

The Diary of Cabin Boy Henry
on board
Flying Fish

This diary, written in 1856, in the form of letters, to his parents; describes in detail, his first trip around the horn, on one of the fastest and most beautiful McKay built Clipper ships. It relates the tragic death, by drowning, of the first mate Rufus Price. Many months after his death, his sea chest and other belongings were returned to his Mother Mrs. Hannah Shreve Price of Salem Mass. Among his belongings, this unsigned diary, of "Boy Henry" was found. It remained her most treasured possession, for fifty years. It was kept in a lacquer tea chest, beside her chair, until her death at 95. It was given to my Mother, who made her home with Mrs. Price.

An exact copy is now presented to you,
in memory of my sister

Helen Price Turbington

in the year 1956

Historical Background
taken from

"Some Famous Sailing Ships and their
Builder Donald McKay"

Name: Flying Fish

Class: Extreme Clipper

Builder: Donald McKay

Launched: 1851

Owner: Sampson and Tappan, Boston

Captain: Edward Nickels

Trade: California, China and East Indies

Tonnage: 1505

She was one of the fastest and most beautiful Clippers, that ever sailed under the Stars and Stripes. She became noted as a contestant, in more famous ocean races than any one of McKays' many Clippers. A vivid account of a sweepstake race, of four American Clippers from New York to California, is related in this book. The Flying Fish won; she made the passage in 92 days and 4 hours, from port to anchor.





(1)

On board Ship Flying Fish, at sea, Tuesday Oct. 14/56.

Dear Father and Mother

I suppose you have got that little note, which I sent home by the vessel, which we spoke last Saturday; or will have received it before this reaches you. And although it was so badly written, I have no doubt you were glad to see it. I am well, and have not felt sea-sick at all yet, but I am so home-sick, that I would come home pretty quick if I could. Going to sea, is a hard life, more so than I imagined. I have to be on duty every ^{other} four hours, night and day, rain or not, and do all kinds of work, that you can think of. We have had very pleasant weather until last Sunday, when it came on to blow so, that we have been wet ever since, from the spray, which flies all over the ship. We have not seen land for ten days, and probably shall not see any for two months to come. There are some splendid nights at sea, when the moon is out bright, and I have plenty of time to enjoy them, whether I want to or not. We have enough to eat and drink, and very good for sea living, so the old salts say; but I often wish, that I had some of your pick up dinners. I have not opened my gingerbread yet, and do not mean to for some time. I have given my money to Mr. Price, the first mate, who will keep it for me. There has been a great deal of stealing in the fore-castle, but I think the boys are all honest, and as the men cannot come into the boy's house, we have not much fear of losing anything.

Wednesday 15th - It is showery to day, but there is not much winds, and we can walk about the decks again without holding on. Our officers are very kind, and will show us about anything we want to know. There is no school on board.

1
this time, but Mr. Price, the first mate, has showed me the most important part of my Navigator, and will explain anything, which I do not understand. I got into a snore in my watch last night, for I was very tired and sleepy, and was waked up by the second mate, who took hold of my nose, but he was not cross. The man at the wheel told me, that if he was like most mates I should have found myself flat on deck without any warning. One man had to shoulder a capstan bar, and every now and then the officer would sing out for him to shoulder arms &c. It is hard work to keep awake four hours in the night for one, who is not used to it. The day that we were towed down the harbor, Mr. L— came on board, and when he returned I was up aloft, so that I did not speak to him. (I was very sorry, for he wanted to see me, so one of the boys said). There are three Chinamen aboard, who are going home and ever since we have been at sea, they have dressed China fashion, and done nothing but eat and sleep the whole time. They make a great fuss because they are obliged to wash their room out every morning, and it is sport to see them, they go about it so clumsily. It seems a great while to think how long it will be before I shall get home again, (and I often think of what Mrs. Josh. P. told me.)

