

An Army Bride Goes West

by Jane Apostol



IN NOVEMBER 1860 MATILDA FINLEY McKEE sailed from New York with her husband of three months, Lieutenant Samuel McKee of the First Dragoons, who was joining his regiment in California. The engaging letters that Tillie McKee wrote to her family over the next year describe the experiences of a young bride at Fort Tejon in the Tehachapis and at little Camp Fitzgerald on the outskirts of Los Angeles. Tillie's mother, Elisabeth Moore Finley, lovingly copied the letters into a bound volume, a book acquired by the Huntington Library in 1984.

Army life was no novelty for Tillie McKee. Her father, Clement A. Finley, was an army surgeon, and she had been brought up at military posts in New York, Pennsylvania, Virginia, Kentucky, and Missouri. In 1858 she visited family friends at Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania, and there she met cavalryman Sam McKee and fell in love with him. McKee was twenty-four years old, and she was twenty-two: attractive, sprightly, and gregarious.

The couple were married on September 4, 1860, at the Finley home in West Philadelphia. Tillie had refused to postpone the wedding until Sam returned from duty in California. She laughed at her parents' fears that she was too delicate for the long

[Above] Portraits of Matilda Finley McKee and her husband, Lieutenant Samuel McKee of the First Dragoons. *Courtesy Huntington Library.*

journey west and the rigors of army life at a post “far beyond the bounds of civilization.” Her fond conviction was “that *with* Sam, and *for* Sam, she could bear anything.”¹

Orders to proceed to California were slow in coming. “Some persons say they think the detachment is being detained until they see whether there is to be trouble with the South,” Tillie wrote to her youngest sister, “but I guess this is all nonsense.”² Her letter was dated November 9, 1860—just three days after Abraham Lincoln was elected president.

The dragoons finally embarked on November 21, 1860, on the Vanderbilt sidewheel steamer *Northern Light*. Advised to carry provisions for the first day or two aboard ship, when confusion often prevailed, the McKees took a large clothes basket filled with roast chicken, ham, beef, rolls, and butter. They traveled with their own servant, an Englishwoman who had lived with the Finleys for five years. “She was very fond of Tillie and anxious to go with her,” Mrs. Finley noted, “and being a widow, steady and quiet, and not at all pretty, we thought Ellen might safely be trusted in a garrison.”³

The *Northern Light* claimed to have just seven hundred passengers aboard. “It is only allowed by law to carry 8 or 900 passengers,” Mrs. Finley wrote to one of her daughters, “but there is no competition and they disregard law, comfort and safety for the sake of making money. They take on the trip 1400 passengers. Only think of such a number on an ordinary steamship; it is fearful.”⁴ After a week at sea, Tillie wrote to her family, “I don’t think even my longing to see you at home would ever induce me to make a second trip in this way—so many disagreeables, everything so dirty.” Her husband agreed: “He calls our state-room the sty, and says he would rather be a gentlemanly pig than a sailor.”⁵

A faithful churchgoer, Tillie was pleased to learn that William Ingraham Kip, the first Episcopal bishop of California, was aboard the *Northern Light*, and she looked forward to his Sunday sermons. Two hundred of the passengers were military men, several of them traveling with their wives. Tillie especially enjoyed the company of army surgeon Joseph Campbell Shorb (“very handsome, and just as nice as possible”)⁶ and his wife Sophia, who were on their way to Fort Umpqua, Oregon. At the end of the

Civil War Shorb went into private practice in San Francisco and became a founding editor of the *California Medical Gazette*.

The *Northern Light* made no stops between New York and Aspinwall (the modern Colón). En route it delivered mail to Inagua by the simple expedient of tossing it overboard in a box. As the ship steamed past Cuba, Bishop Kip must have remembered with pain his journey to California in 1857. On that voyage passengers who came aboard at Havana brought yellow fever with them, and six people died before the ship reached Panama.⁷

After ten days at sea the *Northern Light* reached Aspinwall, and the passengers continued by train to Panama City. There they took the *Sonora*, a Pacific Mail steamer, for the two-week voyage to San Francisco. The ship made a brief stop at the little town of Acapulco, and Tillie happily ordered breakfast at the El Dorado Hotel, which served beefsteak, chicken, fresh tomatoes, fried plantains, potatoes, cakes, and chocolate. Vendors sold fruit at bargain rates, and for a dollar the McKees bought enough for the remainder of the voyage: thirteen oranges, three dozen limes, and about eighty bananas.

