

**THE REVEREND JOHN McKENNA, LOYALIST CHAPLAIN**

BY THE REV. EDWARD KELLY

"The first band of Highlanders who arrived in Upper Canada," says the Chevalier Macdonell, "had followed an Irish priest named McKenna." Although this statement is not literally correct, yet it is but fitting that this man who did so much in bringing to Canada the germ of the Glengarry Colony should be remembered during this U.E.L. year. In most of our literature on the subject he is, indeed, "The Forgotten Man."

In the Public Archives of Canada there are a number of transcripts (the originals of which are in the British Museum and in the Public Record Office, London)<sup>3</sup> which give us much information concerning this priest. These are all petitions of Father McKenna regarding his claims on the government for past services and losses, and might be suspected as being *ex parte* evidence: but the truth of their contents is sworn to by him, and he produces documents from Sir Guy Carleton,<sup>4</sup> Sir Frederick Haldimand,<sup>5</sup> and others,<sup>6</sup> to substantiate his statements. In addition to this he gives as references General Burgoyne, Sir John Johnson, and Col. St. Leger;<sup>7</sup> (all living at the time), who could vouch for the veracity of his claims. From the limited reading of the author of this sketch on the subject, it is judged that with one exception (which will be noticed in its place), all that Father McKenna asserts is substantiated by synchronal documents both civil and ecclesiastical.

Born of a clan whose original home land was in Ulster<sup>8</sup> John McKenna first saw the light in the year 1743 at Brownstown in the parish now known as

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<sup>1</sup> *Reminiscences of the late Hon. and Right Rev. Alexander Macdonell*, p. 13.

<sup>2</sup> B. M. Add. MSS., Vol. 21,875, Fol. 48-9 (Na 56); transcript in Public Archives of Canada, B. 215, pp. 46-52.

<sup>3</sup> Audit Office 12, Vol. 99, Fol. 338; *Ibid.* 13, Bundle 55; *Ibid.* 12, Vol. 24, pp. 247-8; *Ibid.* Vol. 102, Fol. 78.

<sup>4</sup> A.O. 13, Bundle 55.

<sup>5</sup> Hald. Papers, B., 89-1, p. 13.

<sup>6</sup> A. O. 13, Bundle 55 (Letters of Gen. Reidesel and his Aide de Camp.)

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> The Barony of Trough, County Monaghan, where up to a few years ago there were upwards of 700 families of the name. During the centuries groups and individuals of the clan settled in other parts of Ireland. — Letter of Bishop P. McKenna of Clogher to the writer, Jan. 2, 1934.

Beauparc, in the Counts of Meath.<sup>9</sup> As the Penal Code was still in existence at the time and it was impossible to keep ecclesiastical registers, we are forced to other sources for knowledge of our subject. His father's name was Michael,<sup>10</sup> but of his mother's we have no information.

Although we have it on the best of authority that his relatives were respectable farmers,<sup>11</sup> the aristocratic officials to whom his petition was presented pay their tribute of contempt to him and to all the Irish clergy whose families had been so long held in servitude by their benevolent government in the following words: "This man was a Roman Catholic Missionary, and appears to be, as they generally are, a man of low extraction". Had Father McKenna belonged to one of those families in England whose vast possessions were stolen from the monasteries, and held during the Penal days by open or feigned apostasy; or from one of those whose fortunes were founded on the frailty of one of its women who became a royal favorite, these eminent gentlemen would doubtlessly have considered him most respectable. The McKennas have the distinction of being a levitical race,<sup>12</sup> so John, feeling that he was called as Aaron was, repaired to the Continent to acquire the education necessary, the Penal Code forbidding all Catholic teaching in his own land. John Gilmary Shea<sup>13</sup> says he studied at Louvain, but a diligent search of the records there failed to discover his name.<sup>14</sup>

There had always been an intimate relationship between the Gaels of Erin and Albyn, and during the days of persecution many Irish priests served on the missions of the Highlands. John McKenna was one of these, being ordained in Scotland in 1768<sup>15</sup> by Bishop John Macdonald.<sup>16</sup> Immediately on ordination the young priest was sent to Lochaber in the Highlands as the first resident pastor, where he remained five years, attending Badenoch as well. His tenure of office was marked with success, and he completed and consolidated the work of Father Gillis who had visited these missions from Glengarry. A Scottish ecclesiastical

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<sup>9</sup> Otherwise known as Yellow Furze, or Kentstown, – Letter of Bishop Mulvaney of Meath to the writer, Jan. 1, 1934.

<sup>10</sup> The family monument at Danestown.

<sup>11</sup> Bishop Mulvaney's letter *ut supra*.

<sup>12</sup> "Perhaps more of the name have been found at all times in the ranks of the priesthood than of any other". – Bishop McKenna's letter *ut supra*.