Sunday Oct. 19th — The other boy in my watch has been sick since Thursday, so that I have had to stand his watch and my own too. I do not think however that he is very sick. You know he gets a little better fare when sick. He is a lazy fellow, and if he was not the only boy in my watch, I would not have anything to do with him. I have got quite used to the motion of the vessel, so that I can walk straight again. In calm weather, the waves are about as high as my head, so that you can imagine what they are in a storm. The sea was so high one night, that it broke over the bows at every roll, and

washed away a part of both wings of the Flying Dish under the bowsprit. The cook and steward are both kind to the boys. The cook told me one day if I would come to the galley after dark he would give me something good; so I went, and got as much as I wanted. The steward often gives us things, which are left from the cabin table. We killed a pig yesterday, and to day we had a sea pie, which tasted good, I tell you. We are obliged to scrub our floor every morning, and Sunday they give us an opportunity to wash from head to foot if we like. No work, that is unnecessary, is done on the Sabbath, so that after we get cleaned up we can do anything we like.

Monday afternoon 20th - It is very warm to day, and the Sun is almost exactly over our heads. I suppose we shall cross the line in a few days if we have a good breeze. I have been picking ~~one~~ potatoes this morning, and out of eight barrels we only got about two of sound ones, they have rotted so. We have made some curtains for the bunks and the windows, and a kind of screen for the door of our house, and it looks quite comfortable in here.

Tuesday 21st - We had a good shower last night, and nearly all of us got wet through. The wind too is exactly against us, so that every little while we are routed out to tack ship. We are now in what they call the Horse Latitudes, where the wind blows one way one minute, and another way the next. Sometimes before we get the sails braced one way we have to shift them back again.

Friday 24th - There was a large ship just in sight all day yesterday, and another one this morning, which seemed to be steering for Boston or New York, but we did not change our course to speak either of them. We are now in Latitude $22^{\circ}13'$ Longitude $36^{\circ}47'$, which is somewhere near the Cape Verd Islands, I believe. We have not made a very quick passage so far on account of head winds, and calms,

and we begin to doubt whether we shall catch the Winged Arrow, which sailed fifteen days before we did, but which we could do if the wind was steady.

At sea, Friday Oct. 24/56.

Dear Parents.

I hope you will excuse my writing so poorly, for I have to sit on a chest, and hold my paper on my knees. This, together with the motion of the vessel makes it very inconvenient to write. It was so calm yesterday, that we hardly sailed a mile, but we caught some fish, and got them cooked for us, they were dolphins and rudder fish, and were about two feet long. I always thought dolphins were larger. When they die, they change colors, and I had a fine chance to see them. Towards night we saw a large brig sailing northward, but did not try to speak her. This was the second sail we saw yesterday. We were all called to the side of the quarter deck last night, and sent up aloft to practice reefing and furling a little, as it was calm. I made out to get up to the mizzen sky-sail and learned how to furl it. To get up there, is the worst job, for you have to shin about 20 feet with but two ropes to cling to, and then about 20 feet more with but one. You can imagine how I felt with the vessel rolling, and I almost ready to drop, and the Captain singing out that if we were not quick about it we should come down, and do it over again. When we got on deck again, I was as sweaty, as if I had been overboard, and the skin all off my shins, and to crown all, was informed that for the future the boys were to take care of the sky-sails.

Tuesday 28th - We have had a first rate breeze for a couple of days, and are nearing the equator very fast. $11^{\circ}45'$ was our Lat. yesterday. One of the Chinamen, who had engaged to work his passage, refused to work yesterday,

and is in irons, and will stay so until he turns to. We saw a large ship Sunday steering North, and passed another one last night about midnight. She was so near that I could see the light in the binnacle, but nothing passed between us. This morning still another sail was seen, and on our running up the American flag, they hoisted English colors. I was sent aloft Sunday night to loose the main skysail, and got along very well, but thought of home once or twice while there. This morning I have been up three times, as it is rather squally, and often have to shorten sail. We see great numbers of Flying Fish, and one was found on deck the other morning. The sailors tell me that they will often come on board in stormy weather, they are a small fish only about 10 inches long and have wings like a bat. One noon Mr. Price sent in for my fish-line, and I carried it aft where the Captain and passengers were fishing. By and by a shark about four feet long came along, and Mr. Price hooked him with my line, and kept him close by until the Captain got a chance to harpoon him, but it did not hold, and off he went taking my hook with him.

