DRUMS ALONG THE MOHAWK

By

WALTER D. EDMONDS

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To my son and daughter
and to the descendants
in their generation
of these men and women
of the Mohawk Valley

Author's Note

To those readers who may have felt some curiosity about the actual occurrences in the Mohawk Valley during the Revolution, I should like to say here that I have been as faithful to the scene and time and place as study and affection could help me to be. A novelist, if he chooses, has a greater opportunity for faithful presentation of a bygone time than an historian, for the historian is compelled to a presentation of cause and effect and feels, as a rule, that he must present them through the lives and characters of "famous" or "historical" figures. My concern, however, has been with life as it was; as you or I, our mothers or our wives, our brothers and husbands and uncles, might have experienced it. To do that I have attempted to be as accurate in the minutiæ of living as in the broader historical features. Food, crops, game, and weather played an important and ever-active part in the Mohawk Valley. As far as possible I have checked them through old journals, histories, and dispatches, so that, before I was well embarked in the writing of the book, I knew when snow was falling, and how deep it was; how high the river came, and when there was a rain. Naturally, for spaces of time, no data were available, and there I had to relie on my own knowledge of our climate. In those cases, however, the action usually concerned the purely imagined characters of the book.

How few these imagined people are may be another point of interest. Let me list them. Gilbert Martin, Lana Martin, Joe Boleo, Sarah McKlennar, John Weaver, Mary Reall, Mrs. Demooth, Jurry McLonis, Gahota, Owigo, Sonojowauga, Mr. Collyer, and the paymaster. All other characters named played actual parts. As I learned more about them, it astonished me to see how a simple narration of their experiences carried the book along with only

slight liberties with the truth. Even so, I found it necessary to alter the facts of very few of their lives. One case was that of John Wolff. He must have had Tory inclinations, but he was never arrested or tried. But the grafted episode in the novel is taken from the experience of a very similar man whose story may be encountered in the Clinton papers. Only the similar man, with far less evidence against him, was taken out and shot.

Of the other actual characters with the circumstances of whose lives I have tampered, I shall name George Weaver, Reall, Captain Demooth, Mrs. Reall, Adam Helmer, and Jacob Small. For one reason or another I altered the numbers of their families, or the characters of their relations. But in so far as they act for themselves in the pages of the novel, anyone with little pains may check their histories. Women and children, of course, are the bane of the student. Often they are listed without names given. "Dependants over 16, dependants under 16." When confronted by that wall, the novelist must see through as far as his conscience will permit.

The description of Newgate Prison at Simsbury Mines is strictly according to facts—most of them offered by the patriotic party, at that. It was, however, no worse than British prisons, and the prisoners, I suspect, had infinitely more to eat.

In the book, I have not set out to belittle the efforts of Congress and the Continental command so much as to show their almost light-hearted disregard of actual conditions. The maintenance at vast expense of Fort Stanwix is a case in point. I cannot but believe that the reactions of the valley people, who have been vilified for years, were justified by those conditions. Some of the letters which appear in the novel are proof sufficient.

All of these quoted documents may be read in the records, with one exception — Mr. Collyer's summary of his report to General Clinton of the seizure of the grain by the starving populace. But as the General used Mr. Collyer's argument in his own report on the matter, no doubt the inspector, whoever he was, used very similar words.

I owe several debts which I should like to acknowledge. First to

two helpful booksellers: Mr. Lou D. MacWethy of St. Johnsville, and Mrs. James C. Howgate of Albany. To Mr. Howard Swiggett for his suggestive study, *War Out of Niagara.* To the older historians, Benton, Stone, Jones, and the inimitable Simms. And to that invaluable listing of the military rolls, *New York in the Revolution,* compiled under the direction of Comptroller James A. Roberts. A complete bibliography would be out of place in a novel, perhaps, but I must add the names of Morgan and Beauchamp, whose Indian studies first roused my interest in the Iroquois. There, I suspect, I shall find the kernel of many controversies. Finally, for those who would like to understand what valley life was really like before the actual hostilities commenced, when the fear of the Indians was first maturing, I suggest an hour spent with the *Minute Book of the Committee of Safety* of Tryon County, printed in 1905 by Dodd, Mead, and Company.

To those who may feel that here is a great to-do about a bygone life, I have one last word to say. It does not seem to me a bygone life at all. The parallel is too close to our own. Those people of the valley were confronted by a reckless Congress and ebullient finance, with their inevitable repercussions of poverty and practical starvation. The steps followed with automatic regularity. The applications for relief, the failure of relief, and then the final realization that a man must stand up to live. They had won at Oriskany, without help, the first decisive battle of a dismal conflict; Burgoyne was helpless once the Mohawk Valley had been made safe from the British possession. They suffered the paralysis of abject dependence on a central government totally unfitted to comprehend a local problem. And finally, though they had lost two thirds of their fighting strength, these people took hold of their courage and struck out for themselves. Outnumbered by trained troops, well equipped, these farmers won the final battle of the long war, preserved their homes, and laid the foundations of a great and strong community.

