

Edwin Mitchell, Youngest Member of the Crew

At the age of sixteen, a young man could sign on as a boy. (In popular culture today, we often call them “cabin boys.”) Like midshipmen in the Navy, boys had some advantages and often were friends of the captain or the owners. They learned the basics of operating the ship and navigation. Some boys went on to become captains; some never went to sea again. Edwin Mitchell, a teenager from Belfast, took one voyage to California and back in 1866-67, then never went to sea again.

On November 10, 1865, at the age of 17, Edwin sailed as a “boy” aboard the ship *Ivanhoe*, from Belfast to New York, then on to San Francisco, Peru, the Chincha Islands, and back to New York. Edwin wrote in a journal nearly every day. Included in this document are excerpts from his journal (Penobscot Marine Museum Archives, MS 9.).

Edwin later became a storekeeper in Belfast.

Edwin Mitchell's Voyage aboard the ship IVANHOE 1865-1867

- Sailed from Belfast, Maine to New York, Nov. 10, 1865
Arrived Nov. 19, 1865
- Sailed from New York for San Francisco, Jan. 26, 1866
- Crossed the equator in the Atlantic, Feb. 25, 1866
- Doubled Cape Horn, Apr. 8, 1866
- Crossed the Equator in the Pacific, Jun. 2, 1866
Arrived in San Francisco, Jul. 12, 1866
- Sailed from San Francisco for Callao, Peru, Aug. 12, 1866
- Arrived in Callao, Oct. 11, 1866
- Sailed from Callao for the Chincha Islands, Dec. 9, 1866
- Sailed back to Callao, Dec. 21, 1866
- Sailed from Callao to New York, Dec. 28, 1866
- Doubled Cape Horn (west to east) Feb. 2, 1867
- Arrived New York, Apr. 15, 1867

Feb. 11, 1866: I was sent aloft to furl the main sky sail for the first time.

Feb. 12, 1866: Last night one of the sailors was taken sick with the fever and ague. Today all hands have been employed in working about decks. I have also this day made up my mind to leave off using tobacco.

Feb. 16, 1866: I saw a few flying fish, they being the first I have seen.

Feb. 17, 1866: Saw a school of black fish and porpoise but not having our irons rigged they did not afford us any fun.

Feb. 22, 1866: I have a sore foot, I have to walk on my heel and it pains me very much.

Mar. 4, 1866: The captain invited the second mate and the carpenter aft to take dinner with him, so us boys had the duff to ourselves.

Mar. 6, 1866: This a.m. we are about forty miles from the Brazilian coast. Caught a dolphin on a line which was trailing astern.

Mar. 12, 1866: The captain caught eight red mullet and a shark. Tonight the sailors had the shark cooked for supper and I ate a piece. It was very nice.

Mar. 14, 1866: Saw a large school of porpoise but did not get any. Tonight one of the men hauled a bonito out of the water but lost him.

Mar. 18, 1866: Today I have done some washing and mending. Some of the boys saw a grampus.

Mar. 22, 1866: The boys in the other watch saw a sea-serpent under the stern. He was about eight feet long and the size of a snake. The men are engaged in corking the deck.

Mar. 28, 1866: There has been a large school of porpoise along side. At the same time we saw a large flock of birds. There were so many that the air and water were black with them. The sailors all say that it was the largest flock that they ever saw. There were all kinds from a Mother Caries Chicken up to an albatross.

Apr. 4, 1866: Saw several Cape Pigeons, they being the first that I have seen. Tonight we are about the same; becalmed and no Cape Horn yet.

Apr. 26, 1866: This noon we did not get our duff but sent us down what they called rice soup. I tasted of it and renamed it dish water.

Apr. 27, 1866: This morning for breakfast we had hash and hard tack, for dinner bean soup (dish water), hard tack and salt horse.

Apr. 28, 1866: Yesterday was the first day that I have not worn my oil clothes day or night for three weeks. Tonight we got fish hash and three warm biscuits, pretty good.

May 1, 1866: Saw two whales, they being the first I have seen.

May 6, 1866: The crew are about played out, some have boils, some sore hands, some toothache. It is a sick time in general.

May 20, 1866: The captain ordered the steward to feed us well from this time, for we got to work hard, and I think he made a good beginning tonight, sour bread, salt bass and potatoes.

May 24, 1866: I saw a large school of bluefish and plenty of flying fish.