The *Sonora* arrived in San Francisco on December 15, and for the next few days the young couple stayed at the Metropolitan Hotel. Tillie spent much of the time shopping, because at Fort Tejon she would “be limited to the stock of a Sutler’s establishment . . . inferior in quality, and of superb prices.”⁸ A storekeeper took her to wholesale outlets, where for a total of fifty-seven dollars she bought, among other things, French china, cut-glass tumblers, demitasses, candlesticks, stoneware pans and pie plates, and sixty yards of carpeting. She also spent twenty-five dollars on furniture, and twenty-six dollars for a stove. All of this shopping was done in the rain, and as she wrote her family, “The mud *excelled* anything I ever saw in the East, even in Princeton at *its* worst.”⁹

From San Francisco the McKees took the coastal steamer *Brother Jonathan* to San Pedro, arriving at the onset of a storm. San Pedro had no hotel, and hospitable Phineas Banning, who owned the stage line to Los Angeles, invited nearly a dozen passengers to stay with him until the weather cleared. “So our Christmas was passed there,” Tillie wrote home. “The rain fell

in torrents, the supply of books was very small, and we had nothing to do but talk and think about home, and the merry times we *had* seen, but would never see again." Ellen wept inconsolably. "I had thought of that expedient for passing the time," Tillie admitted, "but the scene changed the current of my thoughts and emotions."¹⁰ She broke into laughter instead of tears.

On the day after Christmas the McKees started for Los Angeles by stage. The journey took about six hours, and the road was so deeply mired that for part of the way the men had to get out and walk. Tillie was not impressed by Los Angeles. "The town is very dirty looking," she wrote. "Most of the buildings are the Mexican one-story adobe."¹¹ She and her husband stayed at the Bella Union, the principal hotel in town. Almira Hancock—wife of the army quartermaster in Los Angeles—sent word that she would have called, but heavy rains had partially washed away her house, and she was busy moving out.

From Los Angeles the McKees continued on to Fort Tejon, an isolated post in Grapevine Canyon, near the southern border of Kern County. Edward Fitzgerald Beale, Captain John W. Davidson of the First Dragoons, his wife, and their infant son also were traveling with the McKees. Beale recently had completed a government assignment: surveying a wagon route from New Mexico to the Colorado River, and testing the use of camels in desert areas of the Southwest. Now he was returning to his ranch near the Tejon Indian Reservation, which he had established in 1853 while serving as the United States Superintendent of Indian Affairs in California and Nevada. It was Beale who recommended building Fort Tejon to control the mountain pass, protect the reservation, and suppress cattle rustling.¹²

The Davidsons and McKees were assigned a mule-drawn ambulance for the trip. The vehicle was uncomfortably small for two families, however, so Sam McKee rode horseback, and Tillie rode with Beale in his buggy. When they overtook the troops, who had started three hours earlier, she noted disapprovingly, "The soldiers were scattered all along the road—some of them in an advanced stage of intoxication, and some of the rest had to *carry* them, so they did not progress very rapidly."¹³



Mission San Fernando lay in ruins. *Private Collection.*

The McKee party stopped briefly at Mission San Fernando—“by no means the Paradise I expected to see,” Tillie commented. The buildings were dark and desolate looking, and high adobe walls cut off the view of orange trees and vineyard. According to rumor the mission soon would be used as an army post, and the dragoons would move there from Fort Tejon. Beale and Davidson disagreed on the wisdom of such a move. “Mr. Beale says a force *there* would be of no use at all,” said Tillie. “At Tejon they are of very little use to protect the settlers. If moved at all, they should go further out, to protect the persons who are working the newly discovered silver mines. Capt. Davidson wants the Post moved to the Mission because the expense of living there would be so much less—not because the troops would be of more service there.”¹⁴

Leaving the mission late in the afternoon, the travelers continued on their journey. Heavy rains had washed gullies in the road over the San Fernando Pass, and in one place it took almost an hour for the men to push and pull and lift the buggy over the ruts. After a hard day’s ride of thirty-three miles, the travelers arrived at the house where they were to spend the night. They dined well on partridge, rabbit, buttermilk, and cheese; had good beds and warm covers; but could not sleep “for the attentions of the *fleas*, with which the house was filled.”¹⁵

