

# The BIRTHDAY of the "General McDowell"

By Harriet Hyde

LIKE a pretty woman who has been bathed, massaged, shampooed, manicured, hair softly waved and carefully dressed, a dash of powder, a faint touch of perfume, everything complete even to the level brushing of the eyebrows, who sells down the avenue with the consciously unconscious charm of perfect grooming, so the McDowell sailed down the harbor the other day in anticipation of her twenty-first birthday after 11 months of beautifying at Mare Island.

The "Gen. McDowell" is a steamer that a generous United States government provides for the army it has scattered at various spots about the bay to prevent the suave Spaniard or smiling Jap from blowing the Golden Gate off its hinges.

Three times a day, at 7 and 11:30 and 2 p. m., you may see the McDowell leave the Washington street wharf, glide over to Alcatraz, thence to Fort McDowell at Angel island, out four miles to the Presidio, back to Fort Point or Fort Mason, back again to Alcatraz and to San Francisco.

It is a charming trip and a favorite one for those who know about it to take any eastern friend on, as it gives a visitor a much better idea of the lay of the land than an ordinary ferry trip does.

A close inspection of our military stations, a nearer view of picturesque Sausalito and Belvedere and the many pretty spots about the north side of the bay; and what is even more charming as the steamer heads out from Angel island toward the Golden Gate, the exquisite stretch of the Marin hills as they taper down from beautiful Tamalpais to the ocean; while on the other side is the dear, beloved and ever lovely sweep of the city over the rise of her hills and the curves of her valleys.

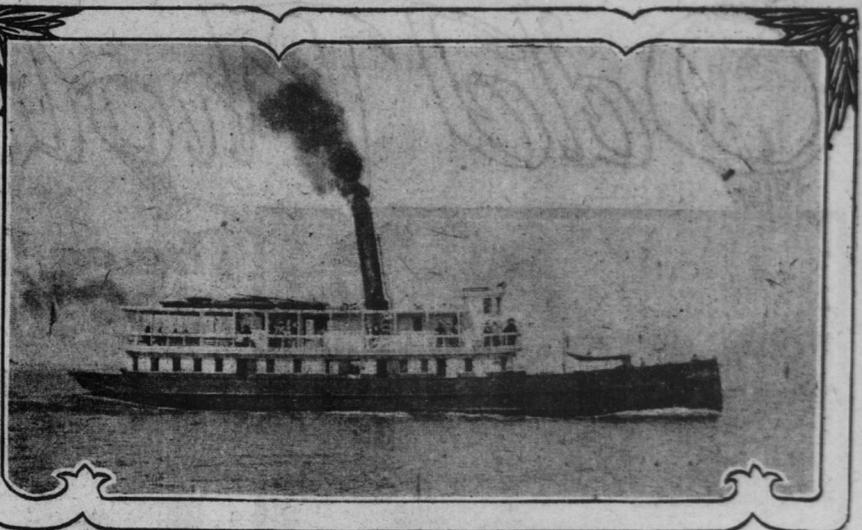
If it is the afternoon trip and the

the quail whizzes and calls unmolested, the squirrels chatter gayly and—be it said softly—the lovers of the post, for there are a few such in the military, stroll blissfully through "lovers' lanes" undisturbed and undismayed. And, speaking of lovers—the McDowell does

### TALES OF THE LITTLE STEAMER AND HER MASTER WHO FOR TWENTY-ONE YEARS HAVE CARRIED THE ARMY PEOPLE FROM THE CITY TO THE POSTS ABOUT THE BAY



CAPTAIN STOFEN of the "GENERAL McDOWELL"



STEAMER "GENERAL McDOWELL" WHICH IS 21 YEARS OLD TODAY

know enough and just right place to get his square.

