

Diary of Charles & Arthur BEARSBY detailing their journey from Frittenden, Kent to Palo Alto, California

(as written by Charles BEARSBY)

Transcribed by Barry and Patricia WOODS (April 2001) from a photocopy of the original as held by Ron WILLIS, 115 Webster Street, Palo Alto - grandson to Arthur BEARSBY. The original words and their spelling have been retained to keep as close as possible to the original - only full stops and paragraph marks have been added for readability.

1. From Frittenden to Southampton

Just a few words of what happened whilst travelling to California from the day Arthur & I left Frittenden, May 10th, 1910 4:30. We left home & caught the 5:19 train at Staplehurst which was 15 minutes late. Arrived at Waterloo 7:30. Took a bus to Ludgate Circus to try & get Arthur's Ocean ticket. Got there at 8 'clock could not get the ticket that night. Left at 8:30. We then walked from Ludgate Circus along Fleet Street to Charing X station. Arrived there 9:05. Took a ticket to Maize Hill. The train was due at 9:14. We stood on the platform waiting for the doors & when it was nearly 9:20 we found we were on the wrong platform. We then found the right train which started late from Charing X so when we got to Cannon Street where we had to change for Maize Hill. We found the train just gone. It was now 9:33 when we arrived at Cannon Street & the next train started at 10:03.

To waste time we went down Cannon Street for a walk. We caught the next train 10:03 arrived at Maize Hill at 10:30 no one to take our ticket so went to Greenwich. Arrived there at 10:35. There we surprised them by coming so late. We sat & talked about 10 of us & we decided not to go again to Ludgate Circus in the morning for Arthurs ticket but thought we would chance getting it at Southampton Docks.

Next we all had a good supper then we played bagatelle. Arthur & I played Frank & Dive (Ed. Frank & Dive were half-brothers to Charles & Arthur) & we emigrants won. We sat & talked & when we got to bed the time was 1:30am. I slept well was ready to get up at 6 o'clock. We had breakfast & left to catch the 7:27 to Waterloo. We arrived just as the train was starting. We only had to wait 2 minutes another train was waiting for us what a slice of luck. When we arrived at Waterloo the time was 7:55 so we were in good time for the Boat train which left Waterloo at 8:30 for Southampton.

We went to the booking office & got our rail tickets & at 8:30 we were on the South Western. We started very punctual I don't think we stopped at any station till we were by the side of the Majestic. We passed Sandown Park racecourse also Brooklands motor track. Things worked better for us at the docks than expected.

The cabin which I was to have was a single berth. I had another one offered me. I was able to have Arthur in my cabin. Arthur bought his Ocean ticket & we went through the usual process passing the doctor. One asked me if it was my first trip. We saw third class being carefully examined before being allowed to board. We were now all four of us walking up on board the Majestic looking for the first time over an English liner. I think the journey from Waterloo to Southampton took 1:35. It was but 11:30 when the bell rang for friends to leave the boat.

Frank & Dive were on the boat about one hour. Punctual at 1 o'clock we commenced to steam slowly away. I shall never forget seeing Frank & Dive getting farther & farther away or perhaps it was us getting farther away. I scarcely felt we were moving. I should like to know how long they watched us disappearing & I should like them to see her sailing gracefully round by Cornwall.

2. From Southampton to New York aboard the RMS Majestic

Soon after leaving old England it was time for dinner which is at 12. After dinner I bought some views of the Majestic to send my friends & was soon busy trying to write a few words on them but is a hard task to write & if ever they reach their destination I shall be surprised. Whilst writing I had a splitting headache. I felt as if I was going round. It would be what you might call sea on land No I mean land on sea. By 2:30 I had finished writing & had gone on deck for a smoke. I went down to my cabin with Arthur & a friend & we a drop of brandy each which was very handy whilst at sea. They advised me to lie down. I took off my boots & laid down but I will have you to know I was very soon up again & after the O well I was sea sick. I think you call it that name it sounded like musick. After all that performance I again went on deck but I felt far from being safe.