Jun. 15, 1866: We had a nice supper tonight. It consisted of baked beans, fritters, soft bread and cookies, and to cap it all, Mrs. Harriman sent us a plate of butter. It tasted nice after going without even a smell of it for a hundred forty days.

Jun. 18, 1866: I amused myself until after four bells by marking out some stars on my diddy-box cover. From four until six I spent the time in painting the stars which I had drawn in the morning.

Jun. 19, 1866: The carpenter cut his foot Friday. It makes him quite lame. I have got a very sore eye. The carpenter looked into it and said the lid was raw. I got some wood scrapings in it. That is what caused it, I suppose.

Jun. 21, 1866: In my yesterday's log I forgot to mention that there was a hen got overboard, so they hove the ship and got out the boat and pulled about a half a mile for her.

Jul. 1, 1866: We had a splendid dinner. It consisted of fresh meat stew, pea soup, two pies and hard bread, and some company in the bargain. They were the steward and Charley, probably the reason for the dinner.

Jul. 4, 1866: Becalmed all day. Turned to this morning at three bells, done my washing and mopping and then went in the between deck at work with Mr. Brown. The captain fired at some birds with his rifle, killed one and wounded three at one shot. They lowered the boat and brought them aboard. We had boiled pork and hard tack for dinner.

Jul. 18, 1866: Mrs. Harriman sent me aboard the *Prima Donna* again. When I got back I commenced scouring brass. Received a letter from Mother.

Aug. 11, 1866: We were expecting to go to sea but it was so foggy that the tug did not come in the afternoon. We have got plenty of animals and fowl to look at now: three pigs, two sheep, six roosters, four hens, one duck, and a lady passenger.

Aug. 14, 1866: We have had butter every meal as yet from the time we arrived in port, but after today we are not going to get any, only Sunday mornings.

Aug. 16, 1866: I took into my head last night to learn to steer so I went to the wheel and the man learned me how to steer. I knew that the Captain or Mate would not learn me so I thought it was best never to ask them.

Aug. 20, 1866: Mrs. Harriman sent us down a pear apiece, quite generous.

Sept. 10, 1866: Came on deck this morning at eight bells, worked all the watch scrubbing paint work.

Sept. 15, 1866: Turned to this morning at three bells. I watered the fowl and sheep, then went down into the well room with the carpenter to see about the pumps.

Sept. 16, 1866: Came on deck this morning at eight bells and oiled down the ropes.

Sept. 17, 1866: Turned to this morning at two bells. I watered my hens and sheep, then scraped the thwarts of a boat until eight bells. After breakfast I mended a shirt and then turned in. This p.m. I worked painting until four bells, then went to the cabin to help the boys scrape and holystone.

Sept. 27, 1866: I worked above decks until six bells, then cleaned our room. Turned in at two bells. This afternoon I have been cleaning guns, painting and scraping the top of the midship house. In the dog watch I done a little sewing.

Oct. 3, 1866: After breakfast I mended a pair of pants then turned in. This afternoon I holystoned the wheel house and helped oil the skylight. The captain has concluded to have the main deck holystoned. They began this morning.

Oct. 14, 1866 (in port): At seven bells I took the captain ashore to market. He bought our mess some oranges. This afternoon we rowed the captain and wife around the harbor. After I got back we went swimming. Last night I wrote a letter home. This morning the captain wanted me to change a few subjects and I would not do it, so I did not send it. If I have to write other fellers' words I will not write at all.

Nov. 2, 1866 (in the Chincha Islands): After breakfast I done a little ciphering and then turned in. This afternoon I have had a farmer's job—sprouting potatoes.

Nov. 9, 1866: We took our first load of guano in this afternoon. I have been at work putting it up in bags. It is disagreeable work.

Nov. 18, 1866: The mate went fishing this morning and caught quite a number. After breakfast I had to clean them.

Nov. 19, 1866: I stood my watch last night. During the night I peeled a basket of potatoes for the cook, and he gave me a good lunch.

Nov. 22, 1866: I have taken the profession of barber. I have to shampoo the mate every afternoon.

Dec. 4, 1866: After dinner I mended my guano clothes and turned in but could not get to sleep, so I read the remainder of the afternoon. Last night there was a sea lion swimming around through the fleet, roaring like a good fellow. It was the most pitiful noise we heard.

