

Chasing the Past / Gerald L. Guy

Chasing the **PAST**

By
GERALD L. GUY



Palm Coast, FL 32164
www.storiesbyguy.com



PROLOGUE

Gus McIntyre, the centerpiece of this series of stories, is no ordinary teenager. At a young age, he lost both his mother and beloved grandfather to an influenza outbreak along the Illinois River where his family had farmed for many years. When his father got gold fever and decided to seek his fortune in the Black Hills of the Dakota Territory in 1876, tragedy struck again. Father and son were set upon by outlaws, and James McIntyre was murdered while his fourteen-year-old son hid in a nearby thicket.

Gus wandered the Black Hills, arguably the most lawless territory west of the Mississippi River at that time, until being rescued by a group of Texans, who were pushing one hundred Longhorn steers to Deadwood to feed hungry miners.

He proved his worth as a hunter who could provide enough meat to keep an ornery old cook named Toots and a half dozen wranglers happily fed. Trail boss Walter Hamilton and his son, Junior, adopted the lanky redhead of Scottish descent and offered him a home and full-time work as a ranch hand in Southwest Texas. He quickly became a valuable asset, working hard and earning his food and lodging on the back of a speedy Appaloosa, named Racer.

He survived several scrapes, including getting wounded while trying to apprehend cattle rustlers along the Mexican border. An aging Apache war chief, named *Tatonga*, found him and applied healing herbs to his wound. Soon he was on his feet and, with the help of *Tatonga's* village, returned to the Circle H Ranch with thirty head of stolen stock. The chief named the young boy, *Enopay*, because he had a penchant of running to danger instead of running away from it. They became life-long friends.

In 1878, Gus came into the possession of a crude map, thought to be the key to vast millions in wealth. Before Gus could consider searching for the lost treasure of Fernand Maximilian, the deposed

emperor of Mexico, he became the target of the Ku Klux Klan, which coveted the bounty to fund a second Confederate uprising.

Gus was forced to flee to Apache Flats, along with friends Katie and Lizzy Sanders. The Sanders women, like Gus, owned a piece of the map the Klan sought. The three fled San Angela, Texas to live for six months with McIntyre's friend, *Chief Tatonga*.

As they traveled to the chief's village, the trio rescued two young Native American siblings, Running Bear and White Dove. They had been forced into slavery in Mexico after their parents were killed. It turned out the two children were the long-lost grandchildren of *Tatonga*.

After a cold winter in the Apache village, Gus, Katie and Lizzy decided to return to civilization and the Circle H Ranch. Before they left the territory, *Chief Tatonga* presented the refugees with three burlap sacks filled with gold and jewels as a token of his friendship and gratitude. Gus assumed it was part of the lost treasure of Maximilian, but the chief was very secretive about how he had acquired the bounty. He said he came by the precious cache when he "discovered two outlaws digging on his ancestors' land without his permission."

The saga continues in "Chasing the Past."

Plagued by bad weather and their heavy burden, the journey to the Circle H Ranch is long and arduous. Along the way, Gus discloses to the women how his family immigrated from Scotland to the New World.

I hope you like "Chasing the Past." It's a fast-paced adventure that will keep you reading late into the night.

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*“Walking with a friend in the
dark is better than walking
alone in the light.”*



Helen Keller

PART I

Scotland





CHAPTER ONE

Apache Flats, TX

Eager to return to civilization, Gus McIntyre and his traveling partners, Katie and Lizzy Sanders, meandered through the Southwest Texas wilderness at a snail's pace. They dragged their scant belongings on a travois, pulled by a borrowed mule, but the added weight of three burlap bags, filled with gold and jewels, impeded their progress. Gus estimated each bag weighed more than 250 pounds.

So, he divided the weight and made a second travois to pull behind his Appaloosa, Racer. Still the burden was great. The miles passed slowly as they traveled north toward the Circle H Ranch, Gus McIntyre's adopted home and the next place of refuge for his female companions.