I did not look bad the feeling part was quite enough it seemed as if I could not get in the right place. It was the same as I heard someone say once you feel as if you want to sink. I again went to my cabin it being then about 3:30 & then I was sick for the second time. After that I tried to sleep & managed it after a while. The engines are such a nuisance the throbbing is like a thrashing machine that you have a job to sleep until you get used to the noise. After I had a good sleep for an hour Arthur came to call me to tea. I was quite ready for it & made a good meal 5 o'clock. Whilst having tea we stopped & called at Cherbourg & took on 15 third class passengers. I did not see the coast of France until after tea. It did look nice to see land again - I had not seen any for 4 1/2 hours.

Presently it will be 4 1/2 days. These passengers were brought out to us on a steam tug. I might say now that the sunset was a grand sight from the sea & there were about 100 sea gulls following us. At 7 o'clock whilst in my cabin writing this diary Arthur came in & told me my ticket was wanted. We all had to start signing again & when we gave up our ticket we had a small ticket given us with a number of a chair at the table & that was to be our place at table at meals. It was 8. Before that process was over we then went to the smoking room & we all sang Lead Kindly Light. I can hear them singing now while I am writing. Supper was at Nine & while we was at supper a lady played the piano very nicely.

All lights are on now it is dark at sea. I go for a stroll on deck it is very windy & nothing can be seen at sea except white foam which shows up from the electric lights. It is now 10:30 & everyone down below & above me sound happy. We have several Cornish lads here & they are lively sparks. I though now we might be seeing the Lizard Lighthouse but I am told we are too much south. I am also told that we hope to be

in New York May 19th. We hope to call at Queenstown in the morning then our letters will be brought back to England. The out to the Atlantic we go. I will now close for the first day at sea. Thursday morning Arthur & I both slept well for the first night at sea. Went to bed at 11 & were up at 7:30. The steward called us for breakfast. We took a stroll on deck before breakfast & then made a good meal & I afterwards wrote two letters & then went on deck again. We could see the coast of Ireland several miles ahead.

It was 9 o'clock when I first sighted land. At 10:30 the pilot came out to take charge whilst entering the harbour. He came to us in a small boat. At 10:45 we could see the tug coming out from Queenstown to bring us some passengers. These were I should guess about 200 came aboard mostly third class. The name of the tug was Ireland Glasgo'. Another tug came alongside the first only two people came on board. This tug was the Flying Fox. It had been out to the Merion a fairly large boat with passengers westward bound. All the while we were in harbour a lot of Irish men & women were pulled up on deck by ropes. They came to sell all kinds of things. It was a sight to see them drop up. I expected to see one drop down.

At 11:45 the tug America came out with mails. Hundreds of bags were brought on the Majestic. At 12:15 we went to dinner 1st sitting. We were still in Queenstown harbour. Beautiful scenery surrounded us. We commence to sail out to the Atlantic at 1 o'clock. The wind was verry strong. Before long we shall be out in the rough Atlantic. Our next place to signal I think is Sandy Hook the entrance to New York harbour. Our mails went to Queenstown in a day or so you will be hearing of our first day at sea. It is now 3 o'clock & the weather is cold & cheerless & the sea is a little choppy. Some of the bandsmen are sitting in the smoking room. Some passengers are playing games & some are reading. Arthur is playing whist. 3:30 we are going along the south coast of Ireland at a nice speed.

The Merion which left Queenstown just as we started in the harbour is a one funnel boat & we are rapidly gaining on her. I can see her several miles ahead. Soon we shall be able to see the coast of Iceland. I have just had a nap in the smoking room on the seat in a corner & as I look out of the porthole I see we have caught the Merion up. We are level to her now. Only miles apart our old Majestic is just beginning to rock nicely. I have just had a look at Thursday's Daily Mail which was brought by someone from Ireland & the first thing I saw was the shipping news. I noticed the Majestic had left Southampton on the 11th of course I did know that. I had a very hasty tea a small piece of calves liver & bacon & one cup of tea. I went to my cabin feeling unwell.

