

= Jane McCrea =

Jane McCrea (sometimes spelled McCrae or MacCrae , 1752 ? July 27 , 1777) was a young woman who was slain by Native Americans associated with the British army of Lieutenant General John Burgoyne during the American Revolutionary War . Affianced to a Loyalist serving in Burgoyne 's army , her slaying led to expressions of outrage and an increase in Patriot military recruiting , especially in the days following her killing .

The propaganda that followed greatly accentuated her beauty , and the fact that she was associated with Loyalists (although her family was primarily active in serving the Patriot cause) undermined British claims of protection for Loyalists . Burgoyne 's inability to punish the alleged killers also undermined British assertions that they were more civilized in their conduct of the war ; the dissemination of this propaganda contributed to the success of Patriot recruiting drives in New York for several years .

McCrea 's fiancé was reported to be bitter about the affair , and never married . The story of her life and death entered American folklore , and was used by James Fenimore Cooper in *The Last of the Mohicans* and Kenneth Lewis Roberts in *Rabble in Arms* .

= = Life and slaying = =

Jane McCrea was born one of the younger children in the large family of Rev. James McCrea of New Jersey . Since her mother 's death and her father 's remarriage she had been living with her brother John near Saratoga , New York , where she became engaged to David Jones . When the war began two of her brothers joined the American forces while her fiancé fled with other Loyalists to Quebec . As John Burgoyne 's expedition neared the Hudson River during the summer of 1777 , Colonel John McCrea took up his duty with a regiment of the Albany County militia . Jones was serving as a lieutenant in one of the Loyalist militia units accompanying Burgoyne , and was stationed at Fort Ticonderoga after its capture .

McCrea left her brother 's home and was travelling to join her fiancé at Ticonderoga . She had reached the village by the old Fort Edward , but so had the war . She was staying at the home of Sara McNeil , another Loyalist and an elderly cousin to the British General Simon Fraser . On the morning of July 27 , 1777 , a group of Native Americans , an advance party from Burgoyne 's army led by a Wyandot known as Le Loup or Wyandot Panther , descended on the village of Fort Edward . They massacred a settler and his family , and then killed Lieutenant Tobias Van Vechten and four others when they walked into an ambush . What happened next is a subject of some dispute ; what is known is that Jane McCrea and Sara McNeil were taken by the natives and separated . McNeil was eventually taken to the British camp , where either she or David Jones recognized McCrea 's supposedly distinctive scalp being carried by a native .

The traditional version of what happened appears to be based on the account of Thomas Anburey , a British officer . Two warriors , one of whom was Wyandot Panther , were escorting McCrea to the British camp , when they quarreled over an expected reward for bringing her in . One of them then killed and scalped her , and Wyandot Panther ended up with the scalp . Anburey claimed she was taken against her will , but there were also rumors that she was being escorted at her fiancé , David Jones ' request . The second version of the story , apparently advanced by Wyandot Panther under questioning , was that McCrea was killed by a bullet fired by pursuing Americans . James Phinney Baxter , in supporting this version of events in his 1887 history of Burgoyne 's campaign , asserts that an exhumation of her body revealed only bullet wounds , and no tomahawk wounds .

= = Reaction to killing = =

When Burgoyne heard of the killing he went to the Native American camp and ordered the culprit to be delivered , threatening to have him executed . He was told by General Fraser and Luc de la Corne , the agent leading the Native Americans , that such an act would cause the defection of all the Native Americans and might cause them to take revenge as they went back north . Burgoyne

relented , and no action was taken against the Native Americans .

News of her death traveled relatively quickly by the standards of the time . News accounts were published in Pennsylvania on August 11 and on August 22 as far away as Virginia . Often the accounts became more exaggerated as they traveled , describing indiscriminate killings of large numbers of Loyalists and Patriots alike . Burgoyne 's campaign had intended to use the Indians as a means to intimidate the colonists ; however , the American reaction to the news was not the one hoped for . The propaganda war received a boost after Burgoyne wrote a letter to the American general Horatio Gates , complaining about American treatment of prisoners taken in the August 17 Battle of Bennington . Gates ' response was widely reprinted :

News accounts elaborated on her beauty , describing her as " lovely in disposition , so graceful in manners and so intelligent in features , that she was a favorite of all who knew her " , and that her hair " was of extraordinary length and beauty , measuring a yard and a quarter " . One of the only contemporary accounts by someone who actually saw her was that of James Wilkinson , who described her as " a country girl of honest family in circumstances of mediocrity , without either beauty or accomplishments . " Later accounts embellished on details ; historian Richard Ketchum notes that the color of her hair has been described as everything from black to blonde to red ; he also cites an 1840s examination of an alleged lock of her hair that described it as " reddish " .

Her death , and those of others in similar raids , inspired some of the resistance to Burgoyne 's invasion leading to his defeat at the Battle of Saratoga . The effect expanded as reports of the incident were used as propaganda to excite rebel sympathies later in the war , especially before the 1779 Sullivan Expedition .

David Jones , apparently bitter over the experience , never married , and settled in Canada as a United Empire Loyalist . The story eventually became a part of American folklore . An anonymous poet wrote " The Ballad of Jane McCrea " that was set to music and became a popular folk song . In Philadelphia in 1799 Ricketts ' Circus performed " The Death of Miss McCrea " , a pantomime co-written by John Durang . John Vanderlyn painted the portrait (shown above) in 1803 , and James Fenimore Cooper described similar events in his novel The Last of the Mohicans . There are several markers in and near Fort Edward commemorating her death .

= = Exhumations = =

McCrea 's remains have been moved three times . The first time was in 1822 , and the second was in 1852 when they were moved to the Union Cemetery in Fort Edward . The body was exhumed again in 2003 in hopes of solving the mystery of her death . Unexpectedly , two bodies ? those of McCrea and Sara McNeil ? were found in the grave . The 1822 move had placed McCrea 's remains atop the burial vault of McNeil (who died in 1799 of natural causes) . The skeletons of both were largely complete , except that McCrea 's skull was missing , possibly due to reported grave @-@ looting in the 19th century . The bodies were exhumed again in 2005 for further analysis , and were this time reburied in separate graves .