

# The Capture of Isabella McCoy

## from Potter's 'History of Manchester'

*While Capt. Eastman's scout was out, the enemy appeared "on or about the twenty-first day of August," at Epsom, and made an attack upon the house of Mr. Charles McCoy as appears by the following Petition.*

*Province of New Hampshire.*

*To his Excellency Benning Wentworth Esq. Captain General Governor and Commander in Chief in and over his Majesties Province of New Hampshire. To the Honorable his Majesties Council for said province and the House of Representatives in General Assembly convened.*

*The Memorial and Petition of Charles McCoy of Epsom, in sd Province, most humbly shews, that on or about the twenty-first day of August last, his wife was taken by the Indian enemy and either killed or carried away captive, and his house burnt. That there is no garrison nor soldiers there, that your petitioner begs he may have some guard to go with him and take care of his cattle and fields there as your Excellency and Honor shall judge necessary.*

*his*

*Charles [X] McCoy*

*mark*

*Sept. 3d, 1747.*

*In compliance with his petition a company of twenty-seven men were sent by the Governor to Epsom, under the command of Capt. Joseph Thomas, to "take care of the cattle and fields" of the petitioner. McCoy went with the scout. After securing his property, they continued for a fortnight scouting from Epsom through Nottingham, to Durham. But they did not meet with the enemy. The Indians who made this attack were Sabatis, Plausawa and Christi.*

*As Christi and McCoy were both from this neighborhood, the former having lived at Amoskeag Falls the latter at Londonderry, we give a more particular account of Mrs. McCoy's captivity in this place. McCoy had moved from Londonderry to Epsom, some years previous to his wife's captivity, but probably was well known to Christi.*

*"Reports were spread of the depredations of the Indians in various places; and McCoy had heard that they had been seen lurking about the woods at Penacook, now Concord. He went as far as Pembroke; ascertained that they were in the vicinity, was somewhere discovered by them, and followed home. They told his wife, whom they afterwards made prisoner, that they looked through the cracks around the house, and saw what they had for supper. The next day, Mrs. McCoy attended by their two dogs, went down to see if any of the other families had returned from the garrison. She found no one. On her return, as she was passing the block-house, the dogs which had passed around it, came running back growling and very much excited. Their appearance induced her to make the best of her way home. The Indians afterwards told her that they then lay concealed there, and saw the dogs, when they came running round.*

*McCoy, being now strongly suspicious that the Indians were actually in the town, determined to set off the next day with his family for the garrison at Nottingham. His family now consisted of himself, his wife, and son John. They accordingly secured their house as well as they could, and all set off next morning. McCoy and his son with their guns, though without ammunition, having fired away what they brought with them in hunting.*

*As they were travelling a little distance east of the place where the meeting house now stands, Mrs. McCoy fell a little in the rear of the others. This circumstance gave the Indians a favorable opportunity, for separating her from her husband and son. The Indians, three men and a boy, lay in ambush near the foot of Marden's hill not far from the junction of the mountain road with the main road. Here they suffered McCoy and his son to pass, but, as his wife was passing them they reached from the bushes, and took hold of her, charging her to make no noise, and covering her mouth with their hands as she cried to her husband for assistance. Her husband hearing her cries, turned, and was about coming to her relief. But he no sooner began to advance, than the Indians, expecting probably that he would fire upon them, began to raise their pieces, which she pushed one side, and motioned her friends to make their escape, knowing that their guns were not loaded, and that they would doubtless be killed, if they approached. They accordingly ran into the woods and made their escape to the garrison. This took place August 21, 1747.*

*The Indians then collected together what booty they could obtain, which consisted of an iron trammel, from Mr. George Wallace's; the apples of the only tree which bore in town, which was in the orchard now owned by Mr. David Griffin, and some other trifling articles, and prepare to set off with their prisoner to Canada.*

*Before they took their departure, they conveyed Mrs. McCoy to a place near the little Suncook river, where they left her*

*in the care of the young Indian, while the three men, whose names were afterwards ascertained to be Plausawa, Sabatis and Christi, went away, and were some time absent. During their absence, Mrs. McCoy thought of attempting to make her escape. She saw opportunities, when she thought she might dispatch the young Indian with the trammel, which with other things, was left with them, and thus perhaps avoid some strange and barbarous death, or a long and distressing captivity. But, on the other hand, she knew not at what distance the others were. If she attempted to kill her young keeper, she might fail. If she effected her purpose in this, she might be pursued and overtaken by a cruel and revengeful foe, and then some dreadful death would be her certain portion. On the whole, she thought best to endeavor to prepare her mind to bear what might be no more, than a savage captivity. Soon, however, the Indians returned, and put an end for the present to all thoughts of escape. From the direction, in which they went and returned, and their smutty appearance, she suspected what their business had been. She told them, 'she guessed they had been burning her house.'* Plausawa, who could speak some broken English, informed her they had.

