

Lady Amelia Matilda Murray was a British botanist and botanical artist who became a maid of honour to Queen Victoria in 1837. Murray traveled through the Adirondacks in 1854 or 1855, escorted by New York State governor Horatio Seymour, guided by Mart Moody and James McClelland and accompanied by another lady and gentleman, unnamed. They stayed at Baker's Hotel which she described as the "last house of reception on the Saranac River." She was hailed as the first woman to "cross the woods," presumably along with the lady who was her companion.

*Letters from the United States, Cuba and Canada*

*by Hon. Amelia Matilda Murray*

*Excerpt from letter XXIX – Page 372-384. Letter is composed as written in the book.  
Saratoga, New York  
September 5, 1855*

While the party was packing up, I parted with R---, and sent her back in the carriage to embark again in the steamboat to Westport. She will go round by Utica to Canandaigua, to give Mrs. Seymour a report of us so far; and I shall pick her up again at the latter place, where she will remain with our hospitable friends, Mr. and Mrs. G---. Miss M--- and Mr. S--- walked on a mile or two to the lake side, and left Mr. H--- and one guide to accompany me, after I had made a sketch of the place and surrounding mountains from a hill above. On the edge of Saranac Lake we found a small three boats, and various articles prepared for forest expeditions. One boat was set apart for two dogs, guns, and baggage, taken care of by **Jamie M'Clelland**, who had enough of Scotch recollections to induce him to look with a pleased expression at one of my name.

Mr. Moody, the head guide, rowed the boat, in which I had a comfortable seat of cloaks and cushions, with the Governor. Miss M---, his niece, and Mr. H---, were conducted by a fine youth of nineteen, who goes by the name of 'Prince Albert', and it is believed he was so christened at two years old, though he looked shy and annoyed when asked about it, and said he believed it was '*Pliny* Albert.' The weather was perfect, as we rowed along the beautiful Saranac Lake. For the first time I saw the Loon, and heard it utter its wild cry, more resembling a mocking laugh than anything else. I could have fancied it saying, 'You intruders, you – you will have enough of this before you have done.' A fine eagle next soared over our heads, and ravens also.

We floated on water as smooth as glass, passing by lovely islands and fine rocks, until we came to the first rapid, and inlet into the next lake, where we disembarked, that the men might carry and push through their boots. I sketched during the operation, while Mr. S--- mended the slight terminal pole of his fishing rod, which an accident had broken; then we proceeded to a small 'round lake', prettily set among the mountains, but very shallow, the rushes and Lily-pads growing plentifully over it. Now we had a portage. Each man carried a boat on his head, and we loaded ourselves with as much as we could carry. M--- and I filled my Scotch plaid with baskets and bundles, and we bore it between us. The distance was short, but it was above an hour before we were again afloat in the Upper Saranac, at the end of which our first encampment was to be made. Upon landing, we chose a pretty spot; the guides hastily built up a great log fire. I gathered up some brush and fir cones to help the blaze, and we broke off small branches (or 'feathers') of the hemlock spruce, which makes the sweetest and best foundation for an Alpine couch in this country – sweeter than, if not so pretty as our heather. Over this the Governor spread a thin oilskin. My air-cushions were most valuable; we puffed them up, and with these, my leather bag as a bolster, large plaids and felt coverings, and Mary M---'s black and scarlet shawl as a curtain of division, we, two ladies and two gentlemen, slept soundly, after making a hearty supper of trout and potatoes. I had provided a dozen lemons, aware that when no milk can be had, the juice is an excellent addition to tea, and this plan was unanimously approved. To our guides the idea