Friday 31st. - We had an awful time night before last. It rained so hard that we got wet through in spite of our oil clothes. It was so dark that you could not see your hand before your face; and they kept us at work passing water nearly all night, so that we filled up all our empty casks. The Chinaman returned to his work Wednesday night, after being in irons forty eight hours. During which time he had nothing but two ships biscuit, and a bottle of water to eat.

Tuesday Nov. 4th - We crossed the line Sunday morning about half past eight O'Clock, but none of us got shaved as was threatened. One of our men came very near getting killed yesterday by the breaking of the fore topsail halliards

7
which is a heavy iron chain. He was senseless for some time, but on coming to it was found that one or two severe bruises was the extent of his injury. I have not got over being homesick yet and not an hour passes, but I think of the whole of you. I would give a good deal to see Josey now, who I suppose can walk by this time. He will not seem like the little boy that I left, when I get home. If any more of the boys about the settlement have got the notion of going to sea into their heads: tell them to get it out again as quick as possible, and when I get back I will tell them enough to pay them for doing so. I suppose by this time you have begun your barn, and perhaps brought the old horse, which I suppose is sold by this time.

Friday Nov. 7th - I believe I have got the right date though I have almost lost the run of the days of the month. We are now about 18° South Lat., and on the south west course, and if the wind holds good we shall very soon make Cape Horn, which we long to get past. Last night a flying fish came on board, striking one of the lookouts on the arm. I am going to get one, and dry it, so that I may bring it home, if I can. I have opened my gingerbread, as I was afraid it would not keep, and it is first rate. Tell Mary or Walter that the two boxes of chocolate are gone, and that it tasted real good. You have to share everything of this kind at sea, so that you cannot keep a great deal for yourself. But this is well enough where each one has something, as most of the boys here have.

Monday 10th - Yesterday was not a very pleasant Sunday, it being showery, and very windy. We saw four sails yesterday, and spoke one of them. It was the Bark Florilla of New York, six days from Rio Janeiro. We have not seen land now for 35 days, but I suppose we are not a great ways from it. Our Lat. Saturday was $20^{\circ} 14'$ South. Longitude $36^{\circ} 24'$ West.

7

At sea, on board Ship Flying Fish, Sat. Nov. 15/56.

Dear Parents

I have not written any since last Monday, as there has been nothing of much interest to write to you. It is getting colder every day as we approach the Cape, and I have to put on my thick coat to keep warm in the night time. There has been a sail in sight all day, and is slowly coming up to us, but we have got almost all sail set, and if a breeze will only come I guess we shall beat her. I do not think I ever saw a much prettier sight than our vessel was last night, with all studding-sails set, and a full moon; it was splendid. There are a great many curious things, which you see in the night. I suppose you have heard, that when sea-water is disturbed in the dark, it is luminous; well when we are going through the water pretty fast, there is an eddy about the stern, which sailors call the wake; this looks like a long silvery streak of light, with lots of bright sparks snapping through it. So in a stormy night when the waves curl over, the sea looks like an ocean of fire, so to speak. There are a great many more, but I will wait till I get home, and then I can explain better. The mate harpooned a porpoise on Thursday, and an old whaler dressed it, so we had fresh meat for supper and breakfast. The meat looks exactly like the lean of beef, and but for a fishy taste might be mistaken for it.

