

The Abduction of Allan Macdonald

One of the important roles the St. Clair River plays is as an international boundary. Despite all of the recreational and industrial benefits, it creates a them and us; US and Canada. Though the peoples of the two countries are similar in many ways, we are still very different and guided by different founding backgrounds.

There are numerous incidents in history in which St. Clair Township, as it is known today, was witness to serious military and diplomatic tensions.

In October 1814, with the War of 1812's end in sight, McArthur's Raid into South Western Ontario took place. General McArthur lead an American force of 700 across the St. Clair River and worked their way to Brantford before they were forced back to the US.

The British war ship, the Nancy, went up and down the St. Clair during the War of 1812 and was attacked by American forces north of Stag Island.

During the Patriot War of 1838, Sombra was attacked by a band of disgruntled British subjects and American sympathisers only to be confronted by the Moore Militia,

In 1866, the local militia was on alert for fear of possible Fenian invasions.

In October of 1867 one of the first international crisis occurred between Canada and the US right along the shores of our St. Clair River.

Allan Macdonald, a resident of Sombra Township, whose parents Neal and Rebecca farmed near Port Lambton, had moved to St. Clair Michigan in 1860. A small, sickly man, he was not a farmer or lumberman. Rather, he found employment in a seedier side of things, smuggling. How good he was at his chosen impression is debatable, but In September of 1867 he was found guilty by the United States district court for the eastern district of Michigan, of smuggling. He was fined \$500 plus court costs of \$63. For that time period, it was a very serve penalty. Unable to pay the fine he was placed in jail. Sheriff William Dunphy of St. Clair, shortly after Macdonald was jailed, released him to allow him an opportunity to earn money to pay his fine. After three weeks of trying to raise money Madonald was still well short of having enough funds to earn his freedom. Frustrated, Macdonald felt that he would have a better chance of earning money in his former home across the St. Clair. On September 30, 1867, he took the ferry rowboat and crossed the river to Sutherland's Landing just south of Mooretown. By doing so, Macdonald had made Sheriff Dunphy responsible for the fine and court costs that had been placed on Macdonald.

Macdonald, once in Canada, began to feel guilty for breaking his pledge to Sheriff Dunphy. He asked a friend, George Powell, to go to St. Clair and ask Sheriff Dunphy to meet him at Gallerneau's tavern in Sutherlands, on Saturday, October 5, to discuss the situation that Macdonald had created.

On the 5th, Powell rowed over to St. Clair and brought back to Gallerneau's tavern Sheriff Dunphy and his brother Andrew. Macdonald and Dunphy met in the bar, shared a meal and beverages. They discussed the situation. They arrived at a resolution, Macdonald would return, and only be responsible for the court costs of his sentence. Despite agreeing, Macdonald lingered and delayed the return to the US. Andrew Dunphy, growing impatient, went up to Macdonald took him by the shoulder and started to escort him to the ferry service dock. Macdonald could not resist the power of Dunphy and was dragged to the row boat. Another patron of the bar saw what was happening and heard Macdonald complaining and stepped in to rescue him. Sheriff Dunphy intercepted and grabbed the onlooker, ultimately striking him in the head with his pistol causing the pistol to discharge. Sheriff Dunphy got in the rowboat, which belonged to the ferry company and went back to St. Clair despite protests from the Canadians on shore. When they landed in the US, Macdonald was returned to jail.

That is when the big boys got involved. Two days later, October 7, G.W. Wilson, a notary public in St. Clair Michigan, wrote to William H. Seward, Secretary of State for the US to inform him of the abduction of a Canadian citizen from Canadian soil by American authorities and to inform him that there may be a response from British authorities. A thorough investigation was conducted by both governments and the United States, through Mr Seward, despite believing that Macdonald should serve his sentence, agreed that Dunphy had overstepped his authority by entering Canada to recapture the escaped convict. That being said, he was going to direct that Macdonald should be set at liberty in Canada. In response to that, Edward Thornton, a British diplomat serving as Canada's Minister to the United States, indicated that in no way did the Government of Canada wish to see a convicted felon set free without having served his sentence.

Thus Macdonald was not rescued by Canada. The Allan Macdonald story ends at this point as there are no local documents to indicate what happened after the investigation.

This whole event was reported in an official US government report called, Message of the President of the United States Andrew Johnson to the Senate of the United States.