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The Tragic Name of Ticonderoga by Christina McAskell

'Eerie Coincidences Link an Australian Plague Ship, a Scottish Crime, and an American Disaster'

In the summer of 1852 a four-masted ship dropped anchor inside Port Phillip Heads flying the yellow flag that speaks a warning in all languages. The convalescent passengers were put ashore to accommodate themselves as best they could on a peninsula then as deserted as Robinson Crusoe's Island. The sick remained on board, and, although fresh food supplies and medical assistance presently arrived by the Government schooner from Williamstown, their misery may be imagined.

The summer of 1852 was notably hot. One hundred passengers had died during the voyage, and in the next few weeks 78 graves were dug on the sandy peninsula to receive further victims of the fever, chiefly Scots and Highlanders, their wives and children, and members of a few families from northern English counties.

The ship was a giant of the days of sail. Her home port was New York, but she had crossed to Liverpool to share in the lucrative passenger trade arising from gold discoveries in the Port Phillip district. The name upon her bows was Ticonderoga, an American Indian word meaning "musical waters".

A hundred years earlier, when Britain and France struggled for supremacy about the great lakes of North America, Ticonderoga – now part of New York State was the scene of a French entrenchment and a British attack repulsed with heavy casualties. The old Highland Regiment, later the famous 42nd, lost 500 men in a few hours of desperate struggle. The name Ticonderoga acquired a mournful significance in British regimental history, and the strange and interesting legend of Ticonderoga was added to the folk lore of Clan Campbell.

Major Duncan Campbell, of Inverawe, marching that day with his regiment through the American backwoods toward an unknown objective, though his years were only 55, could look back upon an adventurous military career and also upon some rather strange psychic experiences. A few years earlier he had raised a regiment and vigorously assisted the Government against the Jacobite rising of "the 45", carrying fire and sword even among members of this own clan who opposed the Government. In a perilous situation he unexpectedly received protection from a Jacobite outlaw who proved to be a kinsman, one Donald Campbell, of Lorn.

Some time after the restoration of peace Donald of Lorn was attacked upon the stepping stones of a river crossing by a cowardly assailant and murdered. Duncan Campbell, enjoying a well-earned



leave from his military duties, received the news of the murder at his estate at Inverawe, and by a strange coincidence had the murderer in his power. Every clan tradition demanded that he should avenge his kinsman's death, but while he hesitated between old loyalties and newer ideals the guilty man escaped. That night Duncan Campbell was visited by a startling apparition. Donald of Lorn stood before him, showed his bloodstained plaid, and exclaimed reproachfully, "My murder is unavenged. Farewell, Inverawe, till we meet again at Ticonderoga."

Ticonderoga! Nobody in Scotland had heard of such a place. Major Campbell related his experience to some of his brother officers, but the strange name remained an unknown quantity through several years. Even as they marched that day upon the fatal entrenchment their commanding officer spoke of it by the French name of Fort Carillon. It was only on the eve of attack that Major Campbell, rendered uneasy by a presentiment – some accounts say that he saw himself, mortally wounded, crossing a stream in the woods – asked of a scout if the place had another name, and received the reply, "Yes, the old Indian name is Ticonderoga."

This strange story of a dream and its fulfillment was widely circulated and its truth attested by Major Campbell's brother officers and relatives. Francis Parkman, the historian, including it in his important work, "Montcalm and Wolfe," gives the facts as he received them from Dean Stanley, who had corresponded on the subject with a later laird of Inverawe, third in succession to Duncan Campbell. Its conclusion is known to the tourist who visits the old lakeside cemetery at Lake George, New York State, and there reads a faded epitaph:

"Here lyes the body of
Duncan Campbell, of Inverawe,
Major of the Old Highland Regiment,
Age 55 years,
Who died July 17, 1758, of wounds
Received at the attack on the entrench-
ment of Ticonderoga."

A tablet has of recent years been placed in a near-by library to commemorate the bravery of the 500 Highlanders who fell that day, but no trace of their burial-place remains. Perhaps in another hundred years there will be as little to memorialize the 178 Highland settlers who died on the fever ship called by the same unhappy name. At present three graves only remain, inscribed:

"In memory of Wm. Henry Boyle, late 3rd officer of the ship Ticonderoga, of New York."

"Adam Moffat, steward of the ship Ticonderoga."



And, saddest of all, monument to 100 similar family tragedies that have no memorial –

“To the memory of Helen McRae, wife
of Malcolm McRae, aged 41 years;
also her daughter Jane, aged 11 years;
her son Malcolm, aged 2 years;
her son Farquhar, aged 6 years;
her son John, aged 15 years.”

A happier thought is to trace some of the survivors of that sorrowful voyage and find among their descendants colonists who gave distinguished service to the country so inauspiciously entered. Sir Colin MacKenzie, the brilliant and patriotic Australian, who in a lifetime too short spent his powers unsparingly for the relief of crippled children, was a descendant of one of the Scottish families who sailed on that nightmare voyage of 91 days from Liverpool 87 years ago. For many subsequent years the landing=place inside Port Phillip Heads was known as Ticonderoga Bay. The name is shown on Port Phillip charts of the “30’s, but has since passed out of use. The legend of Ticonderoga is commemorated in the Campbell country; the Highland glen in which death overtook Donald of Lorn being still called Scalath – in expressive Gaelic, literally “The Dirty Pass”; while over the historic stepping stones still run the waters of Dargan – “the River of the Red Stain.”