In 10 minutes Arthur was also unwell we both went to bed by 6:30. I felt much better after a sleep. I slept well considering the boat was rocking a good bit. Friday May 13th at 7 in the morning I partly dressed & came over bad again. I was not the only one you need not laugh. I had to lie down again or else fall down. Soon after the steward came in to see if we were going to breakfast but neither of us were going to move. The steward gave us two pills each. When my watch was 11 we got up. We had some Eno's fruit salts. We went on deck for a while & sat for half an hour. My watch 12:15 when someone came by & said it was 5 minutes to 11. Of course we were losing time. I try to have a little dinner but I am feeling far from well want to be sick & nothing to bring up makes one feel a bit queer. I feel I shall be glad to get to New York or somewhere else. I had a small piece of roast duck & apple sauce & then I asked for a dry biscuit which I took to my cabin. The duck did not stay ten minutes from dinner time. Until tea time I laid down. For tea I had two boiled eggs.

After tea I went to bed for the night it is the only way I can keep food down. About 7 o'clock we ran into a heavy fog. The foghorns were going for a hour. I forgot to mention I had a talk to our cabin steward during the afternoon. His name is W Grant. He told me he has crossed the Atlantic 53 times when he gets over this time & he has been to other parts of the world all in 10 years. We have 850 on the Majestic 300 crew 350 third class 140 second class & the rest first class.

Saturday 14th I was up at 9:30 did not go down to breakfast had a few biscuits in my cabin. I have been listening to our string band of five. They play from 10 to 11 am & again from 3 to 4 pm our time. Now is 11 o'clock am Saturday & your time is just past 1. I have got a nasty headache shall be glad to get on terra firma again. The rest of the afternoon passed without anything happening. We did not go to bed till nearly 11. Whit Sunday May 15th slept well got up to breakfast. When we were having breakfast at 7:30 you were going to church at 10:15. At 10:30 when your time was 1:15 we went to divine service in the dining saloon. First we had a hymn 160 Holy Holy Holy. Next hymn was 266 Lead Kindly Light. The last was 370 Eternal Father strong to Save. Half an hour at service the Majestic received a wireless message from her sister ship which left New York for England on the 11th the same day we left England saying the weather is fine at New York.

On Thursday noon the day we left Queenstown to 12 Friday noon we did 437 miles & Saturday noon to Sunday noon 463 miles. I have found out that the Majestic burns 350 tons of coal in 24 hours fancy 15 tons per hour or 1/4 ton per minute enough to last the old tap room fire at The Bell a day or two. By Monday midday we hoep to be in the waters of the banks of Newfoundland. Whit Monday May 16th

was up soon after 6 o'clock. It is hot & muggy in the cabin. Can't stay long. I should fancy we were in the Gulf Stream. The time seems so long I don't know what to do with myself. It is best to sleep the afternoon away. The weather is beautiful today. After dinner I laid down in my cabin & did not get up for tea.

Later I got up & had a shave one has to shave under difficulties on a boat. I then undressed & slept until 6 o'clock next morning. Arthur came to bed about 10 said we had just had a severe storm for an hour. From Sunday noon to Monday noon we covered 468 mile. Whit Tuesday 17th we have a nast cold & damp morning to greet us. I heard this morning that a child was buried yesterday from the third class. The ship slowed down for burial but I did not notice it. A wireless message was received this morning saying that a 130 miners have been entombed in America. Today some of the third class are having a jolly time they are celebrating the Norwegian Liberty Day. We had a paper given us today to sign called a Landing Ticket. One has a lot of performances to go through before he gets abroad.