The treasure was given to them by *Chief Tatonga*, leader of a band of Apaches who called Apache Flats home. The unexpected gift was a reward, so to speak, for the friendship and bravery they showed in rescuing the chief's two grandchildren. The young people had been kidnapped and held as slaves by a wealthy vaquero in Mexico.

The trio had fled civilization when they became the target of the Ku Klux Klan, which sought the lost wealth of Ferdinand Maximilian, the deposed Emperor of Mexico. The KKK planned to use the riches to finance a second Confederate uprising against their northern aggressors. McIntyre and the Sanders women possessed maps the white supremacists suspected led to the buried loot that was estimated to be worth ten million dollars.

With their lives threatened, the trio fled San Angela, Texas with only what they could carry on horseback. They spent the winter of 1877 in hiding with the Native American tribe that made its home in the desolate region that spanned the Texas-Mexico border. Their spirits were high as they hoped to resume their lives without the hatred and threats of enemies.

Spring rain had turned several small creeks into raging rivers and flooded prairies they needed to cross to reach their destination. They spent days waiting for flood waters to recede and used the time to share stories of their past and dreams of their future.

Of all the stories they shared, none drew more interest than the tale of the young cowboy's great-great grandfather, James Oliver McIntyre, who fled false arrest in Scotland to make a new life in the American Colonies. This is his story:

JAMES OLIVER McINTYRE was one of the finest craftsmen in all of the Scottish Highlands. His carvings and mastery of furniture-making was the envy of all who traveled to and from the castle of Hastings McAlister, one of the most powerful of all of Scotland's clansmen.

McAlister was a giant of a man and known far and wide for his love of life, family, a good fight, strong wine and art. When it came to sculptures, carvings and paintings, he employed only the finest artisans. Still, there was nothing he prized more than the intricately-carved furnishings McIntyre provided he and the mother of his four children, Margareta.

McAlister stood almost six and one-half feet tall and weighed close to three hundred pounds. When he laughed, those around him always joined the frivolity. But when he raised his voice in anger, friend and foe knew to flee. He was the youngest of five boys born to the mighty Fletcher McAlister whose gallantry during the Battle of Culloden was legendary.

Culloden was the last great battle fought on British soil and cemented Britain as a Protestant nation. The Jacobites, made up mainly of Scottish Highlanders, wanted to restore the throne to the exiled House of Stuart and return Catholicism to Great Britain. The battle was one-sided and bloody. Hundreds of Highlanders were killed by their Scottish brethren from the Lowlands and some Highlanders.

Fletcher and his four oldest sons fell in the fighting. Near the end of the bloodbath, Fletcher McAlister was surrounded by enemy soldiers. With only a sword for defense, tales of the chief's bravery echoed through the green hills and valleys of his homeland. It is said, he hacked off the leg of one of his assailants and used it as a club in

his left hand while the sword in his right sliced away at his enemies until he finally was toppled next to his dying sons.

The loss of the McAlister brood at Culloden left Hastings, a young teen, in a struggle to maintain his family's hold on Highland leadership. Hastings' cunning mother, Deredere, held off challenges to her son's leadership with the help of devoted clansmen and keen alliances. As her only son grew to manhood, he was the spitting image of his father, big, verbose and afraid of nothing. Like his father, he used his immense size to bully all who threatened Clan McAlister.

By 1750, the giant was both feared and revered. As a result, the clan lived in peace and the chief and his family enjoyed the opulence of leadership.

When the clan leader discovered young McIntyre's skills as a craftsman, he hired him to work exclusively for Clan McAlister and handed him a long list of projects. They included ornate picture frames for the colorful paintings that graced the walls of the McAlister Castle, to headboards for the chief's bedroom and cabinetry for Lady Margareta.

While many artisans visited McAlister Castle, McIntyre took all his meals at the family table and resided in a small room next to his massive woodshop on the castle grounds. He was provided tools of all kinds. Saws, planers, hammers, awls and gouges hung on the walls and were strewn across worktables. Glues, varnishes and paints were stored in large pots that filled one corner of the workspace.