was quite new; and, as all forest fare is common potluck, they were quite pleased. 'It isn't bad,' – 'Right, fine, I'll assure you;' but the first sentence implies almost as high praise as 'It won't hurt you;' and that is the *acme*. I concocted my pudding with the wild-plums, deprived of their stones, biscuit, brown sugar, a little butter, and some water; but, as some hours' stewing was necessary, this dish was not produced before our breakfast. One of the boats was turned upside down for a table; our candlestick, a large potato placed upon a tin pail inverted. The guides bivouacked close around the little tent. About half-past two o'clock, according to a common habit in the forests, we all roused up for half an hour, replenished the fire, and I removed my stew to a little fire of its own, that it might not get quite stewed away before morning. We then again composed ourselves to sleep again, and had comfortable naps til daylight. During the night I heard a horrible noise once or twice, and, imagining it might be the howl of a wolf, I called to Moody, who assured me it was nothing but a screech-owl. At five o'clock began preparations for breakfast – frying pork, boiling trout and potatoes, and water for the kettle of tea; at last, trout were broiled in the same pan with the pork gravy, an excellent dish. We two ladies went down to the lake to make our toilet, and balanced ourselves in one of the empty boats, to use tooth-brushes, &c. While the rest of the party were packing up, and preparing to undertake the portage to Story Creek, I made sketch before the tent was struck, and caught one of the men in the act of carrying the boat, with his head concealed underneath, like some nondescript shell-fish.

Before we started, the gentlemen hung a small mirror of M---'s on a tree, and very composedly shaved themselves. The guides took the boats upon their heads, and after two returns they transported all the baggage the rest of the party could not carry through two miles of difficult portage. Then we reached the Otter's Creek and Raquette River, where at last, at the junction of the streams, there was such good fishing, that a long pause ensued. The trout were large and plentiful. The Governor caught several weighing from two to three pounds. Mr. H--- lost two of his best; one owing to his young boatman, and the other owing to his own hurry in pulling up his prize. I landed to sketch the scenery, and was so much absorbed as to leave my parasol in a bush. We rowed back half a mile for its recovery; however, Mr. Moody took this trouble without a murmur, and Mr. S--- having extremely enjoyed his sport, I believe he was rather pleased to take another look at that pleasant locality. We did not again join the other boats until our arrival at the next rapids, where we were obliged to resign ourselves to another tedious portage; but the row down Raquette River had been delightful – it flows through a deep forest of maples, pines, and tamarisks; the crimson tints of autumn blending with dark and orange foliage, tiny seedling red maples the rocks and the bogs; the cantinal flower-blue gentian, and lilac asters occasionally showing themselves; but through this whole region, the autumnal flora had not a great deal of variety. I gathered some berries of a *Rhamnus*, saw very large leaved willows and species of *Vaccinium* (one very good indeed); the scarlet berries of *Cannas Canadana* everywhere enlivened the forest; and there were also the white Partridge berry, bright trillium seeds, and the large and small wintergreen, *gautheria shallor procumbens*.

Now and then the starry flowers of *Houstonias* lingered on the ground, and raspberries and low blackberries refreshed us on our way – these, with the exception of white and yellow *Nymphaes*, called by the people 'Lily-pods', were all I saw of flowers or seeds. Deer feed much on these lily-pods early in the season, and as they come down to the rivers and lakes in search of their tender shoots, they fall an easy prey at that period; but now they feed upon higher ground, so dogs are sent off to hunt a single one, and chase him down to any part of the lakes, where they are loosed; there they keep him in the water, and by their baying call their masters to finish the chase. Our gentlemen were not successful in shooting any, because, owing to the long distance we had to travel through this wilderness (about one hundred and fifty miles), the mornings could not be spared for hunting; and although two attempts were made by despatching the hounds in the afternoon, they did not bring their game back until too dark for even the accustomed to get a shot. Maple and birch are considered the best wood with which to build a fire: the common distinguishing phrase is 'hard and soft wood'. Hard is applied to deciduous trees, soft to the pines and evergreens. 'How finely the soft and hard trees are mixed on that mountain,' said one

of our party.