<sup>13</sup> *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, Vol 2, p. 142.

<sup>14</sup> Letter of Dr. De Meyer to Dr. Phelan, May 11, 1934

<sup>15</sup> "Roll for the Registry of the Popish Clergy according to an Act of Parliament pasted in the Kingdom of Ireland for the further relief of His Majesty's subjects of the Kingdom professing this Religion". – Record Office, Dublin.

<sup>16</sup> Coadjutor and nephew of Bishop Hugh of that ilk – who blessed the royal standard at Glenfinnan.

writer<sup>17</sup> of our day gives us a very vivid picture of Father McKenna at this time. "A man of gigantic stature and prodigious strength, many anecdotes of the prowess of Father McKenna are still related in the country, from which it appears that he was the person exactly suited to the times and the kind of people with whom he had to deal; for if anyone dared to show him any want of respect, or to disobey his spiritual authority, such a one was sure, in case other arguments failed to produce their effect, to feel the weight of his powerful arm." It may be noted in passing that a quarter of a century later Badenoch, the mission of Father McKenna, received as its first resident pastor the future Bishop of Kingston, Alexander Macdonell, the "Father of the Catholic Church in Upper Canada."

Father McKenna's short career on the Scottish Mission was certainly a strenuous time for the Catholics of that country. It is true that since the accession of George Third the cruel oppression and intolerance which had been exercised towards Catholics since the so-called Reformation had become somewhat abated,<sup>18</sup> but petty tyrants, failure of crops, and financial trouble conspired to depopulate the country. The pervert Macdonald of Boisdale began a campaign to drive the Catholics from his estates unless they apostatized. To a man they refused, and emigrated to St. John's Island (Prince Edward Island) under the guidance of John Macdonald of Glenaladale and the Reverend James Macdonald. Some writers<sup>19</sup> tell us that other chieftains imitated Boisdale in the matter of religious persecution; others<sup>20</sup> name Macdonald of Clanranald as the guilty party instead of Boisdale; but the Abbé Macpherson<sup>21</sup> cites the latter alone, and says most of Boisdale's neighbors disapproved of his conduct. The crops of 1772 having failed and the cattle dying for lack of provender, the people were in great distress. The failure of the Bank of Ayr and other financial institutions increased the misery, and reduced the country to a deplorable state.<sup>22</sup>

Emigration seemed the only solution of the matter, so negotiations were entered into with Sir William Johnson, who was anxious to have settlers for his vast estate in the colony of New York. As Father McKenna and Sir William were both from County Meath, we may infer that it was the priest who suggested this project.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Don Odo Blundell, *The Catholic Highlands of Scotland*, Vol. 1, p. 182.

<sup>18</sup> Walsh: *History of the Catholic Church in Scotland*, p. 511.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 516.

<sup>20</sup> Corbet: *A Retrospect*, p. 6; Macdonell: *Reminiscences of Bishop Macdonell*, p. 10; Kelly: *The Fate of Glengarry*, pp 7-8.

<sup>21</sup> Notes and Minutes for Memoirs of the Mission, Minute for 1772, Cf. W. Forbes Leith; *Memoirs of the Scottish Mission*, Vol. 2, p. 364.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Minutes for 1773, p. 366

<sup>23</sup> Sir William Johnson was the son of Christopher Johnson, of Smithstown, County Meath, whose family had at an earlier date borne the corresponding Gaelic name

The outcome was that by Sir William's influence a frigate of the Royal navy was provided for the purpose,<sup>24</sup> and in the autumn of 1773 a party of three hundred, most of them Catholics from Knoydart and Glengarry, including many of the leading country gentlemen, sailed from Fort William in Scotland for New York, Father McKenna accompanying them to take spiritual charge of the colony in their new home beyond the seas.

One factor of his expedition which has never before been mentioned is that there were some Irish amongst the colonists. Father McKenna speaks of himself as an "Irish Roman Catholic priest who, with three hundred Scotch and Irish Emigrants of the same persuasion embarked, etc."<sup>25</sup> The presence of these sons of Erin amongst the party may be readily explained by the fact that both their prospective landlord in the new world and the priest who probably began the negotiations were Irish.