I asked the steward if we had to pay & work to. (Ed - ??). Tobacco on the boat is 9 1/4 pence (Ed. ninepence farthing) Capstan cigarettes Navy Cut 1/- (Ed. One shilling) for a tin of 50 Three Castles.

We have just sighted a German liner bound for New York. We have been having a talk about where to change money. Some change on the boat some on land while some of us have come to the conclusion that we can get 2 1/2 in the pound more at New York than we can on the boat.

This evening we had a concert in the 2nd class dining saloon. The programe was fairly good. I quite forgot that I was out on the Briny Ocean. The collection was for the Seaman's Orphanage Fund it amounted to £2-18s-4d. It is now Wednesday 18th. The sea this morning is so calm that it only looks like a large pond. Yesterday it was rather rough. During the night the boat has been making her fastest speed so as to get in New York this evening. We expect to arrive about 6 but if it should be later than 8 o'clock they will be obliged to keep them on board all night who wish to stay & land in the morning which would be much better for us as there would be more time to arrange our overland journey in the morning. We have just passed Nantucket Island. We did not see it it is a dangerous spot for vessels.

Soon after dinner a very thick fog came over. We were about 70 or 80 miles from New York harbour. It is dangerous to be in a fog so close to a large harbour where so much traffic is. It soon cleared away which we were all pleased to see. The boat was going very slowly the foghorns were blowing & nearly all were on deck looking as if we

expected to see a vessel run into us. As soon as we could see any distance we saw a large boat going in the opposite direction - it was the Oceanic which left New York in the morning.

About 6 o'clock we could see Long Island. Now we were slowly taken into New York harbour by another pilot. At 7:30pm we stopped halfway down the harbour the mail bags to get mails to take in port. The third class marched off on another tug & were taken to Ellis Island there they stayed till they were inspected. The harbour was full of boats ferry boats & tugs. The lights now were looking beautiful all along each side of us in the harbour. It was a nice moonlight night.

The 2nd class now had to go down to the dining saloon to pass the doctor. I gave him a ticket which was given me a few days before which he clipped. I was pass the doctor once more he hardly looked at me. I next had my name checked off the book & was asked where I was going to. We also had to show our money. After we & our mates had scrambled through that red tape performance we went & had a comfortable smoke. It was worth one to be down in their all together. Those that wanted to go ashore did so. A lot of stayed we had supper at 10. At 11 went to bed for the last time on the Majestic. Your time is 4am Thursday our time is 11pm Wednesday. We have breakfast at 6:30 in the morning & then we proceed on our land journey. We have our baggage examined. Tomorrow morning we must bluster through now that we are in America. I guess we now talk yankee fassion.

3. From to New York to Palo Alto

Thursday we had breakfast at 6:30 & were soon off the boat & in a large building where we had our baggage examined. There was a lot of large letters on the wall. I looked for letter B. Went & saw that our trunks were their. The straps had been undone. The lock was safe. I asked the reason the straps was undone. They said to be ready when the inspecting officer came. All went well with us & our friends. The customs official opened a box which my silver cigarette case was in which was given me by Mr C Pope before I left home. I don't know why he looked so close into that. I guess he wanted it. About 16 of us were then taken to Blakes Hotel 16 Clarkson Street New York. We arrived their at 9am. We wrote a few letters & at 12 o'clock we had a good dinner & we also had a good tea their. Then we had our hamper packed for the train journey. Then changed our money & our rail ticket & above all we did not get swindled.

We had a fair night to rest considering we had to sleep in a push back chair. The conductor keeps worrying to look at our ticket you can't rest. He came last night about 12 to look at ticket. I woke up in a hurry. I did not know where I was. The train was rocking like a ship in distress. I had a job to wake Arthur. What do you want now Ticker have not got one. He went off laughing. We are awake about 4 in the morning have a wash at one end of car. The first we eat when we are hungry we bought a lot of fruit at New York.