McIntyre was loved by Hastings and Margareta. But that all changed on a cold October day in 1759 when a bag of priceless jewels belonging to Lady Margareta went missing.

"Return them now," demanded the chief to an assembly of servants and friends, "or I will search every room in the castle and every home in the Highlands until I find the thief who dares to tread on McAlister kindness."

In the days that followed, McIntyre could hear his friend's angry voice echoing through the cavernous halls of the castle, his ire growing with each room his guards searched in vain.

When Hastings came to the door of the carpenter's workshop it was with sad eyes. James was putting the finishing touches on a massive chair, one large enough to command attention when the chief held

court in the great hall. It was made of highly-coveted mahogany McAlister found in a London shipyard and purchased at great expense for his personal craftsman. The prized wood could only be found in the deep and dangerous forests of South America.

“I am sorry to intrude on your workshop, James,” Hastings called out. “But I will not rest until every inch of this castle is searched and the Lady’s jewels recovered. Please stand aside while my men do as I have ordered.”

“Och! I take no offense, my Laird,” McIntyre said. “I would never steal an hour of time from you, let alone Lady Margareta’s fine jewelry. While your men search, come this way so I may show you what I have crafted for you and the great hall.”

Hastings was a large man, but the chair towered over him. The ornate carvings on its back denoted the clan’s crest and an image of his father slaying enemies at the great battle.

“It is wonderful,” the chief said, changing his sour mood into one of great joy.

“Oh, but there is more, my Laird. Take a seat.”

Hastings beamed at the comfort and magnificence of the throne-like chair.

“Grip the right arm and pull up.” McIntyre instructed.

McAlister did as he was asked and the right arm of the chair came free, revealing a hidden compartment where a sword, battle ax and other weapons could be stored. He marveled at the handywork.

“Never again will you be defenseless when you greet visitors and other clansman in the great hall, my chief.”

No sooner had the words left the lips of the artisan when one of the guards knocked a frame from a worktable at the rear of the shop.

“Be careful there, foolish man,” James called out. “That frame is made of black walnut, a very rare species brought here all the way from the New World.”

When McIntyre returned his attention to McAlister, the chief was admiring a hand rest, planed flat at the very end of the chair’s left arm. Hastings smiled and said, “You have thought of everything, McIntyre. This will be a great place to rest my tankard of wine while I hold court.”

“Oh, it is much more than a place to balance your wine, sire,” James

said. "Grasp the arm's end and pull it out."

When he did, the arm extended easily to reveal another hiding place for documents or several daggers.

"You are a genius, man," the chief said, beaming. "How long will it be until it is ready for the great hall?"

"It needs one more coat of wax, sire. I will apply it tonight, and you may have your chair the day after next.

"We will have it installed with great ceremony," the happy chief proudly exclaimed. "You will be the man of honor, too."

"I don't think so," said William Calloway, sergeant of the castle guards. He held a velvet bag high in the air and let it dangle for all to see.

"No!" Hastings bellowed. "Say that isn't what I think it is!"

"I'm sorry, sire. These are Lady Margareta's jewels, the ones we have been searching for. I fear your favorite carpenter is a thief and most likely a liar as well."

He motioned for his men to arrest McIntyre. Four men pulled him away from McAlister and pinned his arms behind his back.

"Tell me this isn't true, James," Hastings pleaded.

"I am being falsely accused. I'd never steal from you, my Laird."

"Where did you find them?" McAllister asked Calloway.

"They were in plain view in one of his toolboxes," the sergeant replied. "Your daughter's friend, young Amos McCloud, found them."

McAlister's joy quickly turned to anger.

"I cannot believe this, not after all I have given you, James. Take him away."

"I am not a thief, my Laird. Please believe me. I did not do this thing," McIntyre pleaded as he was dragged from his woodshop and destined for a cell in the bowels of the castle.