Upon landing below the Raquette Falls, we had a mile and a half of difficult portage: the signs of a trail were at times hardly visible; gigantic timber felled by storms, or by time, crossed the obscure path, sometimes every twenty yards; deep bogs, and slippery rocks impeded it, and we had often to retrace our steps, or seek a blazed tree before we could find our way; each individual of the party straggled on as he or she could, with their load. When Mr. S--- had conveyed his to the edge of the river above the Falls, he kindly returned to relieve me of whatever basket or bundle I had been able to carry; and so we all at last reached our intended camping place, a beautiful spot. Our tent was soon pitched, a bright fire in front of it was lit, just at the edge of the water, and another blaze, for cooking, made near to our boat-table. The largest trout was boiled, the smaller ones broiled, with excellent potatoes, for our supper; tea-lemonade our beverage. As an awakening amusement for an hour afterwards, we played a game of whist, with a not very white pack of cards, procured from one of the guides; and then after arranging our couch as before, we slept very soundly until after one o'clock, when the fires were made up, and then we slept till again morning; not a sound disturbed the forest, except that of the rippling waters at our feet; but when we awoke at six, a gentle rain pattered upon the surrounding trees. However, it was no more than 'the pride of the morning', just enough to make us more sensible of the blessing of fine weather. Mr. M-- selected a sheltered rocky nook, a little way back for our dressing room; there we bathed, and adjusted our toilet with brushes, combs, tooth-brushes, a luxury of towels, and even a tiny mirror hung upon the lowest branch of a fine hemlock spruce; this smartening up of the individual woman marked our Sunday morning, for no Sabbath-day's rest can be set apart for travellers in the Bush, who must get to their journey's end by a certain day, or go without the common necessities of existence. We came forth again arrayed in cleanliness: its opposite is at times picturesque, but certainly not comfortable. On the whole, I was impressed by the tidy habits of our three guides; they omitted no opportunity for using the fresh pure water to wash away impurities, either on their hands or upon our culinary matters, and never left cup or platter in a soiled state, if they could help it.

Before our starting, the Governor rowed me over to the opposite shore for a sketch of our resting place. A few miles further up the Raquette River some of our party saw the track of a wolf, and we heard the partridge drum; this noise is caused by the wing of that bird, which in plumage is like ours, but in size it comes nearer to our pheasant. Wild-ducks appeared numerous, but they kept at a distance. Now again we got sight of distant mountains; of late, the forests and swamps have been low and flat. The approach to Long Lake is so thickly covered with lily-pods, rushes and other water-plants, that it seemed as if we were making our way across watery meadows. When we reached the lake itself, the wind blew freshly, and our boatmen had to row eighteen miles against it and the wavelets which arose. Occasional settlements dot the shores; a boy of ten years old paddled his little boat towards us, and when we asked him if many people lived there, he answered, 'There is the baby, and a few more.' Evidently, that baby was the individual of most importance. We again saw wild-ducks, an eagle, a gull, and a loon; and at one spot (a rare sight in this wilderness) two small wagons were waiting to be transported across the lake.

A Mr. and Mrs. Carey, with a family of young children, possessing cows and horses, and a house in the background, lived just behind the rocky knoll where we decided upon forming our encampment – under some tall pine trees: they supplied us with excellent milk and bread and butter, an unaccustomed luxury, and also with some straw for our beds. Mrs. Carey, a pleasing young woman, visited us with a present of blackberries after supper. The 'Owl's Head' was a prominent mountain beyond, and a young crescent moon arose not far above it. In the morning we had some fine rain; but with the aid of my large umbrella, I did not miss a sketch of our camp: and the palmetto fly-flapper I had brought all the way from Mobile proved of great use in frightening away mosquitoes. Alas! I afterwards lost it during one of the portages. Here it was decided to leave one boat. Mr. Carey was to convey the chief guide with a second one in a wagon, a cross-cut through the woods; and we all packed