Upon their arrival in New York they were assigned to the new county of Tryon in the Mohawk valley, where those able to purchase land did so, and the others were settled as tenants of Sir William, being liberally supplied by him with provisions, cattle, implements and household furniture to the amount of £2000.<sup>26</sup>

From their advent they found that they were not welcome amongst their Dutch neighbors. More than half a century before a colony of Campbells (all Protestants) had settled in the valley, but their strange dress and speech, their independent swagger, and readiness with the *skein dhu* made them so unpopular that they withdrew to the neighborhood of Saratoga, where they were nearly all massacred by the Indians.<sup>27</sup>

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McShane, and, according to report, was an offshoot of the O'Neills of Ulster. His mother was Anne Warren, of Warrenstown, County Meath, a sister of Vice-Admiral Sir Peter Warren, whose protégé William became. Warrenstown is some ten miles south of Father McKenna's native place of Brownstown. Smithstown is not indicated on modern maps, but on Sir William Petty's map of Meath it is pieced about a mile or two northeast of Warrenstown. It was an estate of 204 acres, the title to which, it may be of interest to note, was obtained, or recovered, by the Johnsons in 1770 through purchase by Sir John Johnson from James Bolton. — Memorial no. 283-88 182868, Registry of Deeds, Dublin: transcript in Public Archives of Canada. For the genealogy of the Johnson family see James Sullivan, *The Papers of Sir William Johnson*, Vol. 1 (Albany, 1921), pp. xxxiv et seq., and the references there given.

<sup>24</sup> Cruikshank: "The King's Royal Regiment of New York". *Ont. Hist. Soc. Papers and Records*, Vol. 27, p. 193

<sup>25</sup> Audit Office 13, Bundle 55.

<sup>26</sup> Cruikshank *ut supra*, p. 195.

<sup>27</sup> "Thus atoning" says Rev. T. J. Campbell, S.J. "for the massacre of Glencoe, in which they stained their hands in the hood of the Macdonalds thirty years before".

The colony to which Father McKenna belonged had all those qualities which had created the antipathy to the others, and in addition they were guilty in the eyes of those unbending Calvinists of the unpardonable sin of being Papists. The priest in particular was the *bete noire* for those descendants of the countrymen of William of Orange.

But under the aegis of Sir William, Father McKenna was safe from harm although an act of Governor Bellomont's time still stood on the statutes, by which priests were forbidden to enter the Province.<sup>28</sup> Father McKenna was the first to exercise priestly functions within the colony since the days of Governor Dongan, except the Jesuits who, often disguised as Indians, made frequent visits to their neophytes amongst the Six Nations.<sup>29</sup> Father McKenna tells us that he had a yearly appointment or provision made for him of £46, but he did not receive it regularly.<sup>30</sup> He had a good house rent free, and 100 acres of land in the nature of a Glebe granted to him and his successors. This property was still uncleared at the outbreak of the war.<sup>31</sup> Sir William Johnson died on July 11, 1774, but Sir John Johnson, who succeeded to his father's estates, was equally friendly to the newcomers.

Clouds were gathering on the political horizon: the thirteen colonies were in open revolt. Whether we hold with Shea<sup>32</sup> that "anti-Catholic bigotry sent to swell the British army men who longed to avenge Culloden, men eager to draw their claymores against England;" or with another writer<sup>33</sup> who says that "their patriotism quickly gained the mastery over all other considerations", the people of Father McKenna stood out for the King. Continuing the priest's own narrative we learn that "They made it always their business to demene [sic] themselves Peaceably and with due respect and Subordination to Government, but in the first Commotion and rising [sic] of the Rebels [sic] in those parts in June, 1775, it became unavoidable not to take a more Active part;"<sup>34</sup> and then both priest and people "did in good earnest appear for the Interests of the Mother Country, holding out with Arms that part of the Country for his Majesty in Anxious hope

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*Pioneer Priests of North, America*, Vol. I, p. 343.

<sup>28</sup> By virtue of this Act any priest found in the colony after Nov. 1, 1700, was deemed as incendiary, a disturber of the peace, and an enemy of the Christian religion. The penalty was perpetual imprisonment and, in case of escape, death if recaptured. — Shea: *History of the Catholic Church in the United States*, Vol. 2, p. 73.

<sup>29</sup> Campbell: *P. P. in N. A.*, Vol. 24, p. 248.

<sup>30</sup> Audit Office 12, Vol. 24, p. 248.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 12, Vol. 99, f. 338.

<sup>32</sup> *History of the Catholic Church in the U. S.*, Vol. 2, p. 142.

<sup>33</sup> Kelly: *The Fate of Glengarry*, p. 10.

<sup>34</sup> Audit Office 13, Bundle 55.

of Support."<sup>35</sup> In confirmation of this statement we have a complaint to Congress in May, 1775. "The Roman Catholic Highlanders in and about Johnstown have armed themselves to the number of one hundred and fifty, ready to aid in the suppression of any outbreak in favor of the growing cause of liberty."<sup>36</sup> And again in September of that year the Local Committee informs the provincial congress that they are daily scandalized, provoked and threatened by Sir John Johnson and his highlanders and other tenants.<sup>37</sup> During the summer, Col. Allan Maclean visited the settlement and enrolled four hundred men for the proposed Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment.<sup>38</sup> But the difficulty was to get them to Canada. A small party under Ranald Macdonell escorted the Colonel to Montreal, arriving there in September.

