

# Defiance cost girl her hair

■ Left for dead, teenager survived scalping during Revolutionary War.



**Nearby history**

**LOUISE PETTUS**

Barbara McKinney, a teenage girl, lived with her mother and several small brothers in an isolated log cabin on Fishing Creek in York County.

Her father and brothers were off fighting with Gen. Francis Marion in the Revolutionary War. Always alert, never lacking in courage and determined to do her share, Barbara counted as enemies the British troops, her Tory neighbors and marauding Indians.

The Indians who posed a threat were Cherokee and tribes from the Midwest and "Northward" who were traditional Catawba enemies. The Catawba women and children had moved to Virginia while the Catawba men fought with the Whigs and Gen. Thomas Sumter.

Barbara could fire her flint-lock musket as well as her brothers, and it was said that she could "ride any horse that could be mounted." She had a young black mare that she had raised that refused to be ridden by anyone else.

One night she watched a band of Indians sneak up to the log shed that housed her wild and fractious horse. The Indians led the mare away. As soon as they reached the woods, Barbara slipped out of the

house. She vowed to die rather than see them take her horse away. She followed them through swamps and thickets until they thought it was safe to stop.

When the Indians were sound asleep she crept up to her mare, cut the halter and jumped on the mare's back. The noise woke one of the Indians who grabbed the end of the rope halter. Barbara struck him across the face with a heavy hickory stick she was carrying and urged her mare forward. Hours later, bleeding, bruised, and with torn clothes she returned with the mare to her home.

The McKinneys got their drinking water from a spring half a mile off near old Fishing Creek Church. There old Rev. William Davis preached Sundays carrying a musket and wearing a hunting shirt.

One night when Barbara was headed to the spring for water, she saw two Indians slip into an old stone malt house. The now-abandoned malt house was where Aunt Jennie Young had once brewed beer and where a murder had been committed, but Barbara's mind was not on that but on the Indians. She knew they had seen her and guessed that they were planning to stay in the malt house until she returned carrying her buckets. Coolly, she sang an old hymn until she was next to the malt house. Suddenly, she rushed at the door and swung the wooden bolt into place before the Indians could get out. She kept them prisoners several days before letting them go.

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An early writer said of Barbara's escapades with the Indians, "She challenged them so often and escaped so successfully that she had become reckless in risking her ability and ingenuity in outwitting them."

At one point when Indians had attacked some settlers and were known to be in the vicinity, the McKinney house had no meal for bread. At daylight Barbara mounted her mare and with her musket across her and a sack of corn behind her set off for a grist mill five miles away.

A band of Indians appeared from the underbrush and grabbed her off her mare.

"Then the long, sharp scalping knives glittered in the morning sun and she knew no more."

The Indians took the mare and corn and disappeared, leaving their victim for dead. But Barbara was able to drag herself to the woods where she lay all day, half dead and very thirsty. That night she slipped down to the creek and washed. With her apron over her head, weak and fainting, she made her way home.

After the war, Barbara McKinney married a kinsman, David McKinney, who, too, had fought bravely in the Revolution. She lived to be very old and in her old age always wore a black silk cap to cover her head. She never hesitated to tell the young people who gathered around of her adventures and the tragic way "she lost the soft brown hair of her youth."

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*Louise Pettus is a retired history professor from Winthrop University. Her column appears Saturdays.*