As he was dragged down the castle steps to a dark and dreary depth, McIntyre and every resident and visitor to the citadel heard Hastings' cry of anguish.

"N-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o!"



CHAPTER TWO

The craftsman was manhandled the minute the guards reached the steps leading to the dungeons. As he was dragged downward, he was punched and beaten. He was writhing in pain when the squeaking hinges of a cell door opened for him.

Just before he was tossed to the hard floor, the lucky guard who found Lady Margareta's jewels whispered in his ear, "Now it will be I who will be the chief's favorite. Not you, woodsman." He gave McIntyre a kick and he went sprawling onto the hard, cold floor.

James laid unmoving for almost an hour. When he regained consciousness, the coppery taste of blood filled his mouth and his torso ached from the punishment he had endured. The damp, cold floor had lowered his body temperature to a fragile state. He was within a few degrees of hypothermia, a condition he had endured many times as he wandered the hills of Scotland in search of the perfect piece of timber for his latest project.

As he began to move, every muscle and bone in his body hurt. He grimaced as he pushed himself to a sitting position. With his back against the stone wall, he took deep breaths to make sure his lungs were not injured and watched a rat scurry from its nest in the far corner.

"Don't come back," he muttered. "This is my place now."

He lowered his head into his filthy hands and agonized over the events that had brought him to the dismal chamber. It didn't take long to realize jealousy and treachery had cast a dark shadow over him and his friendship with Hastings McAlister. He had been too eager to please the great chieftain and lost track of what was happening around him. He knew better. Scotland was not the place where laird and commoner could co-exist as friends. Always, there was someone who sought to garner the attention and respect of the affluent at the expense of another.

As he rose to his feet, his mind raced. What would he do now? Was

there any hope of convincing Laird McAllister of his innocence? What would happen to him if he couldn't?

Back and forth he paced, raising his body temperature as the reality of his situation sent chills down his spine. He suspected it was the young guard, McCloud, who had planted the stolen jewels in his toolbox. The twenty-year-old sought the Laird's favor so he could enhance his relationship with the chief's only daughter.

Like her mother, Erin McAlister was a raving beauty who was about to celebrate her eighteenth birthday. Lady Margareta had asked him to make beautifully carved combs for her daughter's long, strawberry blonde hair. Most Scottish maidens were married and raising bairns by the time they were eighteen. Not Erin, the apple of her father's eye and worthy of no common suitor. In a time when arranged marriages sealed powerful alliances, Margareta would not hear of such a thing.

"Erin will marry for love," she told Hastings, "or your wife will leave your bed and never return. Our daughter's would-be husband will arrive at the castle aboard a white stallion and will promise wealth and adventure for our only daughter. I will accept nothing less."

Admirers arrived in all shapes and sizes, but few had been as manipulative as the deceitful McCloud, the son of a craftsman James knew well. Was Angus McCloud involved in his son's dishonest maneuver to gain McAlister's favor? Would he cast his lot in such an immoral plan so he could become the Laird's carpenter and unite the two families in matrimony?

As he desperately sought answers, the words of his father returned to him. James McIntyre Sr. had warned him of the treachery that stalked the corridors of McAlister Castle.

"Everyone seeks the Laird's favor, and you have won it without trying. Beware, others will try to steal everything you hold dear."

His father had been clairvoyant, while he had been blinded by the quality of materials McAllister brought to his workshop. He was provided every device known to man and only the finest woods with which to ply his trade. His lack of attention led him to this desperate situation, for which the consequences were grave. If he was not allowed to state his case, McIntyre would be labeled a thief and face harsh penalties. He could be shunned, tarred and feathered or

imprisoned.

He wouldn't let that happen. He had no other choice; escape was his only course of action. He had to act quickly.

As his blood boiled, the craftsman realized he had not been searched by the guards who abused him en route to the dungeon. In his pockets he found an awl and chisel, some metal fasteners and a tiny blade he used for intricate, fine carving. All would aid and abet his escape.