WALTER D. EDMONDS

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I

GILBERT MARTIN AND WIFE, MAGDELANA (1776)

It was the second day of their journey to their first home. Lana, in the cart, looked back to see how her husband was making out with the cow. He had bought it from the Domine for a wedding present to her. He had hesitated a long while between the cow and the clock; and she had been disappointed when he finally decided on the cow, even though it cost three dollars more; but now she admitted that it would be a fine thing to have a cow to milk. As he said, it would give her companionship when he was working in the woods.

Privately she had thought at the time that she would show him that she could manage their first house and help him with the fields also. She was a good strong girl, eighteen years old the day she married, and she thought that if they both worked hard, in a few years they would have money enough to pay thirteen dollars for a clock if they really wanted it. There were only two cows anyway at Deerfield Settlement, and she might make money with the extra butter.

The cow had given a good deal of trouble yesterday, leaving its own village, but this morning it seemed to be anxious to keep up with the cart. Lana supposed the land looked strange to the poor beast, and that now the cart and the small brown mare were the only things it felt at home with.

Gilbert smiled when she looked back, and raised the hand in which he carried the birch switch. He had taken off his jacket, for the weather was warm, and his shirt was open at the neck. She thought, "He's handsome," and waved back cheerfully. Anyway, the Reverend Mr. Gros made two clocks a year which

he tried to sell to any couple he was marrying, and no doubt a year or two from now there would be one to pick out if they ever came back so far.

The Domine had wedded Magdelana Borst to Gilbert Martin in the Palatine Church at Fox's Mills two days ago. There had been just her family in the little stone structure, Mr. and Mrs. Gros, and a couple of Indians, half drunk, who had heard of the ceremony and happened over from Indian Castle in hopes of getting invited to the breakfast. Lana's father had given them a York shilling to get rid of them and they had gone down to Jones's tavern to buy rum, saying "Amen" very gravely in English.

It was a pleasant breakfast in the Dutch-like kitchen with its red and black beams. They had had glasses of the hard cider saved over from last fall, and sausage and cornbread, and then Gilbert had gone out to get the cart and cow and Mother had slipped tearfully upstairs and come down again with the air of a surprise and given Lana the Bible for a departing present.

It was a beautiful book, bound in calfskin, with a gilded clasp. She had taken it to the Domine for him to write in, and he had put her name very elegantly on the flyleaf, Magdelana Martin, and then very solemnly he had turned to the empty pages at the back and had written there:—

July 10, 1776—married this day *Gilbert Martin,* of Deerfield Settlement, Tryon County, the State of New York, North America, to *Magdelana Borst,* of Fox's, Tryon County, by Reverend Daniel Gros.

They had all thought it was very impressive, seeing "the State of New York," and Mother had looked tearful again for a moment or two, because, as she said, there was no telling what kind of country it was now, with its name changed, and all the troubles of the war in Canada.

But that had passed over quickly. It had been too late then to bring up the old argument about the Indian menace, by which for a week they had tried to persuade Gilbert to settle on their own

farm. His place seemed so far away—it would take two days to get to—it was more than thirty miles.

But Gilbert had been unshakable. He had paid for the land in Hazenclever's Patent beyond Cosby's Manor. He said that it was good land. He had worked there all fall and got his house up and cleared some ground already, and would have a crop of Indian corn, on part of it. It was something no one in his right senses could abandon. And he was capable of looking after Lana as well as any man.

She remembered how he and her father had talked together, and that talk had impressed her father. "He has paid for his land," he said, "and he has built his house alone so that he could buy himself a yoke of oxen, with the money saved."

"But, Henry," said her mother, "Lana knows nobody up there. It is so far away."

"Gilbert has friends and neighbors," he said. "I think Lana will get along all right," and he had smiled at her. "You can't keep all your daughters to yourself, you know, Mummschen. What would the poor young men do, if all the mothers in the world did that? Where would I have been, if your mother had done that to you? I ask you." He had even laughed about it, while Gilbert, for some reason, looked embarrassed, maybe because Lana's sisters were looking at him so admiringly. It seemed a wonderful thing to them for a girl to start off to a strange place with a man like Gilbert, whom she had seen not more than half a dozen times before in her life.

That first time she had seen him seemed long ago now, though it was still less than a year. Ten months and four days, to-day, Lana said to herself, shaking the reins over the mare's back. She and her sisters had been drying flax over the pit on the hillside. They had been playing at kentecoying, and perhaps they had become careless, for they had not noticed the young man coming along the road. And when they had at last seen him just below them, looking up at Lana and smiling, Lana had stepped back inadvertently onto the poles on which the flax was spread, and

the poles had come loose from the hillside, throwing her and the flax at once into the pit of coals. The flax instantly burst into flame, but with the quickness of lightning, the sisters said, the young man had flung down his pack, run up the hill, and jumped down into the pit. Lana's heavy linsey petticoat had not caught fire; but by the time he had hoisted her out, her calico short gown was burning; and with great presence of mind he had lifted her petticoat over her head, wrapping the upper half of her body in it and so smothering the flames.