Dec. 12, 1866: This afternoon I have been at work in the hold. They make the cook save his coffee grounds and use them over again, a specimen of their meanness.

Jan. 6, 1867: This afternoon I greased my boots and gave my clothes another coat of oil and hunted fleas for half an hour. They bite me so that I cannot sleep.

Jan. 7, 1867: I cleaned the office and wheelhouse, then watered and fed the hens. After breakfast I had a flea hunt, mended a pair of pants, then turned in.

Jan. 13, 1867: This afternoon I commenced to wash a shirt. I had to leave for a minute and while I was gone, the hogs tore it up.

Feb. 6: This afternoon I have been boring holes in some boxes for putting in potatoes.

Feb. 7: In the dog watch I picked oakum until two bells, then greased the mate's boots.

Feb. 12: It has been squally all day—strong breeze. Our second bos'n got hit by a sea on Sunday and knocked against the bulwarks and hurt his leg so that he is not able to keep the deck.

Feb. 25: This forenoon I had what us boys call a sailor job (for it is seldom I have one.) I helped set up the main topgallant and royal backstays.

Mar. 2, 1867: This afternoon I oiled the window sashes, picked oakum the remainder of the watch. Saw two sails both in the same tack as us. I think these are the same ones we saw yesterday.

Mar. 17, 1867: There were two flying fish came aboard last night. I got one and Bill the other. We are going to preserve them.

Mar. 18, 1867: After breakfast Bill and I commenced to paint our room. We worked all day, finished tonight except a little blue painting.

Apr. 13, 1867: This morning at four o'clock a tug came down to us. At ten we got our anchor, came to an anchor again off the Battery at four o'clock. We have got the sails unbent and gear stopped up. We are going to dock Monday morning.

Apr. 14, 1867: Turned to this morning at three bells and washed down decks. The remainder of the day I have been doing little jobs for myself. Tonight we got the drowsers up ready for early work in the morning.

Apr. 15, 1867: This morning we hauled into the dock and the crew left as soon as the ship was made fast. Us boys cleared up the decks. This afternoon we went over to N.Y. and saw some of the men that went out with us.

Apr. 16, 1867: Turned to this morning and swept down decks. Then Bill and I went up the street and got my clothes. Tonight at eight o'clock we take the cars for Boston. So ends my great voyage in the ship *Ivanhoe*. Farewell you old tub.



Ship IVANHOE, built at Belfast, ME (Robert B. Applebee Collection, LB1980.223.673.)

Glossary

Aloft: up to the top of the mast

Albatross: a large sea bird

Ague: chills and fever

Astern: towards the rear of the ship

Becalmed: unable to sail because of lack of wind

Bluefish: a school fish that eats mackerel and herring

Boil: skin infection

Bos'n: boatswain, the leading crew member of the deck crew

Bulwarks: the walls enclosing the deck of the ship

Cape pigeon: a sea bird seen in the Southern Ocean

Ciphering: doing math

Corking: caulking

Diddy box: small box in which a sailor keeps personal items

Dog watch: two half watches of two hours each, between four o'clock pm and eight o'clock pm.

Dolphin: a marine mammal smaller than a whale but larger than a porpoise

Duff: a pudding dessert

Fowl: chickens, ducks, and geese

Fritters: food that is coated in batter and fried, such as apple fritters or corn fritters

Furl: to take in and tie down the sails

Grampus: an historic name for the orca, or killer whale

Guano: sea bird droppings that accumulate over long periods of time

Hardtack: a kind of bread baked of flour and water, that keeps for a long time

Hash: a mixture of chopped meat and potatoes

Holystone: to scrub the deck with a soft sandstone, called holystone

Mother Caries Chickens: sailors' nickname for the storm petrel, a sea bird

Mullet: a bony fish with a long, stout body

Oakum: a mixture of rope fibers and tar that is stuffed between the planks of a wooden ship to help make it watertight

Porpoise: a marine mammal, smaller than a dolphin or whale

Royal backstays: The backstay is the standing rigging that goes from a mast to the deck behind the mast. Royal backstays run from the royal sail to the deck.

Salt horse: beef preserved with salt in casks

Skysail: a small sail above the royal

Steward: the crew member in charge of provisions and aiding the cook

Thwarts: seats or braces across a boat, for rowers to sit on

Topgallant: the sail set third up from the deck