

The Diary of William Fraeme McKee

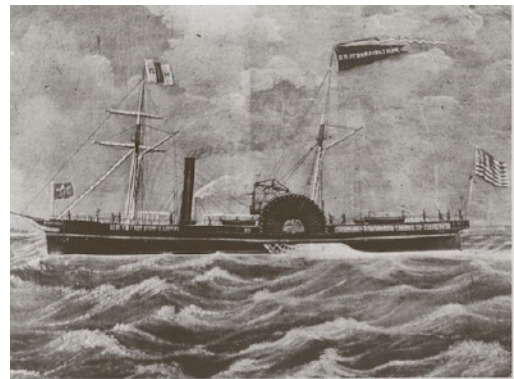
From Brady's Bend to Stockton, California



Brady's Bend, Armstrong Co., PA

Root Cellar member, Lynne Roberts, has given the "Preserves" permission to print an extracted copy of a diary written by William Fraeme McKee, her great-great-great uncle, and brother of Lynne's great-great grandmother, Ann Elizabeth McKee Ray. William is buried in the Rural Cemetery, Stockton, California.

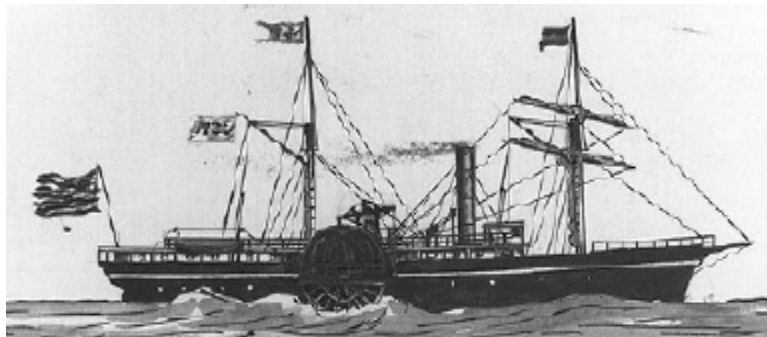
"I made up my mind to go to California on the 6th day of March, 1851. Left Brady's Bend with \$540.55 on the 12th, in the morning, in a flat and landed in Kitanning at one o'clock and got board of a steam-boat and arrived in Pittsburg at seven o'clock. Left Pittsburg the 13th at six o'clock, the Brownsville route and arrived in Brownsville at three in the morning. Took the 'staging' and arrived in Cumberland at ten in the evening; got aboard the cars and passed through Baltimore and landed in Philadelphia the 15th at one o'clock. Left for New York at five in the evening and arrive[d] at nine thirty. Went aboard the Steamer Brother Jonathon on the 17th expecting to make a start, but owing to stormy weather, we lay over to the 19th at ten o'clock. We sailed down the bay under a good gale. On the 20th, we had a strong gale and one of our wheel-houses was staved and the packing of the cylinder gave way and we were compelled to lay to for half a day. On the 21st, we had a very strong gale, but all was well on the 22nd. One of the wheel-houses got loose and we had to take it out; one wheel being off and the other loose and uncertain, the Captain called a meeting to see what was best to do. He advised that we go to Kinston and there repair. We started with only one wheel and canvas but the wind turning, we were forced to tack about and make for Norfolk. We had not run long that way until the wind shifted and we made for Wilmington. On Sunday, the 23rd, a doleful day; at night we lay down with but little hopes of ever rising. The sea was very heavy and we had a strong gale. The wind again shifted, and we were forced to go before it. We had to change our course again for Norfolk. Wednesday, March 26th, we sailed up around the Capes for Norfolk,



SS Brother Jonathon

hoisted our flag for a pilot and got one. We were advised by him to run to Baltimore as it was the best place to get repairs made. Thursday, March 27th; arrived at Baltimore this morning at seven o'clock and got hands to work at the boat. After getting our breakfast, I, in company with some of my companions, started out to view the city. We visited the shot-tower and ascended to the top. It is the highest building that I was ever on. We then went to the Washington Monument. It is also a high splendid and costly edifice. I am very much pleased with Baltimore as a business place. Wednesday, the 2nd of April; called a meeting of the steerage passengers this evening at seven o'clock and elected Mr. Hunt, Jacob Campbell and E. Lewis, committee to wait on the Captain and Purser to see what they were going to do. Thursday, April 3rd; the boat was advertised to sail today at three o'clock, and the committee waited on the Captain and Purser. They go no satisfaction, but we were requested to wait till Saturday as the owner, Mr. Mills, would be here at that time. Friday, April 4th; called a meeting and raised money to fee a lawyer and take advise. Saturday, April 5th; Mr. Mills came as expected. The committee met him in the cabin at one thirty o'clock. After a long talk in which the disadvantage of the passengers being detained were set forth, they adjourned to meet on Monday at ten, at which time Mr. Mills promised to give them a positive answer as to when they would be able to sail. Monday, April 7th; the committee met Mr. Mills as appointed, but he gave them no positive answer and they concluded to publish the facts, that the public might see the imposition. They not only had it published in the papers, but had handbills struck to set on the Isthmus. Wednesday, April 16, 1851; we left Baltimore at eight thirty A. M. The day was fine. We sailed to the mouth of the bay and anchored until day. Thursday, the 17th; the day was wet and disagreeable. We were forced to be confined below. Friday, the 18th; Pleasant. Sun shining bright and beautiful, with top-galland breeze. It clouded up in the evening and rained in the night.

