

Toronto Telegram, July 4, 1953
Schooner Days MCXII (1112)
By C.H.J. Snider

Happier Bride's Diary – Down the River in High Company

SOMETIMES it took these “fast sailing packet sloops” of a century and a half ago a week to beat up the Hudson River from New York to Albany against contrary tides, winds and the river current, not to mention the calms. But one was always sure of getting down – for that's the way the river runs.

The Toronto lady whose fortunes we have been following with the aid of her diary of 1805, had a slow but delightful passage down the river in June, meeting as she had probably hoped, some interesting company.

Mrs. Anne MacDonell's diary of that year continues:

“June 20th – Went on board Capt. Bogart's vessel at ten o'clock. The cabin and staterooms furnished in a genteel manner, and every accommodation we could wish or want, so we could not be more comfortable on shore. The Captain is a pleasant man. Besides we had on board 12 passengers, among which was a General Van Cortland, one of the greatest men in the States, and Sir Alexander MacKenzie, one of our greatest in Canada.”

Montreal to Pacific Ocean

Mrs. Simcoe's Diary: “Mon. Sept. 8th, 1794: Mr. Mackenzie, who has made his way from the Grand Portage to the Pacific Ocean, is just returned from thence, and brought the Governor a sea otter skin as proof of his having reached the coast.” – Note:

Sir Alexander Mackenzie was born in Inverness, Scotland, about 1755. He emigrated to Canada in his youth and became a clerk in the North-West Fur Company. From 1781 to 1789 he traded with the Indians at Lake Athabasca, and in the latter year discovered the river which bears his name, and traced it from its source to its entrance into the Arctic Ocean, where he arrived, July, 1789. In 1792 he led another exploring party westward to the Pacific.

“*Alexander Mackenzie. By Land.*” On his return to England in 1801 he published his “*Voyages from Montreal to the Frozen and Pacific Oceans.*” He died in 1820.

Polite to the Ladies

20th continued. “They were particularly attentive to us, and we did not want for fruit, whenever it could be had on shore.

“Besides we had an old woman and two daughters who were very entertaining, and it could not be otherwise more agreeable tho' a long passage. Wind contrary 21st – 22nd, as far as Poughkeepsie, halfway to New York, and almost brought there by the tide.

“23rd – Getting on with the tide, no wind, and the weather very warm, but what I most regretted was that I could not go on shore at West Point. The General entertained us with many

accounts of it and the American War. I was quite sanguine in my wishes to go to it, and not satisfied with viewing it from the river.

“We passed the High Lands in the day and I was gratified with a full view of them and delighted with the whole river particularly on the 24th, with the many beautiful situations on York Island.

“At 2 o’clock we arrived in New York. I wrote a few lines to Miss Glover, as did Mrs. M. to Mr. A. Mitchell, who immediately came on board, where we dined.

General Van Cortland

“Sir Alexander’s politeness would not allow him to go to his own destination on shore till he attended us to our separate quarters. Mrs. M. kindly asked me to accompany Mrs. McGill. I really forgot to make a memorandum that the General was set on shore at Croton River on the 23rd, where he resides at Cortland’s Manor, to our great sorrow. He is old, but apparently much younger than any on board.

“After making some little arrangements in our dress which we thought necessary, we were attended by Sir Alexander, Mr. McLean and Mr. Mitchell. I really felt sorry to be separated from Mrs. McGill. Mrs. and Miss Glover appeared happy to see me, tho’ it brought to mind a sorrow. It was also painful to me to behold the sorrow of an affectionate parent and ever will be when I reflect on how good a friend I have lost – one whom friends acknowledge she loved me as a sister.”

Anne was not given to melancholy. Just wait till hear what she did in New York in 1805.