

From the Massillon (Ohio) Gazette.

RETURN OF THE CAPTIVE.¹

Our citizens, yesterday morning, were introduced to the acquaintance of John Wood, a man whose tale of sorrow could not fail of interesting the heart, however callous, or however prone to incredulity.² A meager sketch can only be given now. The ample history of his misfortunes may hereafter be presented to the world—and, if given by a master hand, will command the interest, and enlist the sympathy of the public, when the mawkish productions of fiction, which now cumber our book-stores and insult our taste, shall have become despised and forgotten.

In the war of 1812, John Wood, now fifty years old was a young and industrious farmer in Bracken County, Kentucky. He was the husband of a young and interesting woman, and the father of two infant children.³ He was living in happiness on a farm which he had earned by his industry, when the gallant Captain Butler (who afterward fell at the capture of the British batteries at Fort Meigs) raised his flag, and solicited the hardy Kentuckians of Bracken County to enroll themselves among the defenders of their country.⁴ John Wood was one of the number. He suffered all the privations to which the army of the north-west was exposed, during the disastrous campaign which resulted in the defeat of Winchester at the River Raisin. By good fortune, he escaped the tomahawk of the savage allies of Great Britain, and was sent a prisoner of war to Quebec.

He was next, with other American prisoners, dispatched in a transport to Plymouth, in England. From Plymouth, accompanied by a crowd of fellow prisoners, he was about to be transferred to Dartmoor, when he found an opportunity to make his escape. He wandered through the country, stealing through by-ways, until he found himself at Bristol. Hunger compelled him to enter a grocery, the head quarters of a press-gang. Here he was pressed, and despite his protestations that he was a citizen of the United States, and a fugitive prisoner of war, facts that might have been easily proven by reference to the military authorities at Plymouth, he was hurried on board His Majesty's frigate Sea Horse, then the flag ship of the celebrated Sir Peter Parker, and compelled to bear arms against his own countrymen.

On board the Sea Horse were several other Americans, who, like Wood, had fallen victims to the British system of impressment. They determined on desertion; and

¹ *The New Yorker*, 12 May 1838, p. 5, c.8.

² There is a Private John Wood assigned to Captain Richard Hightower's Company, 17th U. S. Infantry. There is no information pertaining to his capture at the River Raisin. This unit was organized in Jessamine County, Kentucky. Clift, G. Glenn, *Remember the Raisin!* p. 176.

³ Clift, G. Glenn, *Notes on Kentucky Veterans of the War of 1812*, p. 56. WOOD, JOHN. Enlisted at Lexington, Kentucky; WIA Jan. 18 or 22, 1813, during action on River Raisin (sworn by George Morris and James Munday who knew him there). He married Rebecca Ballard, in Charlestown, Indiana, 21 Oct. 1821. Children: Sidney S., aged 39 in 1879 and Frances Crawley, aged 56 in 1879. Madison County Pension List. George Morris mentioned above, served as a Private in Captain Hightower's Company, and was taken POW, 22 Jan 1813. James Munday, served as an Ensign in Captain James Meade's Company, also in the 17th U. S. Infantry. Munday was also taken POW, 22 Jan 1813. Clift, *Remember the Raisin*, p. 176.

⁴ William O. Butler, served as an Ensign in Captain Hightower's Company, he was taken POW, 22 Jan 1813. Butler was not killed at Fort Meigs. Butler would go on to serve as a Major General in the Mexican-American War. Butler State Park in Carrollton, Kentucky is named in his honor.

when lying in the port of St. Johns, they succeeded in securing a boat, in an extremely dark night, and attempting to reach the eastern coast of the State of Maine. They were instantly pursued, and were obliged to desert their boat on the shore of New Brunswick, and seek safety in the woods. After wandering about for two days, exhausted with cold and hunger and fatigue, they were apprehended by a party of British soldiers and again transferred to the Sea Horse. The punishment that followed this act of desertion was inflicted with all that ingenious refinement of cruelty for which the British navy is so celebrated.

The Sea Horse attached to the squadron under Admiral Cockburn, was shortly afterwards ordered to the Chesapeake, and took an active part in the robbing, burning and murdering of the defenseless inhabitants of the coast. Mr. Wood and the impressed Americans were never permitted to leave their vessels. He was on board on the night when Sir Peter Parker met his fate on shore.⁵ A few days subsequent to this event, he, in company with seven other impressed Americans, attempted an escape in broad day light, by boldly jumping into a boat along side, and pulling rapidly for the shore. One of the number was shot by the sentinel on duty. The others reached the beach, but were apprehended, immediately on landing, by a party of the marauders belonging to the Sea Horse.

By orders of Admiral Cockburn, they were sent in irons to Nova Scotia, where after undergoing a trial; they were sentenced to be shot. The sentence, however, was commuted to service for life, in His Britannic Majesty's army in the East Indies. They were accordingly shipped to England, and thence with a regiment of newly levied recruits, dispatched to Calcutta. For 21 years, Mr. Wood served as a private soldier in the East India service; and 18 months since, when broken down in spirit and constitution, he was permitted to sail for England. Destitute and heart-broken, he reached London, stated his case to the United States consul, and by him was furnished with the means of reaching New York. He left New York in January, and wended his weary pilgrimage toward the home of his childhood.

It is now twenty-six years since he left his wife and children in Kentucky; and not one syllable has he heard, relative to their situation, since the moment of their separation. The citizens here forced a few dollars upon him, for, poor and decrepit as he is, he still possesses all the pride of a Kentuckian, and sent him on his way in the stage to Wellsville, from which town he intends to embark on a steamboat for Augusta, in Kentucky.

⁵ Captain Sir Peter Parker was killed on 30 August 1814, in the battle of Caulk's Field near Tolchester. Parker, who commanded the *Menelaus*, a frigate of 38 guns, had been ordered to sail down the Bay from Baltimore but, partying with his fellow officers on the night of 30 August 1814, said he'd not go until he'd had "one more lick at the Yankees." Lubricated by spirits, he resolved to mount an immediate attack against an assembly of militia near Chestertown. He set off almost immediately with a modest expeditionary force and landed to engage the militia — some believe their landing was near Tolchester Beach, Kent County, Maryland, and forged inland with armed seamen and British regulars. In an hour's pitched battle, the British were driven back to the *Menelaus*, leaving 14 casualties on the field, among them was Parker. When hit he was quoted as saying: "*But it is nothing; push on my brave boys and follow me!*" at which utterance he fell mortally wounded, bleeding to death from a severed femoral artery, at the age of 28.

Fancy cannot help asking—what is now that home to which the war-broken wanderer is returning? Will the wife of his youth be ready, in the fidelity of her early love, to hail the return of her long lost husband? Or will her duty and affections have been given to another? Or will she be reposing beneath the clods of the valley? And his children!—If living, they must have long since entered upon the busy scenes of life. Will they take the weary pilgrim to their homes and to their bosoms? A thousand overpowering emotions must rush upon the old man's heart, as his weary footstep approaches the spot that once was home! Fancy cannot fill the picture. May he who “tempers the wind to the shorn lamb,” support the aged wanderer in that eventful moment, which is soon to witness, either the ecstasy of his happiness, or the utter desolation of his hopes.