into the remaining boat, as there was some probable difficulty in getting through rapids and portages. The guns and dogs having both been conveyed to the land carriage, whole flights of ducks passed fearlessly within shot, as if they had by some means become aware of their security. After two or three portages, fatiguing and difficult enough, the men determined to attempt pushing the boat through the last rapid. Now touching one rock, now fast upon another, the water rushing by, I did not think the adventure a pleasant one; at last we came to a dead lock. **Jamie M'Clelland** proposed that Governor Seymour and Mr. H--- should jump upon a rock, water surrounded as it was, and by so lightening the boat, we were with difficulty floated up to a landing: here we quickly heard Moody's whoop, and he came up with a partridge he had killed during his progress by land: and soon the whole party was again mustered, for our gentlemen had waded on shore from their rock and thus rejoined us. This day we saw the track of a moose-deer on the edge of a stream; plenty of tracks and signs of smaller deer: one or two solitary cranes, and a bald-headed eagle. It was muddy walking; we were thoroughly bespattered, but **Jamie** endeavoured to console us by the assurance that he had 'seen women looking much worse'.

In these forests, the variety of funguses is beyond description; some, just like beautiful white coral. Many were in form and substance quite different from drawings or models I have seen; the colours scarlet, orange, pink, pure white, black, drab, and rose; and bunches of that odd monotrope, the Indian pipe, constantly fringed our path. It seems to me that there is something nourishing in the air of these Alpine forests: I never felt very hungry, although our meals were far apart, and usually very light in substance. As we rowed down the Raquette Lake, I observed a yellow sunset, with heaped up clouds to the south, and a suspicion crossed my mind that stormy weather was brewing. At a rough clearing, our guides pulled up. A shanty belonging to Mr. Beech was not a great way off, and, oddly enough, there was another clearing on the opposite shore of the lake, owned by Mr. Wood.

Our tent was pitched on a cleared spot, near where a famous eagle once had his eye upon a tall pine; both pine and eagle are gone – the latter died, and the former was blown down. Some dried venison was procured, and a neighbour provided milk. We composed ourselves to rest, and slept till midnight; then growling thunder, vivid lightening, and pouring rain disturbed our slumbers. A wet morning followed, and any intention of striking our tent was abandoned. It was violent storm – probably an equinoctial gale. We had only to be patient and enduring, with the conviction that 'Time and the hour runs through the roughest day'.

In the afternoon the weather cleared, and we went by the lake to visit Mr. and Mrs. Beech, while the gentlemen and the guides went off hunting. But their dogs did not immediately find, and again, it was too dark to shoot a deer which was hunted down to the water. The ladies returned to our tent, and as I had a reserved provision of arrowroot, I determined to make a large kettleful, flavoured with lemons and molasses, adding to it a portion of Malaga, and putting in biscuits. This made a comforting warm mess for the cold and tired hunters upon their return.

After the violent rain of last night and to-day, we found our hemlock spruce beds rather damp, although the guides had turned the tent so as to face a large fire, and accommodate it to a change of wind. In spite of all the wet, however, no colds were caught, and early on the 20<sup>th</sup> of September we embarked again on the lake in high spirits. The guides had stowed themselves under one of the boats during the night, which perhaps sheltered them even more completely than our tent did us.

During the last pause in our wanderings, we could not help being struck by the wild, careless, picturesque appearance inside that tent. Seated upon the floor, where we were taking our meals, with pans of tea and plates of tin, air-cushions, and variously coloured plaids and felts scattered around; sketch-books and presses, books and maps; a large tin case, containing our store of grocery, a huge basket full of biscuits, a hammer ensconced among bunches of berries; tallow candles, under protection from the damp, towels, hats, bonnets, and other article of attire impartially scattered; accidentally bestowed touches of scarlet and blue upon the interior, lit up as it was by the warm glow of a blazing wood fire – this would have formed a picture for Gerard Dow.

I forgot to say we ate Mr. Moody's partridge for breakfast, and it proved excellent. I did not omit to sketch this encampment before we left it. As we rowed up the Raquette Lake, a slight snowstorm overtook us, but it was soon over. Even during that early morning, with its fog and snow, the lake was beautiful, with numerous bays and islands, and blue mountains rising in the distance. We passed through a narrow channel for some way, then disembarked for a portage to the eighth lake of the Eckford chain; for eight lakes of differing magnitude are strung upon the Moose River, and we were to pass through all. We now found a sandy beach which before had been rocky. The cheerful little crossbill hopped fearlessly around us, and wild-ducks flew away. After rowing across the eighth, another portage brought us to the seventh lake. There was some difficulty in pushing over a sandy bar at its entrance from the narrow stream we had just traversed. The seventh lake is quite encircled by hills. We observed a tempting rocky promontory, and as the sun was getting low, we decided upon landing upon a pretty sheltered beach behind it.