At 9:0 we were at Niagara Falls station. This railroad is called the Wabash to Chicago. We went over the suspension bridge between Lake Erie & Lake Ontario. The bridge is about 120 feet high. We passed many fruit orchards in bloom. We are 3 miles from the falls of Niagara. When we got to St Thomas it was raining fast. The next station is Chatham. We have been running parellel with the Lake Erie for miles. We now pass Winsor. We have to pass across a strip of water 2 miles which separates Lake Huron from Lake Erie. To get across the train is shunted out on a large steam barge. It seems strange to be in a train on the water. The lakes are very large like a sea. Now we are in Detroit but I did not see Willie Bolton.

We hope to be in Chicago at 9:30 tonight then we can catch the 10:30 train onward from Chicago but I hear we are over an hour late at this station so shall get behind. It is unlucky as we shall be changing about midnight. The chairs are very comfortable but I would rather be in bed. I tell you it is something to look forward to having to sit & sleep 5 nights in chairs. We are not in the united States at present we are in the south of Ontario amongst the lakes. In the morning we passed over between Lake Erie & Lake Ontario. Now we have passed

over between Lake Erie & Huron. The afternoon has been beautiful this train is just about full & we are a good bit late.

We are going at a tremendous speed just now. The engine whistle blew loud enough to wake the dead. Another train was crossing our track out in the wilds. We just managed to let it get across first by putting on all brakes & stopping with a jerk. We arrived at Chicago 10:30pm Friday night. We went to the road where a lot of buses were waiting to take passengers to the next station. This line is the Chicago & North Western. The train left 11 O'clock. We go as far as Omaha before we change again. We keep getting a little farther. Saturday none of us you see have taken a tourist sleeper from Chicago. Alice told me not to it would cost about \$371 to our destination & we all thought we could make shift in the chair car in which we sit all day & night. We have already had 2 nights of it & expect to have about 3 more. It is rather tiring as we dont take our clothes off only our boots.

This morning between 7 & 8 we had a bad storm. I have never seen it lighten so fast before. We are now seeing wonderful scenery amongst the mountains. We have just been over a bridge a quarter mile long & a hundred feet high right on top of a small village. We have just changed at Omaha. It has taken us a run of 16 1/2 hours to get from Chicago to Omaha & from New York it took us 28 hours to get to Chicago. We are now on the Union Pacific Railroad. The cars are very much alike.

We arrived at Omaha at 3:20 this afternoon Saturday May 21st. Nother train was waiting to take us to the west. We soon changed & were off again. The cards have heating pipes along the sides & some old woman has just said she is cold. The conductor put on the heat she is warm enough now I know I am. The distance from Omaha to Ogden is 1000 miles where we change next Sunday May 22nd at 4 o'clock. One of our mates left us. He travelled on the boat with. He is going to Denver. The place he changed at was Julesburg. He will be there before noon today. The time now is 5 o'clock am & your time is between & 12 & 1 midday. It seems impossible to know that you have had your dinner & we just got up or rather woke up.

We are now at an height of 7,858 feet above the sea level. The little station up here in the mountains is called Buford. To our left are the Sierras mountains which are covered with snow. There is a little snow here & there close to the track where we are now. The highest spot is 8,010 ft above the sea level. It is marvellous how the train line gets up here so high it goes up so gradually. We are now on top of Sherman Hill 8,010 ft. There are for miles & miles large wooden frames 6ft high like tressels to keep the snow from drifting down on the line.

I am thinking what a difference there is today between your Sunday & ours regarding the scenery. We have just passed this afternoon a large flock of sheep. I should say several thousand of them, every little while we come to a camp of tents & wooden huts. There are about 50 horses at each place. They all used in cutting a new railroad through the mountain & at times have to cut through 40 or 50ft of rock. Its wonderful how it is done. We have now come to night again & we have a trouble to sleep as people keep getting on & off at these little stations up here in the mountains.

