

A contributed Article
From Murray MacRae 

(Written ca. 1917)

***Recollections of the ship "Ticonderoga" of New York
as written by Mr. Christopher MacRae to Mr. Kendall,
Officer in Charge Quarantine Station, Portsea.***

In reference to our conversation, when visiting the Quarantine Station recently, I promised to see or communicate with my brother whom I knew to be possessed of a keen memory. By arrangement we met, and had a couple of days, recalling sad, though interesting events of the years long past.

Many of the events as stated in Mr. Donald MacDonald's article in the "Argus" 6-1-17 are utterly incorrect - some of them indeed are unjust (not intentionally, I suppose) at the same time, they are a reflection upon the Officer-in-command.

Captain Boyle was careful as possible for the well-being of those committed to his charge. From a sense of duty and the possession of a humane and kindly disposition, he used every means at his command to prevent such a condition of filth, as referred to in the said article.

There were no doubt, many on board, who had very little conception of sanitary laws, but their conduct was governed by what was most conducive to the interests of others associated with them. To carry out established rules and conditions imposed by the Captain and the Doctors, men suitable were elected to act as constables - the names of two of them I still remember - one being Dempster a single man. The other - a young married man named Douglas Rankin. There were many others.

I remember the Captain accompanying the Doctor, going through and seeing that things were in proper order, that is, as far as it was possible, under the circumstances. To provide as much fresh air as possible, canvas ventilation tubes or funnels were always suspended, an instance of how careful the Captain was for the comfort of the passengers.

Frequently, on coming on deck, and finding the ship carrying full canvas, he would order the shortening of sail, not because the ship could not carry it, but to avoid consternation amongst the passengers on board. The statement that the Captain was the only man who escaped is equally wide of the fact. My father had not been infected.

A Mr. McKay, who was a prominent figure and who lived many years after, as a school teacher in Kilmore, enjoyed good health, proved from the fact that on Sunday's weather permitting, he ministered to the spiritual needs of the Highland passengers by conducting service in Gaelic. This he did throughout the voyage, as well as after landing on the station. Two others I remember by name were Dempster and Rankin, already referred to. Others in the single men compartment, also escaped sickness. Also, only one sailor had fever.

I still maintain that the fever was taken at the Immigration Depot at Birkenhead, where there was quite as much overcrowding as on board ship, just at that time at least. I am particularly led to that conclusion from the fact, that a ship sailing a few days previous to us, bound for Sydney, had some deaths - and two more for Victoria - the "Priscilla" and the "Alison" - followed us, both quarantined here - the three ships being there at the one time.

The two last had less mortality, due probably to the fact, that they were single deckers, where as ours was double. The ship was overcrowded by the fact that the space amidship which should have been for the accommodation of passengers, was fitted up with berths.

The single men's compartment had six of these, one of which I occupied and my brother had the other. You may not be aware that the berths in these ships were not along the side, as we see them now in passenger boats, but were so erected that the occupants feet were against the side of the vessel. The berths were two deep on each deck.

My brother believes the majority of deaths on shore were due to dysentery. Personally I suffered most of the time. The immediate cause of my mother's death was the same. Here I may add that she did not suffer from fever before landing. Many suffered from the same complaint on the voyage. My brother, next in age to me, who died, was so.

I cannot say anything as to the tonnage of the Ticonderoga, but must have been a fair size. My brother reminds me that she carried eight or ten pieces of cannon. I had forgotten this fact, I now remember, how, on weighing anchor a volley of blank cartridges was fired to mark the occasion. He also believes that she was later engaged in the American Civil War - she belonged to New York.

Moreover, she was a noble craft conducting herself admirably as a sailor, making at that time, a record passage - 80 days not 90 - but just eclipsed by the "Great Britain" entering three days before her, although sailing some two days later.

On one occasion only, was there cause for "fear and trembling", which was said to be the fault of the man at the wheel. It was during the night, when all were asleep - struck by the sea, causing a sudden lurch, sending all loose articles from one side to the other. Mr. MacDonald puts arrival date at Nov. 4/1852 - it being Nov. 6/1852.

There can be no doubt about the date, as it was indicated on the tombstone, which was done at the time, my sister having died early in the day, but in sight of land, my father, wishing to have his child buried on land interviewed the Captain, who gave permission.

Then, as soon as a boat could be launched, he, perhaps with others on the same errand, buried their loved ones on land. That was the first burial there, as a quarantine station.

The above was written in reply to an article in the "Argus" on Jan. 6/1917, written by a Mr. Donald MacDonald regarding the voyage of the "Ticonderoga", and the names written on the tombstone at the Quarantine Station.

The following were the names on the tombstone:

Sacred to the memory of Helen McRae, the beloved wife of Malcolm McRae, who departed this life, Jan. 3/1853 aged 41 years. Her daughter, Jessie died Nov. 6/1852 - aged 11 years. Her son, Malcolm died Nov. 6/1852 - aged 2 years. Her son, Farquahar died Nov. 22/1852 - aged 6 years. Her son, John died Jan. 22/1853 - aged 16 years.