In January, 1776, General Schuyler marched into the valley with a force estimated anywhere from two to six thousand men.<sup>39</sup> Seeing the hopelessness of a conflict with such overwhelming odds against him Sir John Johnson surrendered. By the terms of the agreement the Scotch inhabitants were to deliver up all arms in their possession, and were made to promise not to take up arms again without the permission of the Continental Congress or its agents.<sup>40</sup> This last phrase would seem to indicate that the American authorities had hope of gaining over some of the settlers to their side, to which fact Father McKenna alludes later on. Six hostages were taken, including Allan Macdonell of Collachie<sup>41</sup> and were lodged in the jail at Lancaster, Penn. Their property rights were to be respected, but the people were plundered and their cattle driven off.<sup>42</sup> So keen was the distress occasioned by this barbaric conduct that the priest had to help the members of his congregation to the extent of £30.<sup>43</sup> Father McKenna's account of this episode is that "overpowered by ten times their number they

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Kelly: *The Fate of Glengarry*, p. 10.

<sup>37</sup> Cruikshank: "The K. R. R. of N. Y." *Ont. Hist. Soc. P. and R.*, Vol. 27, p. 190.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Cruikshank: "The K. R. R. of N. Y." *Ont. Hist. Soc. P. and R.*, Vol. 27 p. 198, says "from three to six thousand"; Bancroft: *Hist. of U. S.*, Vol. 7, p. 168, says "more than two thousand".

<sup>40</sup> Cruikshank *ut supra*, p. 200.

<sup>41</sup> By a strange coincidence the son of this officer was taken prisoner at Newark, Upper Canada, in 1813 and confined in the same prison,

<sup>42</sup> "Pioneer Settlements", by A. C. Casselman: *Canada and its Provinces*, Vol. 17, p. 4.

<sup>43</sup> Audit Office 13, Bundle 55.

secured decent terms of Capitulation but the terms of the agreement were not much attended to by the enemy.<sup>44</sup>

Sir John Johnson in the end of May, 1776, hearing that a regiment of the enemy was on the way to take him dead or alive, hastily gathered his neighboring tenants and fled to Canada.<sup>45</sup> Three different writers give an identical and elaborate account of his fighting his way to the St. Lawrence;<sup>46</sup> but as a matter of fact, his men being unarmed, he avoided all chances of encountering the enemy and arrived at Caughnawaga after nineteen days, the people famished from hunger and worn out by their toilsome journey.<sup>47</sup>

After the departure of their patron the people were in a quandary. Emissaries of Congress were amongst them endeavoring to win them over. "Foreseeing," says Father McKenna, "that they would all be forced into the service of Congress after pressing imitation from persons authorized to that effect,"<sup>48</sup> it was decided that the priest should go to Canada, acquaint the authorities with these latest developments in their section and make arrangements for the removal of the people to that country,<sup>49</sup> leaving behind him all his possessions, even his vestments and sacred vessels, he set out with two or three guides,<sup>50</sup> with no provisions or clothing except what they could carry. As the fear of being captured was ever present they made their way, not by the main routes of traffic (which in those days were not ideal) but, as he quaintly puts it, "by bye and unfrequented way; woods and loughs, for fear of detection.... A long and dismal journey of between five and six hundred miles, usually through an uninhabited country... I suffered dangers and hardships not to be related."<sup>51</sup> According to General Carleton's certificate this journey was made in the summer of 1776, but Father McKenna says it was in October of the same year.<sup>52</sup> On his arrival in Canada, he continues, he gave to General Carleton the first information that official had received of the state of affairs in that part of New York.<sup>53</sup> If Father McKenna had meant by this expression the first since the beginning of the War, he would hardly cite as a reference, as he

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Cruikshank: "K.R.R. of N.Y." *Ont. Hist. Soc. P. and R.*, Vol. 27, p. 200.

<sup>46</sup> Macdonell: *Remin. Of Bp. Macdonnell*, p. 12; Corbet: *A Retrospect*, p. 6; Blundell: *The Catholic Highlands of Scotland*, Vol. 2, p. 69.

<sup>47</sup> Cruikshank *ut supra*, p. 200.

<sup>48</sup> A.O. 13, Bundle 55.

<sup>49</sup> Hald. Papers, B. 215, p. 46.

<sup>50</sup> They charged him £20 for their services. A.O. 13, Bundle 55.

<sup>51</sup> Hald. Papers, *ut supra*.

<sup>52</sup> A.O. 12. Vol. 24, p. 247

<sup>53</sup> A.O. 13, Bundle 55.

actually did,<sup>54</sup> Sir John Johnson, who had preceded him by four months, and had been in contact with the governor from his arrival. The priest evidently meant the first since Johnson's flight, and the developments which arose during that period were sufficient to be thought by General Carleton "of some importance to the King's service."<sup>55</sup>

Stimulated by the advice and example of their pastor, as General Carleton attests,<sup>56</sup> his people three months later,<sup>57</sup> to the number of 300, made their way to Montreal.

