the Province for a number of years had been at his camp, had driven away his overseer and slaves, robbed his house, destroyed his corn and broken down his fences, Captain James McPherson and Captain Charles Russell were ordered by Governor Johnson to take detachments of their men and try to capture or kill the Indians, with captives to be sent under sufficient guard down to the Governor.

A high point in the service of the Rangers came in February 1733 when "pursuant to a Resolution of the General Assembly of South Carolina", as that august body later patted itself on the back in its own Journal, Captain James McPherson and fifteen of his Rangers, escorted General James Edward Oglethorpe, his sloop and five boatloads of original Georgia colonists, from Beaufort to the present site of the City of Savannah, landing there Feb. 12th. The Rangers "covered and protected the new settlers until they enforted themselves and as they had occasion" as the official report to the South Carolina Assembly records it. Captain McPherson was to receive his orders directly from Gen. Oglethorpe himself and was to protect the colony if any danger were to arise. Later in 1733 when Gen. Oglethorpe ordered Fort Argyle built on the west bank of the Ogeechee River, Captain James McPherson and a detachment of his South Carolina Rangers ^{built and} garrisoned the fort. That year his fifth child, Job, was born.

The number of Rangers was first increased to twenty (7) and then to thirty as the Journal of the Commons House of Assembly records. As Commander of the Rangers, Captain McPherson's salary was 288 pounds per year; his sergeant received 166 pounds and each Ranger got 14 pounds per month. A fairly comprehensive list of the Rangers includes:

Jacob Brown	William Gibson	John Saunders
William Burt	William Gulliver	William Small
Lawrence Cooke	Samuel Kinsman	Richard Smith
Morgan Davis	Joseph Lowell	James Vincent
Gregory Fagan	Walter Pike	Joseph Wannell
William Fitchet	George Pilkington	William Westberry
James Fitzgerald	William Richards	

The Scout Boat was commanded by Captain Ferguson at £200 per annum. His command included ten Scout men at £9 per month, including:

James Distance, Patrick Loner, William McLane, Joseph Oldham, John Rea, David Swinton and William Thomas.

It was reported to the Assembly in 1737 that Captain McPherson and his Rangers were employed three or four months in the Spring of 1736 hunting cattle and driving them to Georgia to supply that colony. They were ordered to accompany and secure the settlers at Pine Tree Creek, protecting them still against Indian raids until May 1737.

In 1736 Captain McPherson's second daughter, Susannah, was born and on 24 Oct. 1739 his fifth son, Isaac, followed. That same year the Journal of Assembly reports that Captain McPherson and his Rangers were several weeks "in pursuit of the white servants and negro slaves who had murdered one John Watson" of Beaufort District. It appears that the murder actually occurred at Captain McPherson's

Prince William plantation and that some of his own slaves were involved. The end of that fascinating episode has not been found although he and his Rangers were still on duty in March 1740. (2)

Meanwhile, General James Oglethorpe wrote to Lt. Gov. William Bull of South Carolina on 29 Dec. 1739, outlining his needs for a proposed siege of St. Augustine. He asked for "as many horsemen as can be had, who may pass over the River Savanna, and passing the Oatmulgy and Ockcorry, and from thence to the Ferry on the River Altamaha, where they may pass over into Spanish Florida. Captain James McPherson can show them the path, for I think the people of Carolina would do very well to raise a troop of Rangers under the command of Captain McPherson, who is a very good officer." After the Battle of Bloody Marsh in 1742 there was no longer any danger from the Spanish and without their support and instigation, the Indian attacks subsided. Captain McPherson had earned the right to develop his plantations in peace. In 1741 his third daughter, Kesiah, was born and in 1743 his last child, Ulyses, appeared.

But wars and rumors of wars never cease and on 6 July 1744 Captain McPherson was appointed by the Governor to be Commanding Officer "betwixt the Savannah and Saltcatcher Rivers". This was the Council's response to the 3 July 1744 petition of the inhabitants of Granville County who had noted a party of 15 Indians camped between the Saltcatcher and Pocotaligo Rivers and had petitioned the Assembly for relief. Granville County was still fearful.

Nevertheless, Stoney Creek Presbyterian Church had been founded in 1740 and on 25 May 1745 the entire area between the Combahee and Coosawhatchie Rivers, westward from Whale Branch was designated Prince William Parish, its elegant

who had married in 1751 Captain Silas Miles of Poplar Springs plantation, St. Paul's Parish. Her three elder sisters, Ann, Rachel and Elizabeth, married respectively John Wilson, planter of St. Paul's Parish, Captain Thomas Cater, planter of Cater Hall, St. Peter's Parish, and Lt. Pears Smith of Charles Town, a nephew of the learned Dr. Robert Smith, first President of the College of Charleston and first Episcopal Bishop of South Carolina. (10)

Capt. Jimmy's fourth and fifth children, Joshua and Job, both married and survived him but left no posterity, Job dying in a fall from his horse in 1790, his daughter Ann dying unmarried in 1801. Their sister, Susannah McPherson, married Rev. War Captain Andrew Postell, Representative from Prince William Parish in 1782, but died leaving no children.

It was the family of Captain Jimmy's fifth son, Isaac McPherson, born 1739, which really made the greatest impact upon the history of Prince William Parish. He married in 1760, Elizabeth, daughter of his first cousin, Thomas Miles of Poplar Springs; their two daughters dying young at Isaac's "Indian Hill" plantation where he raised fine race horses, as did his famous nephew, General John McPherson whose haurium plantation boasted its own racetrack. Isaac owned the thoroughbred Flimnap which he took to the Jacksonboro. g. legislature in 1782; on a bet he rode the racer up the stairs of the temporary State House and jumped 18 feet from a window to the ground below. He spent every summer at Newport, R. I. ^{whence he sailed on his own yacht} in fact, he ultimately died there in 1787. His son, Col. James Elliott McPherson of Brawton and Mount Pleasant plantations, was born in 1769 at Indian Hill and continued the family tradition of fine horses and fine women by being President of the South Carolina Jockey

(11)

... marriage of Elizabeth daughter of James Skirving of Ashe fort, who bore him eleven children. She ^{in 1745} found time to give a Sterling baptismal bowl, to Prince William Parish Church, possibly recalling the 1819 similar gift of her cousin Ann McPherson to St. Michael's Church in Charleston which caused no small theological and ecclesiastical stir.

From Brewton plantation Col. James Elliott McPherson's son, John Skirving McPherson married in 1835 Cornelia Washington, daughter of Col. William and Mary Washington; their only son, John James McPherson, born 1837, ultimately died unmarried the last of the McPherson male line. His aunt, Theodosia Narcissa McPherson, married William Washington, a grandson of the Revolutionary Col. William Washington who built the great house at South Battery and Church Street in Charleston.

Ultimately most of the thousands of acres of McPherson lands descended to the children of Martha McPherson of Brewton who married in 1823 James Gregorie.

Meanwhile, Captain James McPherson, the Indian Fighter, lived out his years at his Prince William plantation, making his will 28 Sept. 1765, not that he was about to die then, for it was not until the 4th of April 1771 that his obituary appeared in the South Carolina Gazette:

"On the 6th ult. (i.e. March) died at his Plantation in Prince William Parish, aged 83 years, Captain James McPherson, a Native of this Province, who in the first Indian War, and at several other periods since, served this country with Honour and Reputation. As he was remarkable for his Honesty, Generosity and Humanity, and more particularly for his friendly disposition, so his Death is universally regretted."