#### The Prisoner's Letter

"Then I got myself in a peck of trouble," he went on, "once when I first started in. I took a letter from a prisoner in Alcatraz to his wife in San Francisco, not knowing I shouldn't. She wasn't there to get it, so I kept it till she should come and forgot all about it. Some little time later the soldier himself walks on board the boat one fine day in citizen's clothes and I asked him if he'd got off. 'Yes,' he told me, 'he'd been good and the officer of the day let him off.' I said no more, not being my business, but the corporal of the guard's. The man walked off at San Francisco cool as a cucumber and was never seen from that day to this; escaped clean as a whistle. He had the nerve, that fellow had, and best if I ain't always liked his grit. Of course, I got hauled up and had a close shave for implication, but showed clear there was none. The letter was read, and say, that fellow Hader's said a word to tell on himself, but at the end told his wife 'he was coming over on April 1, All Fools' day'—and, by gum, that was the day he walked off and out." The sympathy in the captain's voice as he told how the soldier came to be a mascot would have implicated him any day. "He was sort of carousing around the Barbary coast one night with a bunch of fellows, not saying but what he shouldn't, and being pretty gay and seeing a purse that was lying on the bar, took it. When he came to he found he was some sixty odd dollars richer and went around and paid all his bills like a good fellow. The fellows who were with him when trouble began to leak out made up the money and paid it all back, for the fellow was a favorite and a good sort generally. But the soldier's woman that the purse belonged to was a lowdown sneak and after all was the general's 'moss' and got him sent to Alcatraz. There's some in prison ought not to be and some out that needs a big lock and key," the captain wound up, oracularly.

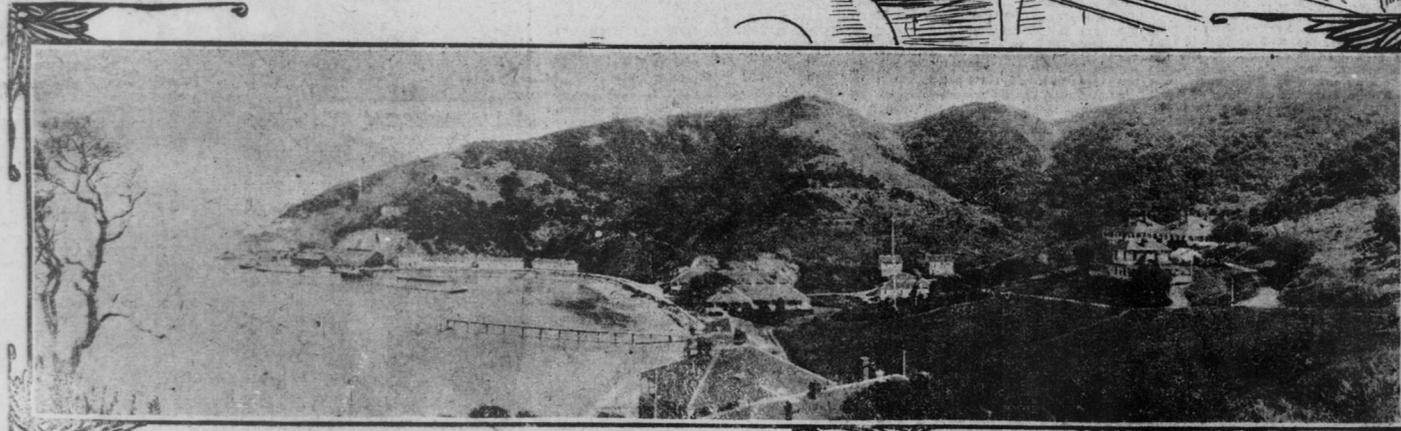
"So say we all of us—in San Francisco," I echoed. "Speaking of General Miles," the captain said during the conversation, "he wasn't standing any nonsense, but he was a fine hearty man to talk to. One day a messenger of his who liked a spree now and then left a note on the general's desk: 'Dear general—Am off for the day, will be back tomorrow night; goodbye.' The general doesn't say a word, but about a day after the messenger gets back calls him up and says: 'E—' says he, 'how much money have you saved up?' E— thinks that's very nice of the general to take such a personal interest and says he: 'Oh, about \$1,000.' 'That's more than I've got,' says the general, 'you won't starve; you're discharged, get out' and E— he got, by gee."