While in the province of New York Father McKenna had been under the jurisdiction of the Vicar Apostolic of the London District, whose diocese embraced the thirteen colonies; and when he came to Canada, being now under that of the Bishop of Quebec, he received faculties to exercise the ministry in this country from M. Montgolfier, Superior of the Sulpicians, in his capacity as Vicar General of Bishop Briand.<sup>58</sup> Whilst in Montreal, Father McKenna lived with Father Foquet.<sup>59</sup> John Gilmary Shea, usually a very accurate writer, is guilty of an anachronism in saying that the Reverend John Carroll, who came to portray to the Canadians the toleration of his countrymen, was confronted at Montreal by Father

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid. As to the date of Father McKenna's arrival in Canada, the author was confronted with the contradictory statements of that he was the priest that; first to bring knowledge of the state of affairs in New York to General Carleton, and that the journey was made in October, 1776. From the statement of Father Floquet, as given us by Father Charland (cf p, 53 infra). Father McKenna must have been in Montreal before the date assigned by him, as he was the only Irish Royalist priest in the country at the time. The "lapsus penna" of a man who was a physical and nervous wreck, writing eleven years after the event, might easily be excused. His claim, then, to be the first to advise the Governor of affairs in New York can be conceded. His arrival in Canada could not have been earlier than the spring of 1776, since he was in New York when Schuyler came (Jan., 1776), and the trip to Canada was made by water, as he speaks of the costs for the boatmen. If Father McKenna arrived in Montreal before May 12th, 1776, it would have been possible for him to confront Father Carroll as Shea states.

<sup>56</sup> Certificate of General Carleton, June 25, 1778.

<sup>57</sup> A.O. 12, Vol. 24, p. 247.

<sup>58</sup> "That Missionary had been charged with accompanying a new colony of Highlanders, about three hundred in number, who, they say, are going to settle in Upper Canada, where they hope to enjoy the Catholic Religion without molestation. They have already arrived at Orange and intend to fix altogether in the same place with their missionary who alone understands their language. I have given him the ordinary powers for ministering to his ambulating parish." Letter of M. Montgolfier in Sulpician Archives.

<sup>59</sup> D. A. O'Sullivan: *Early History of the Church in Upper Canada*, p. 43.

McKenna, the victim of their bigotry.<sup>60</sup> Father Carroll had left Montreal before Father McKenna arrived there.

Sir John Johnson had already begun the organization of the King's Royal Regiment of New York<sup>61</sup> and the bulk of Father McKenna's people joined this unit. There were, however, a respectable number of them in the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment, and a few in Butler's Rangers and other Provincial corps. Father McKenna was appointed as chaplain to the Catholics of the two first named regiments by Sir Guy Carleton, and, at the desire of that officer, he also attended to the spiritual needs of the Catholics amongst the Canadians, British, Irish and German troops in their cantonments, and in the various expeditions from Canada. For his services he was granted by the Governor a salary of one hundred and fifty pounds a year and forage money.<sup>62</sup>

The first active work of the "Royal Yorkers" was the capture of Crown Point and the attack on Ticonderoga, and it is likely that this was one of the "expeditions from Canada" to which Father McKenna refers.

On Nov. 1776, this last named regiment went into winter quarters, being, billeted on the parishes of Lachine, Point Claire and St. Anne, on the island of Montreal.<sup>63</sup> That Father McKenna was a busy man during this period of rest for the troops, we learn from several interesting documents. In the Archives at St. Sulpice, under the year 1776, we find that "le père McKenna, prêtre irlandais qui s'était enfi des Etats Unis par crainte du fanatisme Yankee passa quelque temps à Montréal. Il y desservit les Irlandais, les Ecossais, les Anglais et les Allemands Catholiques. C'était un excellent prêtre."<sup>64</sup> That he travelled far afield in his priestly labors we have proof in the two following orders, the first of which is from Major General Riedesel, the commanding officer at Three Rivers, the other from the aide-de-camp of that officer.

Il est ordonné à tous les Capitaines de Milice entre Trois Rivières et Cap Santé de fournir à Monsieur McKenna une Cariole gratis pour le mener à tous ces endroits où ses occupations spirituelles le demandent." – Riedesel, Maj General, Trois Rivières, 5 Fev. 1777.<sup>65</sup>

Il est de l'ordre de Monsieur le Major Général, Baron de Riedesel à tous les Capitaines, de Milice, dans le district de Quartiers que les trouves allemands occupent, que Monsieur le Curé McKenna sera fourni d'une

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<sup>60</sup> *History of the Catholic Church in U. S.*, Vol. 2, p. 152. But see note 55, *supra*.

