

Museum Around the Corner
Georgetown County Museum
Sergeant Allen McDonald ©

An enduring tale from Revolutionary War days is one concerning Sergeant Allen McDonald, a patriot serving under Colonel Peter Horry. The first mention of Sgt. McDonald is that he was one of three American prisoners rescued at Nelson's Ferry. He promptly joined General Francis Marion's brigade.

Young McDonald was the son of General Donald McDonald, a fierce fighter who had survived the Massacre of Culloden in the highlands of Scotland in 1745. The son was a remarkably stout, red-haired young Scotsman, cool under the most trying difficulties, and brave without a fault. He once tricked a loyalist citizen into giving him his finest steed, pretending to be a messenger from British Colonel Banastre Tarleton, who supposedly requested the horse.

In January, 1781, Colonel Horry encountered one third of Loyalist Major Gainey's men just outside of Georgetown. In the encounter the latter lost one half his men who were in the action. In the conflict, as usual, Sergeant McDonald performed with valor. Later in the day, Major Gainey's regiment again commenced the attack when the sergeant made a dash for the leader. Major Gainey proved to have been well mounted; but the sergeant, astride his mighty steed, overtook Gainey. When they reached the corner of the Richmond fence on the Black River Road, the sergeant had gained so far upon his enemy, as to be able to plunge his bayonet into his back. The steel parted from the gun, and, with no time to extricate it, Major Gainey rushed back into Georgetown, with the weapon still conspicuously showing how close and fierce had been the charge, and how narrow the escape. Gainey miraculously survived the wound, returning to duty some weeks later.

Not long after the incident, the sergeant, as usual employing himself in watching the movements of the British under Colonel Watson, climbed up into a bushy tree, and thence, with a musket loaded with pistol bullets, fired at the guard as they passed by, of whom he killed one man and badly wounded another; then sliding down the tree, mounted his horse, and was soon out of harm's way. Colonel Watson gave chase and came upon the encampment where the patriots had hidden themselves. Finding the clothes of Sergeant McDonald, he seized them. Feeling it a point of honor to retrieve his clothing, Sergeant McDonald sent word to Colonel Watson if he did not immediately send back his clothes, he would kill eight of his men to compensate for them. Furious at the audacious message, Colonel Watson ordered the messenger to return with no reply. Knowing the character of the sergeant and that he would keep his word, some of Watson's men urged him to return the clothes. Watson yielded, and when the messenger returned to the sergeant, he said, "You may now tell Colonel Watson that I will kill but four of his men."

Sergeant MacDonald did not live to reap the fruit of his labors, or even to see his country free. He was killed at the siege of Fort Motte, May 12, 1781. In this fort was stationed a British garrison of one hundred and fifty men under Captain McPherson. General Marion, with the assistance of Colonel Henry Lee, laid siege to the fortress, which was compelled to surrender, owing to the burning of the mansion in the center of the works. Mrs. Rebecca Motte, the lady that owned the mansion, furnished the bow and arrows used to carry the fire to the roof of the building. The British did not lose a man, and General Marion lost two of his bravest—Lieutenant Cruger and Sergeant MacDonald.

His resting place is unknown. No monument has been erected to his memory save the historical marker found in the McDonald community west of Georgetown on Highway 521. This marker was formerly located on Highway 521 on North Fraser Street near the spot of the encounter with Major Gainey, but was moved in 2008. The name of Sergeant Allen McDonald will endure so long as heroes are remembered and their stories are handed down.