Saturday, April 19th, I rose early, took a bath and watched the splendor of the rising sun which is excessively warm. We made a fine run today, but the wind blew high in the evening. Sunday, April 20th; pleasant, sun warm with a delightful evening. Monday, April 21st; made the Bahamas this morning, the sun is warm, the sea is clam and reminds me of a field of standing grain. We got off our course and did not know it positively until twelve. We turned about and rounded the island at three and got on the direct course again – to be lost on the sea tries man's courage. Tuesday, April 22nd; the sun is warm with a clear delightful day. We got the awning up today, and with the breeze that is going it is very pleasant. Wednesday, April 23rd; a pleasant day with quite a breeze and heavy seas. At twelve o'clock were 420 miles from Chagres. Thursday, April 24th; this morning was cloudy with a few showers, afterwards clearing. Friday, April 25th; we landed in Chagres at ten A. M., hired a boat for \$5.00 each and landed in Gorgona, the 26th at eight in the evening. Sunday, April 27th; hired a man to take our baggage to Panama at \$6.00 a cwt. We started at nine thirty on foot and got to Panama about nine in the evening. Monday,



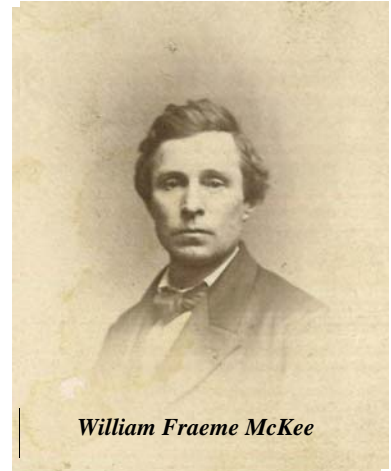
April 29th, we bought tickets in the steerage of the Tennessee at \$150.00. She is to sail on the 1st of May.

Wednesday, April 30th [no entry]

Thursday, May 1st; I went aboard the Tennessee about ten A. M., and

sailed at five in the evening. The Columbus started about one hour ahead and we passed (sic) her at nine the same evening. Friday, May 2nd, we passed around a few groups of small islands and last night and this morning the rainy season commenced on the Isthmus. We had a heavy rain this afternoon. It rained frequent showers during the night. We were all sleeping on the deck, consequently we got wet. Saturday, May 3, 1851; it is very cloudy this morning; at three P. M. there was a heavy shower. I, for the first time in my life, caught rain water and drank it with relish. It is better than the water we had on board. Sunday, May 4th; we rose early as usual and from the movement on board you would not have known it was Sunday. The card players got at their favorite amusement as usual.

Monday, May 5th; the sun rose with its usual splendor and has ushered in another warm day. May 8th; we arrived in Acapulco at nine A. M., and commenced coaling. We ran up alongside of a vessel and the 'hombres' commenced carrying on coal. Acapulco is situated at the foot of a steep mountain, and is composed of a few huts and canvas houses with two small chapels. It has a very fine harbor and the garrison is agreeably situated for commanding the bay which is narrow and protected by huge mountains. Friday, May 9th; the alarm gun was fired at four A. M., and we weighed anchor and started at six. Saturday, May 10th; about noon there was an alarm of fire which caused quite a stir. The hose was put on and the water run in which soon extinguished it. There was a bundle belonging to a passenger fell through the skylight on to the boilers and caught fire. Sunday, May 11th; we arrived in San Blas at 2 P. M. When running in we struck on a rock and rubbed the boat pretty tight. Monday, May 12th; we arrived at Mazatlan at six A. M. We found the Antelope there with some of our western friends, James Peregrin and others. She had met with a misfortune and had to sail in. We hoisted anchor and sailed at six thirty P. M. Tuesday, May 13, 1851; we now got into, or rather crossed, the Gulf of California today and the climate is so cold that we have to gather up our flannels as we have generally thrown them off. Wednesday, May 14th; the sun rose clear this morning and we have a strong cold wind. We slept on deck last night as usual, but it was very cold toward morning so that I went below. Thursday, 15th; clear with cold strong wind. 16th; high cold wind and heavy seas. We are making very little progress today. Saturday, May 17th; we reached San Diego this evening at eight o'clock – made slow time during the day, but somewhat better than yesterday. Sunday the 18th; left San Diego at six thirty A. M. It was raining this morning when I rose and the wind had shifted to our stern. They hoisted the sails thinking to derive some advantage from it, but it soon shifted and we had head wind nearly all the time. Tuesday, the 20th; arrived in Monterey at 5:45 and left at 6:15. Monterey is pleasantly situated on the bay and is the handsomest place I have seen since leaving Baltimore. Arrived at San Francisco at five P. M., making our trip in nineteen days from Panama. Wednesday, May 21st; left San Francisco at four P. M. on the steam-boat E. Corning. Thursday, May 22nd; arrived in Stockton at eight A. M. and found my uncle in the Post Office as expected, and had the extreme pleasure of taking breakfast with my new aunt.



William Fraeme McKee

*Courtesy of Haggin Museum
Stockton, CA*

(The Post-Master was his uncle, Jonathon Tittle, who had been given his appointment through Gov. Johnston of Pennsylvania who was a near relative. Jonathon Tittle died February 3, 1853.)