<sup>61</sup> The Commission from General Carleton is dated June 20, 1776, at Chambly. – Hald. Papers, B. 158, p. 2.

<sup>62</sup> A.O. 13, Bundle 55.

<sup>63</sup> Cruikshank: "K. R. R. of N. Y." *Ont. Hist. Soc. P. and R.* Vol. 27, p. 202.

<sup>64</sup> Archives of St. Sulpice.

<sup>65</sup> Hald. Papers, B. 215, p. 53.

Cariole gratis, pour aller à Montréal, de paroisse en paroisse, aussi cette ordre doit être respectée quand il passera de Montréal à Berthier, pour se rendre dans les Cantonnements des Allemands du Coté du Sud de la Rivière, faisant tous ces voyages en services du Roy.

Cleve, Aide de Camp du Major General de Riedesel,

Trois Rivières, ce 5<sup>me</sup> d'Avril, 1777.<sup>66</sup>

Various parties from the Johnstown district trickled in during the Spring of 1777, all of whom were willing to serve for the period of the war, but they insisted on serving under their own chiefs. They were therefore distributed between "the Royal Yorkers" and the Loyal Highland Emigrant Regiments, in both of which were officers from their colony.<sup>67</sup>

An attack was made that summer on Fort Stanwix, the compliment being made up of three hundred of the "Royal Yorkers", a company of Canadians, detachments from the 8th and 14th British Regiments, one hundred German troops, and one thousand Indians from the Six Nations and the Mississagas of Upper Canada.<sup>68</sup>

Father McKenna accompanied this expedition, which was under the Command of Lieut. Col. St. Leger. The fort was invested and a force of the enemy which was marching to its relief was defeated at Oriskany with great loss. A sortie from the fort to aid the advancing party was made, but was driven back after it had reached the camp of the Royalists. In the archives of the diocese of Quebec there is a Latin letter from Father McKenna telling of the victory, giving the list of casualties and the news concerning the Canadian officers. Here regrets that owing to circumstances it is impossible to celebrate Mass every day.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Hald. Papers, B. 215, p. 53.

<sup>67</sup> Cruickshank: *Ont. Hist. Soc. P. and R.*, Vol. 27, p. 205.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

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Wood creek, 10 augusti 1777.

Reverende ac per dilecte Domine,

tandem aliquando pervenimus ad arcem fort stanikae, quae brevi in nostra possessione, Deo juvante, erit, cum omnino a regalibus circumcincta sit, septima hujus Dominus johnson cum octoginta (80) ex propriis copiis, et quingentis (500) sylvestribus, mille bostonenses tribus fere leucis ab arce: fort stanikae aggressus fuit, obtinuit Dominus johnson victoriam; occisi fuerunt ducenti bostonenses inter quos fuerent ipsorum generalis Harkiman et multi ex principalibus officialibus. Dominus johnson perditit tantum quatuor officiales, sex milites et viginti indos, triginta in toto occisi. Dominus st Leger imperat semper de arcem fort stanikie. Dominos Roy well, st ours, salebry, vasal, Bazin et onnes alii Canadenses recte valent, omnes bono animo sumus, valde difficile est mihi quotidie dicere missam propter bellum nihil desuper et cum muni venerations in christo

humillimus et semper obedientissimus

Owing to the fact that St. Leger had no guns of sufficient weight to make any effect on the fortress, the siege was prolonged. Reports came in of an overwhelming enemy force advancing, and the Indians got out of hand. Many of them deserted, and the others turned on their white allies, "committing ravage upon their friends as they had lost the opportunity of doing it upon their enemies."<sup>70</sup> Growing furious when St. Leger refused to retreat immediately, they seized upon the officers' effects and became more formidable than the enemy.<sup>71</sup>

In this plundering by the Indians, Father McKenna lost his whole equipment, including vestments, altar service, clothing, tent, etc., to the value of £139.<sup>72</sup> The Savages guilty of this treachery were the Mississagas, who had attempted a similar feat of robbing their friends at Fort Rouillé during the Seven Years' War.<sup>73</sup>

The balance of the year was spent by the "Royal Yorkers" in frontier duty in the Lake Champlain district, and they went into winter quarters as in the previous year in the villages around Montreal.<sup>74</sup> Father McKenna thus had the opportunity of again visiting the Catholics amongst the other troops as before. In the spring of 1778 the regiment was broken up into detachments, some of which were sent to the Upper posts and others to Sorel to help build barracks and fortifications. In October of that same year a detachment was sent under Lieutenants Byrne and Crawford on a daring expedition to their old home in the Mohawk Valley, where they retrieved the private papers of their commander, Sir John Johnson.<sup>75</sup> Whether Father McKenna was of this party we have no information, as during that year (1778), he was allowed to return to his native country owing to the deplorable state of his health.<sup>76</sup> General Haldimand had succeeded Sir Guy Carleton on June 27th, and a month later we find an order from the new Commander in favor of the Reverend John McKenna for the sum of £150,

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joannes Mackenna.