Our tent was pitched behind a gigantic fallen tree, against which the fire was made: it served as a convenient table for our cooking operations, as well as a good back for the blaze. I made a can of excellent portable soup, a provision we had before tried with success; but now I added a little arrowroot, an onion, potatoes, two or three spoonful of sweet wine, and several biscuits. It was generally agreed that this mixture 'would not hurt anybody'; indeed it might anywhere have been considered an excellent soup.

I found a quarter of a pound of portable soup, or a quarter of a pound of arrowroot necessary to make this quantity sufficient for seven hungry bodies. Although I brought these things with me from England more than a year ago, they were in good preservation; and I recommend London portable soup to all travellers in the Bush, and advise them also to add lemons and a good store of sugar, brown and white, to their other preparations. We had a bright moon this evening. Some hunters and fishers were upon the lake, and from the latter our people procured trout, and all enjoyed this camp particularly, even though no deer were attained. We had a misty morning, but the mountain tops soon peered out. We again embarked, and passed from one lake into others, sometimes by such narrow outlets that there was difficulty in finding them, until at the last our boatmen rowed twice a considerable distance before a swampy-looking egress was discovered: this led us into a pretty winding creek, and another short portage brought us below the falls of the Moose River into its rapid stream. Here we had only one boat. The Governor (for our other gentlemen had been obliged to leave us before we entered the chain of lakes) walked on to make some arrangements at Arnold's Farm, and we two ladies, in charge of Mr. Moody and M'Clelland, had a pleasant row, seeing many canvas-back ducks before us in the river. The former shot one, which I have no doubt would have been very good for dinner, but we never had any time or opportunity for trying an experiment. Mr. Seymour remained to make arrangements with the guides while his niece and I walked on to Arnold's Farm. There we found Mrs. Arnold and six daughters. These girls, aged from twelve to twenty, were placed in a row against one wall of the shanty, with looks so expressive of astonishment, that I felt puzzled to account for their manner, till their mother informed us they had never before seen any other woman than herself! I could not elicit a word from them; but, at last, when I begged for a little milk, the eldest went and brought me a glass. I then remembered that we had met a single hunter rowing himself in a skiff on the Moose River, who called out, 'Where on the 'arth do they women come from?' And our after-experience fully explained why ladies are rare birds in that locality. At this place we expected to find horses, but owing to our twenty-four hours' detention on Raquette Lake, they had been sent off to bring up some gentlemen from Brown's Tract; pedestrianism was therefore our only resource. Jamie M'Clelland came up from the river and explained that unless we made some further progress this evening, we should not be able to get through the forest during daylight tomorrow, and delay was of importance, so we decided upon trudging on as far as possible. Jamie took the tent on his back, and Mr. Seymour and the other guides were to follow as soon as they could select positive necessaries from our baggage. Mrs. Arnold was furious – she did all but try to detain us by force – declared we could not get on, and that she should

soon see us back again; but necessity has no law: we felt the importance of determination, and we had become too experienced gipsies to fear camping out. For one mile we had a pleasant path, then commenced the series of bog-holes which, with few and short intervals, were to be scrambled through for sixteen miles. The worst was, that as night closed in, we could not find a dry spot on which to pitch our tent. At last we sent **Jamie** on, and he brought us the news that, at a short distance, he had found a little knoll above the bogs.

