

# Woman's Spunk Rattled British

## But Tenacity Got Sarah M'Calla Closer To Freeing Husband

*First of two parts.*

Sarah and Thomas M'Calla, natives of Chester County, Penn., fled to Chester District, S.C., in 1778. The two were among the Pennsylvania Whigs who resisted the British troops but now found themselves defeated and their home area occupied.

They followed Thomas' brother David and found him staying with Capt. John Nixon. The M'Callas built a log cabin nearby and began clearing the land.

In 1780 the war arena moved to South Carolina. Thomas M'Calla joined the Whig partisans under Gen. Thomas Sumter at Clems Branch in the Indian Land section of Lancaster County.

In August 1780 M'Calla obtained a pass to visit his family. As he returned by the Landsford crossing of the Catawba River, M'Calla learned from fleeing comrades that they had been surprised and defeated at Fishing Creek.

Capt. John Steel, also of Chester, was attempting to rally the Whig forces and M'Calla joined him at Neely's in York district. An hour later the British captured M'Calla and took him as a war prisoner to Camden. Steel and others managed to escape. Each day M'Calla was threatened with hanging.

Refugees and others informed Sarah M'Calla of her husband's capture but none knew his fate. She wished to hunt for him but her children had smallpox. There was an epidemic and many died. Young John M'Calla's life hung by a thread for nine days. No one dared visit or travel.



Nearby  
History

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Finally, when the child was on his way to recovery, Sarah M'Calla mounted a horse before daybreak and took the Charleston road down the west side of the Catawba for Camden. She arrived there at 2 p.m.

Maj. Doyle of the British forces heard her plea and took her to Lord Rawdon. Only he had the power to release her husband. According to Daniel Stinson, Lord Rawdon heard her impassioned plea for her husband's life and only then did he speak, "I would rather hang such d---d rebels than eat my breakfast!"

Maj. Doyle apparently sympathized with Sarah M'Calla and interceded. Later he told her she had shown too much spirit. Other Whig women had been more compliant. Lord Rawdon believed that her husband must be more dangerous than most simply because his wife had such spunk.

In spite of her behavior, Rawdon allowed Doyle to take her to the prison for a 10-minute interview with her husband. Stinson observed that it was probably the first time in his life that Lord Rawdon had "felt uneasiness from a woman's rebuke."

With the British major listening to every word, Sarah M'Calla promised her husband that she would bring him clothes and needed articles and assured him that the women were organized and doing all they could to defeat the British.

Once a month, occasionally with company and other times alone, Sarah M'Calla made the 100-mile round trip on horseback delivering food and clothes to the prisoners. She was the first to inform them of the American patriot victory at Kings Mountain.

Twice, Sarah M'Calla managed an audience with Lord Charles Cornwallis, Rawdon's superior. The second time Cornwallis told her that if she could manage to get Thomas Sumter to agree to a prisoner exchange he would release her husband.

Sarah M'Calla rode to Sumter's camp and got a letter promising to exchange a captured British soldier for Thomas M'Calla.

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