Digneris partiri salitem omnibus Reverendis Dominis Seninarii atque patri well.

Capti fuerunt bostonenses triginta tantum in bello, propter angustias temporis pauca scripti.

<sup>70</sup> St. Leger to Carleton: Cruikshank *up supra*, p. 211.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> A.O. 13, Bundle 55.

<sup>73</sup> On that occasion the Mississagas had been summoned by the French, whose allies they were, to the defence of Montreal. On the way they came to Fort Rouillé and tried to loot it. Messengers sent to Niagara arrived with a force sufficient to repel these treacherous "friends".

<sup>74</sup> Cruikshank: "K. R. R. of N. T." *Ont. Hist. Soc P. and R.*, Vol. 27., p. 212.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid p. 215.

<sup>76</sup> A.O. 13, Bundle 55.

the same as that appointed to him by General Carleton.<sup>77</sup> It was after that date, then, that he left Canada. The intention was that he should return when his health should be restored, and that his salary should be continued in the meantime. But the effects of his strenuous life in the wilds of America had sapped the strength of the erstwhile Hercules, and he never recovered sufficiently to return to the army.<sup>78</sup>

Before the departure of General Carleton from Quebec that officer had given to Father McKenna the following certificate:

**Copy of General Carleton's Certificate**

Quebec, June 25th, 1778.

I do hereby Certifye that the Rev. Mr. McKenna at a great Risque and Hazard came into the Province with a great number of Royalists whom he has Excited to follow his Example from Johnstown in Summer 1776, and that ever since his Residence here he has shewn an Zeal and Attachment to the Kings Service, and went as Chaplain to party's of Roman Catholic Royalists and Indians upon the Expedition to Fort Stanwix under the Command of Lieut. Col. St. Leger.

Guy CARLETON.<sup>79</sup>

In the letters of both governors we notice that nothing is said about the duties of Father McKenna as chaplain to the British or German troops: Carleton speaks of the "Royalists"<sup>80</sup> and Indians only, and Haldimand is silent in the matter. As we already have had documentary evidence from both ecclesiastical and military sources that such services were rendered, the only explanation we can give is that both Carleton and Haldimand were aware that the Home authorities might not countenance in Canada what was strictly forbidden by the Penal laws in the Mother Country – the appointment of a Catholic priest as chaplain in His Majesty's service. As to his appointment to that office for the Colonial units and the Indians, no fault could be found, since this could be justified by the Quebec Act.

On retiring to Ireland our subject dwelt at Balrath in County Meath, near his native place.<sup>81</sup> Owing to the state of his health he had no pastoral charge for some years. His salary as chaplain was not continued as had been agreed upon, and he was, he states, "compelled to live on the bounty and kindness of friends, not being able to take up any duties". He met a friend (unnamed) who gave him a letter

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<sup>77</sup> Hald. Papers, B, 89-1, p. 13.

<sup>78</sup> A.O. 13, Bundle 55.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> The term "Royalist" is used by both Governors to denote residents of the Colonies who remained loyal to the King.

<sup>81</sup> Letter of Bishop Mulvaney to the writer, Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1934.

to the Ministry in England. There he was told that it would be necessary to get a letter from General Haldimand, and on that officer vouching for the truth of his statements all the arrears in his salary would be paid. He wrote, therefore, to the General reminding him of the agreement and asking him to forward the necessary document.<sup>82</sup> Another letter addressed to Sir George Germaine (undated) gives an account of the services of the writer. The outcome of this correspondence was a recommendation that he should receive an allowance of £20 a year.<sup>83</sup> He appealed to the Commissioners appointed for Enquiring into the Losses and Services of the American Loyalists, who, four years later, increased this award to £30 a year, and also allowed him £10 for the expenses of his journey from Ireland to London. The Commissioners in their report on the case said: "We find that he has very great merit as a Loyalist, and well deserving of a more liberal allowance for temporary support than was formerly recommended."<sup>84</sup>

From a very interesting document copied by Bishop Mulvaney of Meath, from the Record Office, Dublin (afterwards destroyed in the conflict of 1922), which His Excellency has very kindly placed at my disposal for this paper, we learn much concerning the subject of our sketch. It is entitled "A Roll for the Registry of the Popish Clergy according to an Act of Parliament passed in the Kingdom of Ireland for the further relief of His Majesty's Subject's of the Kingdom professing this Religion".<sup>85</sup> Dr. Plunkett, Bishop of Meath at that time, refers to this Act in his Visitation Diary for 1782: "This day the Roman Catholic Bill passed into law May 4th." I quote Bishop Mulvaney in extenso:

