

**RECOLLECTIONS OF A '49ER. A QUAIN
AND THRILLING NARRATIVE OF A TRIP
ACROSS THE PLAINS, AND LIFE IN
THE CALIFORNIA GOLD FIELDS DURING
THE STIRRING DAYS FOLLOWING THE
DISCOVERY OF GOLD IN THE FAR WEST**

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Recollections of a '49er. A quaint and thrilling narrative of a trip across the plains, and life in the California gold fields during the stirring days following the discovery of gold in the far West by Edward Washington McIlhany

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EDWARD WASHINGTON MCILHANY

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"One of the Last of the Old Boys"

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PREFACE.

Such a work as Edward McIlhany's is most valuable because it gives an insight into the life and struggles of the "Days of '49" that the ordinary history, embellished as it may be, must needs lack. In preparing Mr. McIlhany's "Recollections" for the press little has been changed from the original manuscript. To have interrupted the course of his narrative by interjecting anything that would tend to spoil the naturalness of the simple, quaint style would surely have been little less than a literary felony.

F. H. E.

Recollections of a '49er

CHAPTER I.

At the age of 20, the great discovery of gold in California fired my heart with ambition to see the wild, wild west, and as Horace Greely advised, "Go west young man, go west and grow up with the country." One motive which caused this desire, was disappointment in my first love affair, and I wanted to get far, far away, and try to forget. I welcomed the lines of the poet,

"There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is a rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrude,
By the deep sea, and music in its roar."

Hearing of a company being formed in Charleston, Jefferson County, Virginia, ten miles west of Harper's Ferry, the place where John Brown made his raid to free the slaves, I realized that here was the opportunity.

The company that was formed to start to California March 3rd, '49. There were three men from my neighborhood that had joined this company, and one of these men, Ed Hooper, was going to Charleston to pay his dues, so I went with him to try to join the

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same party. We rode horseback, and forded the Shenandoah River. He rode a large horse, mine was small, and about half way across, my horse commenced swimming, and swam to shore. I was soaking wet from head to foot but happy in the thought that my hopes might soon be realized. Hooper made fun of me but said, "Mc, you have nerve enough to make a good one across the plains." We reached Charleston by night and stopping at a hotel, ate a hearty supper as you can imagine. There were about fifty guests at the hotel, most of whom had come to try to join the company. They asked how I came to be so wet. I told them I had swum the river in my anxiety to join the company. They were amused and remarked, "You've got nerve," and said also, "We are here for the purpose of joining the company. We fear, however, we are too late, as we have been informed the quota of seventy-five is full." My heart fell.

These men were mostly farmers and mechanics with a few lawyers whose limited practice bespoke a change. The company was desirous of having strong, able bodied men, who could endure the hardships of such an adventure, without shrinking. The company was thoroughly organized, and during the conversation that night, they decided to hold a meeting next morning to see if they could increase the number. The meeting was held and voted to increase it only five more, which made it eighty men. The company was then complete.

Forty of these applicants were made to stand in a row to be examined physically, and I fortunately was the fifth and last one, to be taken on, which naturally gave me great joy. I then went to the secretary and

gave him the \$300.00 required to become a member of the company, which was called the Charleston, Jefferson County, Virginia, Mining Company. Each member was given a rubber sack with the company's mark on it, to use in carrying his clothing. The 3rd of March, 1849, a day never to be forgotten, was the date set for our departure. I returned to my home, reached there as the family were eating supper and threw my sack on the floor remarking that I was a member of the company destined to cross the plains to California.

Still bouyant with hope and anticipation the date for starting came and I bade a sad farewell to my family and reached Charleston in time to join my company on March 3rd. There were hundreds of our friends to bid us good-bye. Fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, wives, sweethearts and even old family darkies—all with tears in their eyes for they knew not our way.

Although it was March, generally a stormy month, that day was calm and beautiful. Still we were sad at the thought that perhaps we might never see our loved ones again.

A special train was to bear us to Harper's Ferry. The baggage was put aboard. The engine was quietly puffing with steam up. The bell rang, the conductor called, "All aboard," then the parting, a tragic scene such as I want never to witness again.

We reached Harper's Ferry at noon. Then we took the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad to Cumberland, Md., the terminus of the road at that time. Father met me at Harper's Ferry, with tears in his eyes, the first I ever saw him shed. He said, "My son, here is

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a hymn book and a bible from your mother and myself. I would rather give you \$1,000.00 than to have you leave me today," but I replied, "Father, it is for the best."

CHAPTER II.

Cumberland, Md., is situated at the base of the Allegheny Mountains. Our company occupied all of one hotel. We were all tired and hungry and thought we could eat the hotel out, but we failed to do so as they gave us an abundance to eat. Hooper and I occupied a room together. We were up early in the morning, the first down stairs. I had always been an early riser from a boy. The clerk remarked, "You are up early." I said, "Yes, I guess it is time they were all up." He said, "If you want to wake the men, I will show you how to do it." I told him I wouldn't climb the long stairs, and there was no elevator those days. He took me into a little room back of the office, and said, "Here are pipes that carry a sound to every room in the house." He gave me a gong and told me to beat on it and that would carry the sound to each room. I commenced beating it with a vim, and very soon the boys came rolling out, not knowing what to make of the awful din. Some thought it was a cyclone. I met them at the stairs as they came down, and I was enjoying the laugh at their expense.

One remarked, "Mac., I see you have commenced your tricks, and I guess you will keep us laughing clear through to California."

We had to cross the Allegheny Mountains in stage coaches, and we chartered nine and there were nine passengers in my coach. Our coach took the lead. In crossing the mountains the driver would stop to water his horses, make a change of teams, and refresh himself. He was very fond of his "toddy" and as his drinks cost him but six and one-quarter cents each he figured that he could take them frequently. It was a fine road, wide and in ascending there were precipices three hundred feet deep on each side. The driver feeling pretty good, went down the mountain fast and seldom put the brake on. One of the boys in the coach had crossed the mountains before and seemed to be alarmed, fearing the upsetting of the coach. Finally we reached the top and it was a glorious sight that stretched before us—the beautiful valley slumbered in its dreams of what was to come.

List of members of the company of pioneers which was composed of men principally from Jefferson County, West Virginia, March, 1849.

OFFICERS.

President, B. F. Washington.
 First Commander, Robert H. Keeling.
 Second Commander, Smith Crane.
 Third, Joseph E. N. Lewis.
 Treasurer, E. M. Aisquith.
 Quarter Master, Nar Seevers.
 Secretary, J. Harrison Kelly.
 Surgeon, Dr. Wake Brayrly, Baltimore.