Thursday 20th - I think I have not told you that as there are so many of us in the house, two have to use the same bunk, one in one watch, and one in the other. So when I go on deck, he comes below. Well the boy, who shares my bunk is ^{very} sick with the dysentery, and I am afraid will not get over it. I do all that I can for him, but one can not be taken care of properly at sea, and he often says "I wish I was at home where mother could be with me". I use one of the other boys' bunks, so I get along very well. We are nearing the Cape very fast,

being in Lat. 41° South, and begin to have Cape Horn ^{weather} cold and very windy. One of the ordinaries and I went aloft this morning to stow the mizzen top gallant staysail (understand?) and had just finished that, and we were sent up to the main skysail, and just as we commenced to furl it, it split from head to foot, and began to whip around, so that we were a long time getting it in, then the royals were clewed up, and we had to help get that in too. Two cabs went overboard, and once or twice I had to hug the yard to keep from going too. When the ship is pitching bad anyone on the main skysail yard is first right over the bows, then over the stern, flying some thirty feet through the air at every pitch. We shipped several heavy seas this morning, filling the fore-castle, and washing away everything that was not lashed. I could not help laughing to see two large deck tubs come sailing along until they brought up against the steps that go up to the poop deck.

Monday Dec. 1st - I have not written as much the ^{last} week as usual; it being very cold, and you have no fire at sea except in the galley. We have to reef topsails nearly every afternoon, so that all hands have to be on deck a good part of the time. We are now directly off Cape Horn, being in Latitude $54^{\circ} 29'$ South, Long. 65° West. As the weather was good we were able to pass through the Straits of Le Maire yesterday, and we saw land the first time for 56 days, passing so near, that we could have seen a man on the beach, had there been one there. But I do not suppose, that one could live there a week. It was nothing but a solid mass of rock; the top of which was lost in the clouds. Here and there a frozen stream of water, which oozed out of a seam in the rock, and wound its way down to the ocean; together with large patches of snow might be seen. It makes one feel queer to think what

would become of us, if we should be cast away there. The skysail and royal yards have been sent down on deck, and everything of deck lashed, so as to be ready for a blow.

Sunday 7th - The last week has been a very hard one; all hands being on deck nearly half the time. Wednesday one of the ordinaries fell overboard from the mizzen chains, but was lucky enough to catch hold of a piece of rope, which hung close to the water. There was a very heavy sea on at the time, but as the ship was not going very fast he kept hold until we got him up. Although he was half gone from fright. Thursday forenoon our watch had just gone below, and I was in my bunk; when a tremendous sea came, filling the deck with water as high as my shoulders. All hands were called, and shortened sail. It seemed as though we were going for a few moments. The ship laying like a log, from the weight of the water; water casks bumping, beef barrels stove in, ropes snarled up, and washing about, and the Captain singing out that the lee bow was gone. I tell you I wished I was on land just then. After we found that we were above water, it was found that the bulwarks on the lee bow were gone between the cathead and bowsprit, and several seams above water were opened; through which the water poured at every sea. One gang cleared up the decks, while the rest started the pumps, which were kept going an hour or two before they sucked. I forgot to tell you, that on Monday we spoke the A. H. Stevens, a Boston ship, from Callao to Rotterdam, with a cargo of Guano. Her bulwarks were badly stove, and she had two men at the wheel, when we spoke her. On Wednesday we passed by, and very near a large ship, but nothing passed between us. Today it is quite warm so that I can write without shivering, and it seems good to be dry once more. My oil-skins are all wet

10
through, and need a coat of oil very much.

Monday Dec. 8th - A sad event has just occurred. We have lost our first mate, Mr. Rufus B. Price of Salem. He was at work on the bow, replacing some battens, which had been nailed over the place where the bulwarks were gone, and which the sea had torn off. The carpenter was within four feet of him, when it happened. He says Mr. Price stepped over the bows upon the back rope, which goes from the cathead to the bowsprit: when a tremendous sea came sweeping him off in an instant. The cry of "a man overboard" was immediately given, and life buoys &c thrown over. The ship was put about, and lookouts sent aloft. The life buoys could be distinctly seen, but he was gone. The man at the wheel and several others, say they caught a glimpse of him, as the ship rushed by, but there was such a heavy sea on, that they could not keep sight of him. Both quarter-boats were lashed on top of the cabin, having been taken in before we passed the Cape. One of them was quickly got ready however and would have been lowered, if it would have done any good, although it would have been at the risk of those, who ventured into it. We did all that could be done, while there was the least possibility of his being alive, and then put the ship on her course again.