At 11 o'clock tonight we lose our other mate who came from England with us. He changed at Green River (Green River is close to Granger). & stays at an hotel for the night & goes on a train at 11 in the morning to Buste. A nights rest in bed at an hotel or somewhere would do us good I'm thinking as well as him. Monday 23 May 1910 at 5:35 this morning we arrived at Ogden a distance of just 1,000 miles from our last change at Omaha. It took us from 3:15 Sat afternoon to 5:35 Monday morning to get here. Just 38 hours 25 mins ride across desert & through mountains. Our train left Ogden for Oakland 6:40 Monday morning. I stayed at the station & looked after the baggage while Arthur & another young fellow went & had a hot cup of coffee & something to eat. Soon after leaving Ogden we travel across great Salt Lake.

We all going across now. We can see only a few mountains in the far distance nothing else but water again. The bridge is made of huge stone cut from the mountain & thrown in the lake. It seems great to be in a train on a lake as large as a sea. There is a young man on the train & his wife. They have been with us from New York. He is a fruit buyer & is going to California for that purpose. He has just shown me todays paper (it is 7:45am) & I see that there was severe earthquake shocks felt last night at Salt Lake City. We are still on the lake & the city is a few miles to our left. The distance across the lake is 40 miles about. From Ogden to Oakland is 785 miles. It is now exceedingly hot down in the level amongst the mountains & the mosquitoes are here in swarms.

We are at a station now called Battle Mountain & a little girl came alongside the train selling new milk 5 cents a mug. It was just what I wanted as I had had nothing else but water since leaving New York. I can see mountains in the distance on all sides they look close but I am told they are probably 30 or 40 miles away. Tuesday 24th May (Club Day) This morning I awoke & found we are up in the mountains again & the journey looks very dangerous. We are now at Sacramento where I am going to send Alice a telegram so that she can meet us. So many people are getting on here that another car has to be put on.

When we arrive at Oakland we have to leave the train & go across the ferry to San Francisco it is about 5 miles across. The time now is 2:30. When we arrive at the ferry depot we proceed across Frisco to the railway depot where we take train for Palo Alto which is 33 miles. The train left the city at 3:40.

We arrive at Palo Alto station at 4:45 & nobody is there to meet us. We wait around for 15 mins & then we enquire the way to the nursery. It is about 3/4 of a mile according to instructions. We walked off finding or trying to find our way. We turned at one block & then another till we hit on the road called Palo Alto Avenue. We saw on a house number 436 & the number we were trying to find was 580. I thought we should never get to the place & I was glad to see that the numbers went up in tens. However we had not gone far when we saw the two boys (Ed. Frederick and Herbert Frank) playing on some wood outside & I could see some of the greenhouses.

When we got to the door Frank was on the telephone. Alice was not at home. She had gone to Oakland to meet us off the train at the ferry. We got at the nursery at 5:30 & Frank said that at 5 o'clock telephoned to him saying "she could not see us as there were so many people!. Frank told her to come back. She got home at 7:30. She was very much surprised to see Arthur with me (Ed. Looks like a last minute decision from Arthur - he didn't have his ocean ticket either!).

She told us how worried she was when she could not find us. She said she could have cried. Thinking that being by myself I had got lost. Frank & I got something to eat & we had just finished supper when Alice got back. She said she could tell that we were there before she got inside. Said she could smell the English tobacco smoke American tobacco is rotten. Well I am glad this is about finished. We rested a few days till June 1st but we did a few jobs. We made a good size chicken run. This climate is good here but it differs as you get nearer to San Francisco.

The wind blows very strong there. The scenery is very pretty also. I need not say how we slept the first night after arriving here. It seemed a little different than sitting in a chair in a train for five days & nights without taking your clothes off. Now I think (guess) I will close my diary. It is rather a mixed affair but I think that those who try to read it will have a little idea of what kind of journey we both had to Palo Alto nursery California USA

Goodbye from yours sincerely

Charlie & Arthur Bearsby

It is now August 6th 1910 & it has taken me from May 24th till now to finish this.