*They now commenced their long and tedious journey to Canada, in which the poor captive might well expect that great and complicated sufferings would be her lot. She did indeed find the journey fatiguing, and her fare scanty and precarious. But, in her treatment from the Indians, she experienced a very agreeable disappointment. The kindness she received from them was far greater than she had expected from those, who were so often distinguished for their cruelties. The apples they had gathered they saved for her, giving her one a day. In this way, they lasted her as far as Lake Champlain. They gave her the last as they were crossing the lake in their canoes. This circumstance gave to the tree, on which the apples grew, the name of "Isabel's tree," her name being Isabella.*

*In many ways did they appear desirous of mitigating the distresses of their prisoner while on their tedious journey. When night came on, and they halted to repose themselves in the dark wilderness, Plausawa, the head man, would make a little couch in the leaves a little way from theirs, cover her up with his own blanket; and there she was suffered to sleep undisturbed till morning. When they came to a river, which must be forded, one of them would carry her over on his back. Nothing like insult or indecency did they ever offer her during the whole time she was with them. They carried her to Canada, and sold her as a servant to a French family, whence, at the close of the war, she returned home. But so comfortable was her condition there, and her husband being a man of rather a rough and violent temper, she declared she never should have thought of attempting the journey home, were it not for the sake of her children."*

*This was the last attack of the Indians during the war, in the Merrimack valley. McCoy was not the only person to have contact with the Indians.....so did Samuel Blake, known as Sergeant Blake, and his story is told by Rev. Jonathan Curtis.*

*"The ferocity and cruelty of the savages were doubtless very much averted by a friendly, conciliating course of conduct in the inhabitants towards them. This was particularly the case in the course pursued by Sergeant Blake. Being himself a curious marksman and an expert hunter, traits of character in their view of the highest order, he soon secured their respect; and, by a course of kind treatment, he secured their friendship to such a degree, that, though they had opportunities, they would not injure him even in time of war."*

*"The first he ever saw of them was a company of them making towards his house, through the opening from the top of Sanborn's hill. He fled to the woods and there lay concealed, till they had made a thorough search about his house and enclosures, and had gone off. The next time his visitors came he was constrained to become more acquainted with them and to treat them with more attention. As he was busily engaged towards the close of the day in completing a yard for his cow, the declining sun suddenly threw along several enormous shadows on the ground before him. He had no sooner turned to see the cause, than he found himself in the company of a number of stately Indians. Seeing his perturbation, they patted him on the head and told him 'not to be afraid, for they would not hurt him.' They then went with him into his house; and their first business was to search all his bottles to see if he had any 'occabee,' rum. They then told him they were very hungry, and wanted something to eat. He happened to have a quarter of a bear which he gave them. They took it and threw it whole upon the fire, and very soon began to cut and eat from it half raw. While they were eating, he employed himself in cutting pieces from it and broiling upon a stick for them, which pleased them very much. After their repast, they wished for the privilege of lying by his fire through the night, which he granted. The next morning, they proposed trying skill with him in firing at a mark. To this he acceded. But in this, finding themselves outdone, they were much astonished and chagrined; nevertheless they highly commended him for his skill, patting him on the head and telling him 'if he would go off with them, they would make him their big captain.' They used often to call upon him, and his kindness to them they never forgot, even in time of war."*

*"Plausawa had a peculiar manner of doubling his lip and producing a very shrill piercing whistle, which might be heard a great distance. At a time when considerable danger was apprehended from the Indians, Blake went off into the woods alone, though considered hazardous, to look for his cow that was missing. As he was passing along by Sinclair's brook, an unfrequented place, northerly from McCoy's mountain; a very sharp whistle, which he knew to be Plausawa's suddenly passed through his head like the report of a pistol. The sudden alarm almost raised him from the ground; and, with a very light step, he soon reached home without his cow. In more peaceable times, Plausawa asked him if he did not remember the time, and laughed very much to think how he ran at the fright, and told him the reason for his whistling. 'Young Indian,' said he, 'put up gun to shoot Englishman. Me knock it down, and whistle to start you off.' So lasting is their friendship, when treated well."*