



**Allan McLane**  
*The First Marshal of Delaware*

Allan McLane did not want to be a United States Marshal. Having suffered financially during the Revolution, McLane sought a better paying position in the new government. Unfortunately, Washington had already filled these offices, so he offered McLane the job of Marshal with the promise that when something more "productive" came open, McLane would be appointed to it. In the interim, McLane continued to suffer financially.

Deeply in debt, he wrote Washington on June 9, 1794, to reiterate his request for a better paying office. McLane complained to the President that his commission as marshal was "an office of considerable trust, but not profit." Nevertheless, McLane remained as Marshal until 1797, when the President fulfilled his promise by appointing McLane Collector of the Port of Wilmington.

In many ways, McLane typified Washington's Marshals. Born in Philadelphia on August 8, 1746, he moved to Kent County, Delaware, in 1774. At the time of his appointment as Marshal on September 26, 1789, he was 43 years old and had lived in his District fifteen years. At various times, he earned his living as a farmer, soldier, member and speaker of the Delaware legislature, privy counselor to the governor, and judge of the Court of Common Pleas. McLane was also a member of the Society of the Cincinnati, an avid abolitionist, and a supporter of the Federalist party. As delegate to Delaware's ratifying convention in 1787, he voted for the new national Constitution. During the presidential election of 1800, McLane campaigned actively for John Adams. Although Jefferson moved quickly to purge the government of Federalists and replace them with his own Democratic Republicans, he did not remove McLane from his job as collector.

A hero of the Revolutionary War, McLane earned a reputation for his "daring and intrepidity." He enlisted as a Lieutenant in 1775 in Caesar Rodney's Delaware Regiment. The following year, he joined Washington's Continental Army. McLane distinguished

himself in the battles of Long Island, White Plains, and Trenton. His gallantry at the battle of Princeton earned him promotion to captain in 1777. Washington put him in charge of the outposts around Philadelphia, and, in July 1779, McLane was promoted to Major in "Light-Horse Harry" Lee's Legion. The new major took a prominent part in the battles of Paulus Hook, Stony Point, and the siege of Yorktown. By war's end, he wore the rank of Colonel.

McLane earned these promotions through the skill and bravery he showed in fighting the British. On one occasion, he and four of his men ran into a large group of redcoats. His men fled, leaving McLane alone before the British troops. After a brief exchange of gunfire, McLane also retreated, only to encounter an even larger number of enemy soldiers. He managed to outrun all but two of these redcoats before turning to take his stand. McLane shot one of his pursuers and then fought hand-to-hand with the second. This one, too, he managed to kill, but not before the British soldier struck him in the hand with a saber, inflicting a severe wound that bled profusely. Exhausted by the running and fighting and weakened by loss of blood, McLane sought refuge in a mill pond. He stripped naked and hid in the freezing water until the cold stopped the bleeding and the British gave up their search for him.

On another occasion, McLane, riding alone, chanced upon a dozen British soldiers. Rather than turning and fleeing, he spurred his horse to the attack, charged through the startled redcoats, and made good his escape. McLane also showed a sense of humor fighting the British. On many occasions, he dressed his men as farmers and sent them behind enemy lines to spy on the enemy. He also provisioned British troops with "beef", which he sold them at market rates. He used the profits to supply his own men. Since the "beef" was actually the meat from British horses killed in battle, his margin of profit was considerable. McLane served as the first Marshal of Delaware for eight years. His appointment as Collector of the Port of Wilmington on 1797 began a new phase of his career. He remained in that office until his death on May 22, 1829, at the age of 83.