"Inter alia the Act provided that priests would be regarded as lawful subjects and discharged from the penalties of the Penal Laws if they took the Oath of Allegiance to King George and registered their names, titles, place of residence, place of residence, etc. As there was nothing against the Faith, though the language of the Oath was a bit nasty, the Bishop signed the Roll (he was the first) and 69 of the Priests of the Meath Diocese. 46 of the Priests refused to register. Now on the Roll appears the name of the Rev. John McKenna. He on the 27th August, 1782, registered as living at Balrath – was 39 years of age – was ordained in Scotland by Bp. John McDonald. The other Priests gave their titles – whether P.P. or C.C. or O.S.F. or O.P. – all except two. Hon. Jenico Preston, a member of the Lord Gormanstown family, was one, Fr. McKenna was the other. Both are simply called 'secular', and I interpret this to mean they were not attached to any parish".<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Hald. Papers, B. 215, p. 49.

<sup>83</sup> A.O. 12, Vol. 99, F. 338.

<sup>84</sup> A.O. 12, Vol. 102, f. 76.

<sup>85</sup> Record Office, Dublin

<sup>86</sup> Letter of Bishop Mulvaney to the writer, Jan. 1<sup>st</sup>, 1934.

Some time after this he was appointed parish priest of Donaghmore and Kilbride, being there in 1785.<sup>87</sup> "The Reverend John McKenna lived at Kilbride. At that time there was a mud-walled thatched chapel, convenient to the crossroads of Prieststown in the parish of Kilbride, and another at Dunamore [sic]. At the visitation of Bishop Plunkett, Aug. 22, 1788, one chapel had been rebuilt on a larger scale and two schools had been established in the parish".<sup>88</sup> Father McKenna died July 28, 1789, and was buried beside his father and his brother in the churchyard of Danestown.<sup>89</sup>

After the departure of Father McKenna from Canada, his people, the greater part of whom were serving under Sir John Johnson, were engaged in garrison and other duties in Canada, with occasional raids into their homeland in the Mohawk valley. In these expeditions they acted with all the daring and cunning of Caterans in a Creagh; and from each of these many of their friends accompanied them back to Canada. So great was the number thus brought in or who took the risk of making the journey alone, that it became necessary to form a Second Battalion of the "Royal Yorkers". For the Gaelic-speaking members of his corps and of the Royal Highland Emigrant Regiment, Father McKenna's absence was indeed a calamity; priests could be found who could minister to the English, French, and German-speaking troops and to the Indians in their own languages, but for those speaking Gaelic alone, Father McKenna was the only priest in the country who understood their language. At the close of hostilities the "Royal Yorkers" and the Royal Highland Emigrants were disbanded, and, as it was impossible that the men should return to their former homes in the now United States of America, the government determined to grant them land in Canada. The men of the "Royal Yorkers" asked Sir John Johnson that in this allotment the members of the Catholic faith and those who were Protestants should be placed in separate groups according to their religious belief. Sir John brought their request before General Haldimand,<sup>90</sup> who very willingly granted it,<sup>91</sup> and the Catholics were given the newly surveyed townships Nos. 1, and 2. A large number of the Royal Emigrants also availed themselves of this opportunity; those who had been recruited in the Mohawk valley settled amongst their former neighbours. A few Catholic officers of the latter Regiment settled in the Bay of Quinte district and at Niagara.

It is mentioned in the early part of this paper that there were some Irish amongst the emigrants who came out in 1773 to the Mohawk country. Amongst the

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<sup>87</sup> Cogan: *History of the Diocese of Meath*, Vol. 2, p. 192.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 207.

<sup>89</sup> Bishop Mulvaney *ut supra*.

<sup>90</sup> Public Archives of Canada, Series B, Vol. 115, p. 252.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 63, p. 270.

various corps recruited from the inhabitants there, we find such names as Martin Kelly, Pat. Corrigan, Paul Corrigan,<sup>92</sup> John O'Brien,<sup>93</sup> Ensign John Connolly, Capt. Patrick Duly, Ensign Francis McCarty, Capt. William Byrne, Capt. Patrick Langan.<sup>94</sup> Amongst those who settled in the townships allotted to the Catholics were some of the above named officers and the following: Patrick Burke, Barney Cain, John McCaffery, James Roach, Peter Daly, O'Neill, Michael Cline. Patrick Fitzpatrick, Luke Bready. Geo. Haley, Joseph Hanley, Patrick King, James Lynch (Lynch), John Lynch, Michael Quinn, John Scanlin (Scanlon).<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Jessop's Corps.

<sup>93</sup> McAlpine's Corps.

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