One of the funny episodes that happened on the McDowell which the captain did not tell me, though he was personally concerned in it, is this: The ladies of the island posts have more horrors in servants to contend with than even the poor women in the city; for servants refuse to be so cut off, and if they do consent to go, charge fabulous prices. One lady, after all the trials and tribulations she could stand, took in desperation a big, raw boned Irish woman, who condescended to go, gave her her pass and minute directions to appear on a certain trip of the McDowell.

On a certain trip she did appear and seated herself comfortably in the cabin on the upper deck. It chanced to be a reception day at Angel island and many army officers and ladies were aboard, which is not always the case. Finding her there the mate appeared and as politely as possible told her that the upper deck was reserved solely for officers and their friends, and it would be necessary for her to go below. "To go below, indeed," she threw back in a voice in proportion to her size, "go below—and me as good as any that walks the upper deck—with a nice little pile of me own bigger than them little brass buttons boys has, I'll be bettin'." It's not meself will go below for any one, be he ginerl or captain of the ship.

The mate reported to the captain, who sent back word she'd have to go or be thrown off the ship, and to the walking was wet. By this time she was outside. "Thrown off the ship, is it? Thrown off the ship," she bellowed as she rallied up her sleeves and advanced toward the backing mate. "Thrown off the ship—well, just you try it, me darlint—just once, and see where you'd land, me pretty boy—," and the mate ran to further report to the captain. The captain was very busy steering over a choppy sea and the good Irish lady sat upstairs in state and walked off at Fort McDowell with her nose up in the clouds and a seraphic smile. The captain has many a tale to tell, and the McDowell has many and many a story if her freckly painted walls could speak—but some things cannot be thrown broadcast for eyes and lips to make common knowledge and speech of.

But the McDowell stands for the army, the army for the country and the flag. May she plow the blue waters of the bay and watch our city grow unmolested to more than oldtime prosperity, our flag float prouder and freer, until she, too, is retired from honorable service and her drying timbers tell the wharf of her anchorage all the wonderful tales of daring and beauty when she was young way back in the eighties, and when she saw her twenty-first birthday, November 17, 1907.



sunset is throwing a royal arment of cloth of gold over mountain and city and sea and dinging with royal largess, countless fire opals to every laughing, leaping wave as the prow of the McDowell points straight for that Gate of Gold, you feel like a royal princess in glistening jeweled garments, sailing out and into the heart of the sunset to a glorious kingdom of the ideal—to possess, to hold, to rule, to fill heart and mind and hands with the golden treasure of the beautiful.

Or perhaps if it is later in the year you sail back toward Alcatraz with the purple twilight shadows deep on the hills and just a faint purple gold light lingering on Tamalpais. The city has already opened her jewel box and is glittering and sparkling with her gems, while the great light of Alcatraz, just ahead, flings out its challenge to the night.

Certainly it is a trip worth while, but of course taken only by permit from headquarters. It is not particularly difficult to obtain except if it is desired to land—then it is hard. Once even the landing was easy, but the usual run of rough picnic crowds that strewed Angel island with greasy papers and lunch boxes and bottles and sardine cans in regulation picnic style put an end to that, and now, if by influence you do land, it is minus even so much as a soda cracker. Cameras of necessity are tabooed, as at any military post.

The 11 o'clock run has its special attraction also. The McDowell then goes around the island, through Raccoon straits, stopping at the little known station on the other side of the island, the detention camp; past the quarantine station and the new immigration camp and by the beautiful wooded slope of the island not seen from the ferry boat side.

**Moonlight and Romance**  
It is rather queer that the west slope, which we always see, should be so barren and brown with only a tree here and there, while over the ridge it is one beautiful green tangle of oak and brush and fern and flower, where

make another regular trip. On Tuesday nights there is a theater run, half-past 11 from the city, and if there is a ball or hop at any of the posts the McDowell is ordered out. It is on these trips that hundreds of the army matches have been made. Many and many a woman from Alaska to Manila and from Maine to the Mexican border can look back to some white moon drenched night, when the bay lay like a gleaming piece of molten silver, and date her happiness—or unhappiness—from some trip made in a shadowy corner of the McDowell.