Mr. Price was a very active young man, about twenty five years of age. He is father, mother, and several brothers and sisters are living at Salem Mass. He was very good to me; often calling me into his room to do some little thing for him, and keeping me there, looking over his books, and talking about home; when my watch was hard at work on deck. In my watch on deck it was "boy Henry", and in the other watch "boy Sam". when he wanted anything - In such cases (loss of first officer) the second mate most generally takes the mate's place, But Mr. M^r Kenney, although a very smart seaman, unfortunately

has not the education to fit him for all the duties of mate. So that while he takes the mate's place in working the vessel: the third mate, Mr Bowman, aids the captain in taking observations &c, and keeps the log, so that we get along very well.

On board Ship Flying Fish, at sea, Tuesday Dec. 23/56.

Dear Parents

Perhaps I am wrong not to have written oftener for the last week or two. But if I had, I could not have told you anything new. We have very pleasant weather since we left the Cape, and have had all but three sails set for a week past; the S. E. Trades blowing steady all the time. Our Lat. yesterday was 20° 42' S. and Long. 96° 2' W. It is 79 days since we sailed, but it seems about a year to me. During this we have seen land but twice; about two hours each time. All the rest has been nothing but water, water all around us. We began yesterday to scrape the iron-work, and to paint, and I tell you it is no small job. Every particle of iron has to be scraped, and sand-papered before it is painted; all the old paint scrubbed with lye; decks repaired, caulked and varnished; Overalls and jumpers have to take it now, tar, paint varnish, and slush mixed up with iron rust, soon makes them about as good as oil-clothes. There is no use trying to keep clear of it, as it is over-all the ship; besides it is not sailorfied to be very particular. I am going to get a log-book in San Francisco, and copy the ship's log, which contains every thing important that occurs in the voyage.

Friday 26th - We are nearing the line very fast; our Lat. is about 12°. I do not know what our Long. is. San Francisco begins to be talked of a great deal, although it is not very likely we shall arrive within a month.

17
As there is a great deal of work going on just now: the boys are allowed to take the wheel in the day time, so that the able seamen can be at work on the rigging; and I have got so that I can steer pretty well.

Jan. 11/57. - Today is the first of a new year. But while perhaps you are having a big snow storm, and are almost frozen: I am just three degrees north of the line, almost wasted, and do not think I ever saw it rain harder. The P. E. trades have left us, and I suppose we are now getting a little touch of the northeast trades, which will take us to San Francisco in a short time, if they will last. We passed the line yesterday between 6 & 8 O'Clock A.M. As we draw nearer port, the crew begin to steal clothes &c from each other, and two or three fights have taken place already. They are quite saucy to the officers, and as the third mate is only a boy, so to speak, they hardly notice him. They do not trouble us however, as they are not allowed to come into the house, and we cannot go forward of the galley door, except when work is going on.

Friday Jan. 12th - I suppose that a week from now we shall be at San Francisco. We have nearly finished painting &c, and if it is calm weather the anchors will be got over the bows tomorrow. We have been going at least ten knots nearly all the time since we passed the line, and our Lat. is about $22^{\circ}30'$, and Long, $126^{\circ}30'$ West.

Thursday 15th - The nice breeze, that was taking us along so fast, left us last Monday night, and we have had a dead calm ever since; the ship not under steerage way a great deal of the time. San Francisco is not more than two days sail distant: our Lat. being $31^{\circ}40'$, and Long. $128^{\circ}58'$ W. Both anchors were got over the bows Tuesday morning and everything is ready for port. You remember that I wrote sometime ago about the boy,

who was sick. He is not much better, and is going to leave the ship in San Francisco, and come home as soon as possible. I am very sorry for him. But it would be very foolish for him to make the voyage around, as we are going to two ports, which are called unhealthy, I do not think I shall write again till we get into port: when I shall be able to write something more interesting to you. I am going to commence several letters to Mr. L., to Warren, and one or two others, as soon as I get time.