The eerie silence told him he was alone in the bowels of the castle. No guard stood watch outside his cell or at the entrance of the dungeon. He was free to ply his skills without being detected. McIntyre shook the rusted door that blocked his path to freedom. It was at least eighty years old and in poor repair. When he shook it, the hinges and lock rattled like coins in a tax-collector's purse.

James pulled the awl from his pocket and inserted it into the lock. He moved it around slowly, searching for a release. The mechanics were different from those of the locked chests he had picked for customers, and the awl was inferior. If he could find the lever to release the lock, the door would open. After thirty minutes, sweat was pouring from McIntyre's brow as he sought purchase inside the rusty mechanism. When he heard a familiar click, he held his breath as he pushed the door open. His father's voice echoed in his brain as he took his first step toward freedom.

"Seek peace at all times but fight when you must. Then, be ruthless and brutal."

McIntyre knew every inch of the castle because ten years of his work graced every corridor, public and private. If he could make it up the winding staircase to the main floor, he knew exactly how to reach a secret passageway that led outside. Getting there unnoticed was his biggest problem.

He gripped the small knife in one hand and the chisel in the other as he began his climb. As luck would have it, halfway to his destination he heard footsteps. Two men talked and laughed as they descended the spiral staircase. He had no choice. He pressed himself against the inside wall, held his breath and waited.

He tripped the first guard who passed. When he fell forward, James drove the chisel deep into his right eye with lightning quickness. It was

a gruesome and deadly blow.

Taken by surprise, the second guard was easily subdued. Before he could react in the tight staircase, McIntyre had him pressed against the far wall with the blade of his carving knife pressed against his throat. He smiled when he realized it was McCloud.

“Imagine, meeting the likes of you here,” McIntyre said with contempt in his voice. “I take it Laird McAlister hasn’t detected he has a thief and a liar among his castle guards.”

McCloud’s eyes were as big as serving plates as he recognized his situation was desperate.

“It was nothing personal, mate,” the young man begged. “Twas me father’s plan. He said he would skin me if I dinna plant the jewels in yer workshop.”

“I’ll deal with him before I leave this cursed place,” McIntyre said. “But first, I must dispense with a bit of garbage.”

“Please don’t...”

He never completed the plea as the knife sliced across his neck and blood gushed down his chest. McIntyre let him fall and tumble to the bottom of the stairway where the body of the other guard had come to rest. He climbed back down the stairs to retrieve his chisel. Then, he resumed his escape.

McINTYRE KNEW THE landscape surrounding McAlister Castle better than the lifelines in the palm of his hand. He was raised in the village, and he knew every farmer and family who made their home in the shadow of the great citadel.

He was as much at home in the neighboring forest as he was in his mother’s arms. He had cataloged and marked hundreds of trees that might serve his needs. He knew them by size and species. Accordingly, he knew beside one of the valley’s largest oak trees was the home of Angus McCloud. It was the only stop he intended to make before escaping to the port of Glasgow, where he would seek passage to the New World.

McCloud was seated outside his small cottage and drawing a jug of Irish whiskey to his lips when McIntyre walked up on him.

“I suppose yer celebratin’ ye good fortune, McCloud,” James bawled as he walked briskly toward the father of his accuser.

“What are ye doing here, McIntyre?” he asked as the amber liquid dripped down his chin. “I thought...”

“Ye thought wrong, man,” McIntyre said as the blade slipped as easily across the throat of the father as it had the son. “Neither ye nor ye addled son will ever get the best of a McIntyre as long as we can breathe God’s sweet air.”

The force of the attack rocked the man backward in his chair. The jug smashed against a log and McCloud summersaulted onto the ground. James rolled the lifeless body over so he could see his victim’s face one last time and wiped his bloody blade on the man’s clothing.

“I’ll see ye and yer worthless son in hell, Angus McCloud,” McIntyre declared without remorse. “It just won’t be anytime soon.”

He spat into the man’s contorted face and stormed off toward Glasgow.