It must not be taken for granted that the McDowell's usefulness is limited to being a mere military transport—her 7 a. m. trip disproves that. Without her, Alcatraz would be a desert island, as uninhabitable as the moon; for, although it may not be generally known, Alcatraz has not enough fresh water on it to make a decent dewdrop. "Water, water, everywhere, but not a drop to drink," is its state until the McDowell at 7 a. m. with thousands of gallons in her hold, pumps relief and future cleanliness into the anxious tanks. It is exceedingly interesting to see this water supply pumped into the McDowell's hold and repumped from steamer to island.

These runs of the McDowell must not be confused with the Goat island daily. That is the navy, and as unmixable with the military as oil with vinegar, except when Uncle Sam whips them together for a war salad. But the McDowell has had a master—the man who has carried them all—water tanks, lovers, generals, colonels, captains, lieutenants, the rank and file of the army militant—from him with decorations on his breast to renegade prisoners, through moonlight and starlight and sunlight and foglight, in safety to the haven where they would be. "Good old Captain Stofen, retired, and modestly retiring, who is anchored now in as snug a harbor as the heart of mariner could wish, looks back over the years into the heart of the fifties and will tell you what a gentleman General Schofield was, tales of his tact and diplomacy and all around fineness; will tell you that General Perly was the only quartermaster who knew anything about a boat—and why not, indeed, when the blood of the grand old commodore pumped through his veins?" will tell you what a fine man he thought General Miles, though he was stern and wouldn't stand for any nonsense; will tell you tales of soldiers' escapes and funny little incidents on board; halfbreath escapes of his own beloved McDowell in the fog, with dates of the month and year thrown at you every other second, until your eyes pop, wondering if that gray haired

sea salt's brain is a rejuvenated, animated log book.

It was back in the first sixties that the captain, with a little plunger, as they called such boats then, the Fisherman, got permission after a struggle with the saloonmen on Meigs wharf to build a little shanty and keep his boat there for the accommodation of people who wished to get back and forth to the post on Alcatraz and later at Fort McDowell. It became a good thing, for, at that time the Brady, a small sloop, was the only conveyance twice a week to the posts, followed later by a little larger sloop, the General Wright, in 1862.

Naturally, others followed his shrewd lead; but, by attending strictly to business, and by being ready and willing to get up any old time of night to take belated passengers over he had other competitors all in, down and out, and the whole business to himself. Because, as he expressed it: "Any fellow that was willing to get up at midnight and take 'em over for the same price as in the daytime, 50 cents, was going to get trade in the daytime, and pretty darned often, too." Many and many a night, he said, he had rolled out of his bunk, put a red light in a sack and made for Alcatraz, taking out the light as they neared the island and lowering it three times as a signal that an officer was coming.

It has a romantic tinge of the early days, those midnight rides over the bay to the mysterious lowering of a red light three times.

He had put a stop to this in '61, when the government interdicted the landing of civilian passengers at any post, while to take an officer was as much as his life was worth.

He had bought a much better boat, which he had named the William A. Winder, after the general, but when the edict went forth he, with a nice little saving and a scheme already ripe, planned with an eye to the future, took to himself and a partner the entire fruit and wine trade from Sonoma to the city. This he held, thereby laying up for himself money until he was called to be master of the McDowell in '63. The McDowell was a small army boat not much larger than a tug, commissioned in '67 to succeed the sloop, Or, as he put the whole history in a nutshell statistically, "Alcatraz was taken possession of by the engineers' department of the United States somewhere in the midst of the '50's for the purpose of fortifying and improving it. This was done by an engineer officer by the name of McPherson, under whose direction and supervision the fortifications were commenced."

