

The Diary of John Guinnis Laird

1847

The voyage journal kept by John Guinnis Laird of County Fermanagh, Ireland, who emigrated with his parents George Laird and Rachel Guinnis in the summer of 1847, when the Great Famine was at its height. Like many others, they sailed from Liverpool to Canada.

Entered the Durham ship (I trust with the blessing of Jehovah) on Saturday the 15th of May 1847 – that night a rumour of robbers.

Sun. 16th.

All confusion. Wrote a letter for a Mr. Walker. Got to no place of worship.

Mon. 17th.

Got the chests put down in the hull. In the evening sung and prayed with a number of people between decks and trust under the influence of the Holy Spirit. After service a poor lad came up out of the hull. Supposed to be a robber. Also on this day wrote a letter to brother Robert.

Tues. 18th.

Set sail from Liverpool. Had a good gale of wind. All got sick during the night.

Wed. 19th.

All still quite ill.

Thurs. 20th.

Calm weather. All continuing to be ill. Brother James and sister Ann very ill.

Fri. 21st.

All feeling some better. Calm day, but night rather rough. We got 1st ration of food – 2 days allowance of biscuit.

Sat. 22nd

Calm – got 2nd ration, 2 days allowance of flour.

Sun. 23rd

Very calm. Held a meeting on deck, had a very good audience. The night becoming rather rough.

Mon. 24th

Very stormy, nearly everyone ill again.

Tues. 25th

Wind still continues, but thank God rather settled.

Wed. 26th.

Still stormy. 3 upper berths broke down which caused confusion.

Thurs. 27th.

Morning still stormy, but thank God the evening became fine. Got purgative pills from Captain – feel very well.

Fri. 28th.

Rather better weather. Got 3 days allowance of flour.

Sat. 29th.

A very good day. Night rather rough which caused 4 berths to fail – some people hurt. They remained down all night.

Sun. 30th.

Very stormy; berths remain down.

Mon. 31st.

Morning wet but calm. About between 11 and 12 o'clock a sudden squall arose which seemed to be hurrying us into eternity, but with the blessing of God was preserved.

Tue. June 1st.

Still continues very wet and stormy during the night.

Wed. 2nd.

Calm and dry. Got a 3 days allowance of biscuit.

Thur. 3rd.

Fine dry day — a fair wind, therefore a quick sail.

Fri. 4th.

Calm but still some wind, heard regulation about fire has commenced.

Sat. 5th.

Got 4 days allowance of flour. Day very calm.

Sun. 6th.

Very calm and warm. Read Church service in morning and evening in the Captains cabin. After each gave a sermon, first from Isiah 3rd chap. 10th verse and then from Mathew 24 chap. 43 verse. Saw a large fish, a species of whale, in lat 46'23 long. 35.

Mon. 7th.

Morning calm until about 10 A.M. Got rather rough and a school of porpoises appeared in great numbers. Became very stormy during night.

Tues. 8th.

Morning windy – got calm towards noon with some rain. Got 3 days allowance of biscuit, will get last of flour on Sat.

Wed. 9th.

Day calm. During the night the ship logged very much from a troubled sea, supposed to be caused by the approaching near the bank.

Thur. 10th.

A calm day – saw some sea porpoises, caught one and brought it up some feet above water but the harpoons hold broke and down it went again.

Frid. 11th.

Brisk wind. An older woman died early this morning and was interred in a watery grave in the afternoon.

Sat. 12th.

This morning foggy – another vessel came almost in contact with ours, was observed by the Captain in time.

Sun. 13th.

A new moon. Mist and cold continues 46°. This morning Joseph Fester's wife was delivered of a baby daughter. It died in the evening;

held prayers in the Captain's cabin. Night appears dismal – continual sound of horn, depth 45 fathoms.

Mon. 14th.

Bright this morning and continues so. Mother feeling quite ill, I am quite well, Thank God.

Tues. 15th.

Misty again – higher and more favorable wind. Sailing 5 miles per hour. A little child died this morning, supposed to have had measles. About 4 years of age. The captain requested that I should dine with him.

Wed. 16th.

Continues to be misty. Sat up with the captain this night until 12 o'clock. Got 2 days allowance of biscuits.

Thurs. 17th.

Clear but with rough winds. Another little child died (a sister of the other one). Their parents from Mayo.

Fri. 18th.

Fair wind – rather warmer. Got 4 days allowance.

Sat. 19th.

Very calm and warm.

Sun. 20th.

Rather rough. Buried the Booth's child this morning. I read prayers in cabin. *Evening wet with a fair wind.

Mon. 21st.

Misty morning but a fine wind for sailing. Mist cleared by noon. Got 3 days allowance of biscuits. During the night we passed Anticosti.

Tues. 22nd.

A good sailing wind continues, could see land, the mountains of lower Canada, wind become weaker. Have had 30 days allowance of flour and biscuits.

Wed. 23rd.

Calm day. Got 2 days allowance.

Thurs. 24th.

Rather rough but a more favorable sailing wind. About 3 o'clock p.m. the pilot came aboard.

Fri. 25th.

Calm but favourable for good speed sailing.

Sat. 26th.

Fine favourable morning. Got 3 days allowance.

Sun. 27th.

Fine warm day.

Mon. 28th.

Still calm. Got 3 days allowance.

Tues. 29th.

Arrived in quarantine early this morning. At about 4 o'clock Doctor came aboard, all but 15 were healthy. Another man came aboard and ordered everyone to be washed.

Wed. 30th.

Fine warm day, all engaged in washing and trying to dry clothes.

Thur. July 1st.

Fine day – visited by the doctor. There are some quite ill and 5 were ordered to go to hospital.

Fri. 2nd.

Cleaned and white-washed between decks, visited by the doctor – nine people quite ill.

Sat. 3rd.

Left ship about 4 o'clock and left for Montreal.

Sun. 4th.

Arrived in Montreal at about 10 o'clock in morning – had slept in the sheds that night, numbers of people are dying. May God withdraw the prevailing sickness if it be His Will.

Mon 5th.

Got on the steamer to go to Kingston, price 12 s..British.

Tues. 6th.

Arrived in Kingston about 6 o'clock p.m. Took passage on the American Line for Hamilton for \$2.75.

Wed. 7th.

This morning left Oswego. Father, Mother and William are very sick, believe it to be fever. May God restore and bless them if it is His Will.

Thurs. 8th.

Arrived in Lewiston. They are still very sick. Got medicine for Father, brought doctor to William. Charge for all 4s 6p. Arrived in Hamilton in evening, remaining all night at lodgings; in morning sent William to hospital where he died. We then got a team of horses and a wagon and proceeded on to London. Mother died enroute and to avoid being kept in quarantine she was propped up between Father and a brother and brought to London to be buried at St Paul's Church Cemetery.

The writings end abruptly here.