If he had not saved her daughter's life, Mrs. Borst told him half an hour later, he had certainly saved her from being badly scarred. She called it a noble action and asked him to stay the night. He had accepted. At supper he had told them that he was going west. He had no family, but he had enough money to buy some land with.

Little did Mrs. Borst or Lana herself guess how it would turn out. But when he left he caught her alone outside the door and whispered that he would return some day, if she were willing he should. Lana could not answer, beyond nodding; but that had seemed enough for him; and he went away with big strides while her father said behind her, "That's a fine young man."

Lana had dreamed about him during the winter. Often she thought he would not come back. But in the end of the winter, just when the sugaring was beginning, he had arrived one afternoon. He told them about his experiences in the westward. Up there they didn't hear much of the political doings of the lower valley. They knew that Guy Johnson and the Butlers had gone west, of course, and Mr. Weaver, Gil's neighbor, attended Committee meetings from time to time, which gave them some news. But Mr. Kirkland, the missionary, had made the Oneida Indians so friendly that one did not have the same feeling about the possibility of an Indian war. And besides, when people were clearing land they were too busy all day and too tired at night to think much about other things.

Gilbert himself had started clearing his first five acres. He had

boarded during the winter with the Weavers, who had been very nice to him, paying for his food by helping George Weaver one day a week. He had got his cabin walls laid up and a good chimney in. The cabin was set right at the turn the road made for the Mohawk River ford. One could look from the door south across the marsh to the river itself, a fine prospect. Behind the house there was a natural spring.

Though he told the family about these things, Lana, in her heart, knew he was telling them to her alone. She was afraid, after supper, to go out, knowing that he would follow her. But nothing she could do could keep her from offering to step down to Jones's for her father's beer. And as she knew he would, the young man offered to go with her to carry the jug.

On the way down he had told her still more about the place. It sounded like the most wonderful place she had ever seen. He was going to buy a plough and also get a yoke of oxen this summer. There was some natural pasture along the river on his place. The loam was deep. He expected it was four feet deep in places. He had built the cabin with an extra high roof, which made the sleeping loft quite airy. He had never slept better in his life than he had slept in that loft. In March he had bought two window sashes from Wolff's store in Cosby's Manor, glass sashes, so that the kitchen seemed as light as a church. He wished Lana could see it.

Though Lana wished so herself, they had by that time come to Jones's, and she had had to go in after the beer. When she came out again, the young man had been quite silent. Even when she had asked him a shy question or two, he had hardly answered. It was only as they came in sight of the lighted windows of the Borst house that he asked her suddenly whether she would come and look at it as his wife.

"Yes," said Lana. Though she had expected the question all along, and though she knew what her answer was going to be, the word put her into a panic. "You 'll have to ask Father," she added.

He had done so, much more calmly than he had asked her; and after their talk together, her father had also said "Yes." And then Gilbert had arranged to come back for her when his first rush of spring work was ended, so long as he should not be called out on militia duty.

Now they were on the Kingsroad. It ran from the ford at Schenectady the length of the Mohawk Valley; passing the Johnson land, Guy Park and Fort Johnson, Caughnawaga, Spraker's, Fox's, Nellis's, Klock's, and on to the carrying place at the falls. Then past the Eldridge Settlement, which was on the north side of the river opposite German Flats, and so to the settlement at the West Canada Creek crossing. From that settlement it continued into the woods through Schuyler, to Cosby's Manor, and then to Deerfield, where it crossed the river. West of there it was a barely passable track into the Indian camp at Oriska on Oriskany Creek. It ended at Fort Stanwix, which some people were saying would be repaired this summer by the Continental government.

From her high perch on the cart, Lana had looked out over the Mohawk all day. Last evening they had climbed the steep ascent beside the falls. A little before that, Gilbert had come alongside the cart to point out to her the fine red brick house of Colonel Herkimer with its gambrel roof, higher than any roof she had ever seen. But once past the falls they had burrowed into a stretch of woods, and for a way the land seemed wild. There was only one house, a small one, glimpsed through an opening in the trees. Then, almost at dark, they had emerged on the broad intervale lands that marked the beginning of German Flats. A little tavern stood beside the road, and they put up in it.

Lana thought of their arrival with swelling pride. The landlord, a Mr. Billy Rose, was smoking an after-supper pipe in the door. He was in his shirt, with a leather apron, and had bidden her "Good evening," quite politely.

Gil came up, harrying the cow. He walked directly to the innkeeper and asked for a night's lodging. "Two shilling for you