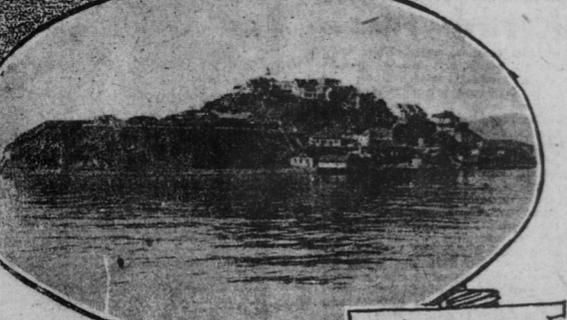
ANGEL ISLAND, WHICH THE "GENERAL McDOWELL" CONNECTS WITH THE OUTER WORLD

were a rowboat and a small sloop called the General Brady. This sloop was afterward used for a time by thearrison of Alcatraz island and was in command of a sturdy old Englishman by the name of Henry Charles. I have no doubt there are yet some old North Beach people who will remember old "Captain Henry." Among them is Hugh Neary or Nealy, who was coxswain of the first rowboat used by Colonel McPherson. Colonel McPherson, afterward General McPherson, fell during the civil war, and the first steamer built for Alcatraz island was named after him. In 1865 the government bought the sloop Harvest Queen, renamed General Wright, which ran between Meigs wharf and Alcatraz with old Captain Harry in charge, the General Brady being taken possession of by the engineers' department again. In '67 the steamer General McPherson was built for the use of all military posts in the harbor.

I think it was in 1868 that Colonel Andrews took possession of Angel island, when the only means of communication was the little sloop Shooting Star, of which Captain Hanna was master.

**The Tug's First Run**  
In 1866 the government contracted for a new steamer to replace the General McPherson. It was launched on August 17, 1866, named the General McDowell, and went into commission November 17, 1866. Her first master was John Stofen, transferred from the McPherson, resigned and retired to private life December 1 of last year, and succeeded by the first mate, Peter Grimm.

The only means of communication of success and I can safely say she has saved the government lots of money. Not alone success, but the army people hardly realize what safe hands they have been in, for the captain knows the bay as a mother knows her baby's teeth. "Fog," he said scornfully when I ventured to inquire if there might not be such a thing as danger: "Why, a man with any sense has more than eyesight to go by" (this says are a master's best guide in steering). "Echoes?" I queried: "How, where from?" "Why to be sure, from vessels lying at anchor; it's plain as a book when you know the trick. I learned it up in the Suisun narrows; could hear the echo of the steam exhaust against the bank or against the wharves and trees, a very different sound, and so calculate distance and the height of the boat out of the water or in it. One day on the McDowell I remember," he went on, "there was a specially heavy fog; could barely make out the bow of my own boat. Captain— was with me that day up in the pilot house. There's a big fourmaster lying 50 yards off our port," I said, easy as if I'd say you dropped your handkerchief. The captain he looks at me and says: 'How in— do you know that?' 'Echo,' I say. 'Well, he looked at me like I had wheels for a minute and I guess he thought I was yarning him one, but sure enough, coming back the fog had lifted and there, lying right in our course, the only vessel in sight, was a big fourmaster at that, was the ship I told him of. You bet the captain got studying; echoes after that."



ALCATRAZ ISLAND, WHICH DEFENDS UPON THE "GENERAL McDOWELL"

"Accidents," he answered me. "Not one, but I had a close shave one day all right, and God help me I never want another such. I was steering through the fog, slowest speed, whistles going, watching in every pore of my body, when all of a sudden the Tiburon looms up in front like a big white ghost. 'My God!' I says, and Pete the mate behind me says, 'My God!'—then 'Back her, captain, back her,' yells Pete. 'No!' I roared back like a thunder clap, and with all my strength I gave the signal full speed ahead and kept on giving it and giving it harder, knowing the salvation of every mother's son of us depended on just this one thing—if God willing we could make enough speed to clear that big white death crashing down on us. It wasn't a minute—less time than I'm telling you in—till the Tiburon slid by us so clean you couldn't put a pocket handkerchief between her bow and our stern. If I'd been a woman I bet I'd fainted, but I just broke out in a sweat all over, thinking where we'd been a minute back, for sure my mate's name's Stofen. If I'd backed her, we'd been out straight in half an hour, lying in the bottom of San Francisco bay. Backing takes time and would have been