Dark as it was, we reached this spot without any mishap than an occasional flounder in the mud; but all the lumber around was soaking wet. No fire could be made till our guide had cut down a tree – for he had not forgotten his axe; and his experienced arm soon felled a birch of considerable size, cut it in logs about two yards long, and so built up a fire, which we assisted in lighting, by breaking off dry bush from the surrounding bush. **Jamie** worked hard; and before Mr. Seymour and the other guides joined us with exclamations of astonishment how we had ever got through the places that had nearly swamped them, the tent was raised, hemlock branches gathered, and a good fire blazed all ready for cooking operations. The young moon occasionally peeped through the foliage above our heads; but it was too thick for much light to be visible. Our misfortune at that moment was the sufferings of poor young Prince Albert, who lay upon the ground agonized and quite useless. We gave him what comfort we could; and I administered camphor, which soothed the pain, and enabled him to get asleep. Our head guide told me he knew the value of that substance in most cases of slight illness; and that he seldom went into the forest unprovided with some of it.

Before daylight next morning we again aroused ourselves. Fortunately sufficient portable soup and arrowroot was still left to make a good warm mess for breakfast; and this nourishment is so lasting, that, with the exception of half a biscuit and some water, I got on upon it till we reached our resting place at Bonville, after nine in the evening. At this encampment, we parted from our three guides, who had conducted themselves excellently well through all our difficulties. **Jamie**, a Canadian, was going back to take his young wife, of nineteen (to whom he had been four years married) to his father's house near Montreal. 'An' wont she be glad to see me back. I wouldn't change my gal for any gal in the States, or in Canada either.' **Jamie** is a sober, handy fellow. I sure he is a good husband, as he certainly made a thoughtful, intelligent attendant on us two women in the Bush. The Governor fell in with Mr. Wood, of Raquette Lake, at Arnold's, and engaged him to see us safely through the concluding passage of our travels; but as the only chance of getting assistance to meet us, it was necessary to send him on. Mr. Seymour must always be considered a brave man, for having undertaken alone, to take us that day's walk; but having never passed through this track before, he was happily not fully aware of what he undertook, or he confesses he should have been afraid. The path we had to follow was a road cut through the forest fifty years ago; planks had been laid down and corduroy bridges made; but as no settlement followed, left to entire neglect, the rotten timbers only made bad worse; and I imagine that it would be impossible to find anywhere a track so difficult to get over as that through which we patiently laboured for ten consecutive hours. Mr. Seymour's patience and good humour never gave way. Putting off the packages on his back he now extricated one companion, now another, from a boggy 'fix.' I shall never forget the astonishment of Mr. Stephens, of yacht celebrity, when on horseback with another gentleman and guides, he met us emerging from the Bush! They had four horses; and our *avant-courier*, Mr. Wood, had secured one of them, upon which I mounted; and although it was not easy to keep my seat upon a man's saddle in getting over such ground, I soon found the benefit of being carried on the last few miles by some other agency than my own feet. Mr. Seymour and his niece walked on; in one mile more we again reached the Moose River, and crossed it in a boat; and another two hours brought us to the clearing, where a small wagon was procured – rough enough, but still a wagon – which took us to a comfortable hotel, at the small town of Bonville, from whence, after a good night's rest, we got on by coach and cars to Utica. A singular and touching circumstance occurred to me in the coach. An old man and a younger one conversed in Welsh. I could not help inquiring what part of Wales they came from, for that tongue awoke in my heart early memories. The old man knew



Caermarthen; had been at Abergwilly, and spoke of my father as 'that charity man.' David Owen was quite blind; but that meeting was pleasant to us both. After fifty years to hear one's father's name spoken of with respect and affection, in this far distant land! There are many Welsh people settled hereabouts. Owen's home was a small village near Trenton Falls. As we passed over a bridge, – 'Now,' he said, 'we are near my home.' 'Not being able to see, how do you know that?' 'Ah! Do I not understand the voice of that bridge?' And one or two miles beyond, the old man and I parted, he shaking me by the hand, with his blessing. Three days at Utica were necessary to recruit and repose myself. Now I write from Canandaigua, on the eve of starting for Chicago and St. Louis.

\*\* The author continues writing from Buffalo on September 27<sup>th</sup>