The next day the party covered the fifty-six miles to Beale’s

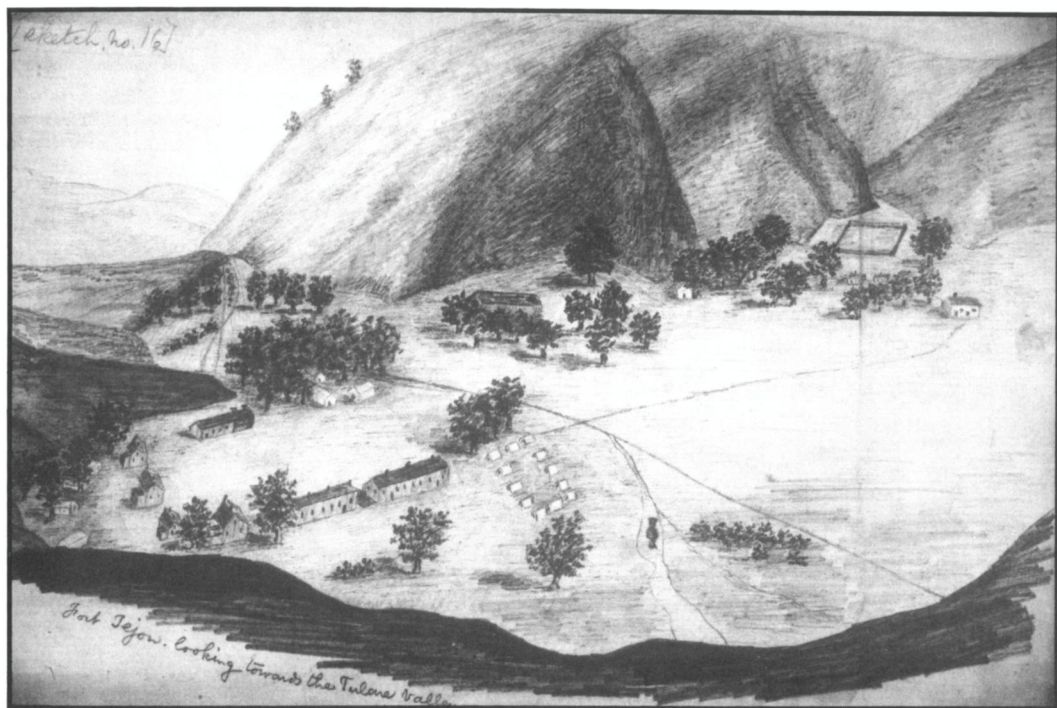
49,000-acre Rancho La Liebre. They had climbed some “wonderfully steep” hills, and Tillie observed, “The mail stage *always* upsets *once* during the trip but we are over the hills now, and by merely concealing my fears, I have gained the reputation of being quite a courageous woman.”¹⁶

Beale was fond of the young couple and concerned for their well-being. “He advises Mr. McKee to resign,” said Tillie. “He has an idea that I am very delicate, and pities me very much for the hard life he says I have entered on. I don’t feel that I need pity; I am willing to follow my husband all over California—it does not hurt me; it does me good.”¹⁷

On January 2, 1861, after a pleasant interlude at the ranch, the McKees rode eighteen miles from La Liebre to Fort Tejon, where they were stationed for the next six months. Bishop Kip had visited the fort in 1855, just a year after its founding. He praised the beauty of its site, surrounded by oak trees and enclosed by high mountains. William Wallace, editor of the *Los Angeles Star*, also admired the setting but observed that Fort Tejon was “a hundred miles from anywhere in a mountain gorge where the variations of temperature are killing to the most healthy constitution.” He quoted one officer as saying that the quarters were the best in the army, but the worst located. “They are subject to every change and vicissitude in nature. Earthquake, rain, hail, thunder and lightning, wind, sand, cold, heat, each in such rapid succession as to all appear in the same day.”¹⁸

Tillie compared the encircling mountains to prison walls. “You feel a longing to reach the summit of the mountains,” she wrote home, “as if you could breathe more freely and see something of the world outside.”¹⁹ Beale had promised to lend her a horse, and she yearned for spring, when she could go out riding. Meanwhile, she happily confessed, “When I complain of want of exercise, [Sam] chases me over the house till I sink down in a corner perfectly exhausted with laughing.”²⁰

Even when the weather permitted riding, it would be dangerous to go too far from camp because of the prevalence of bears. A constant reminder of this danger was an oak tree nearly opposite her house. Carved in the tree was an epitaph to Peter Lebec, killed by a grizzly bear on October 17, 1837. Visitors to the



Major Edward Davis Townsend made this sketch of Fort Tejon in 1855, just before the barracks were completed.
Courtesy Huntington Library.

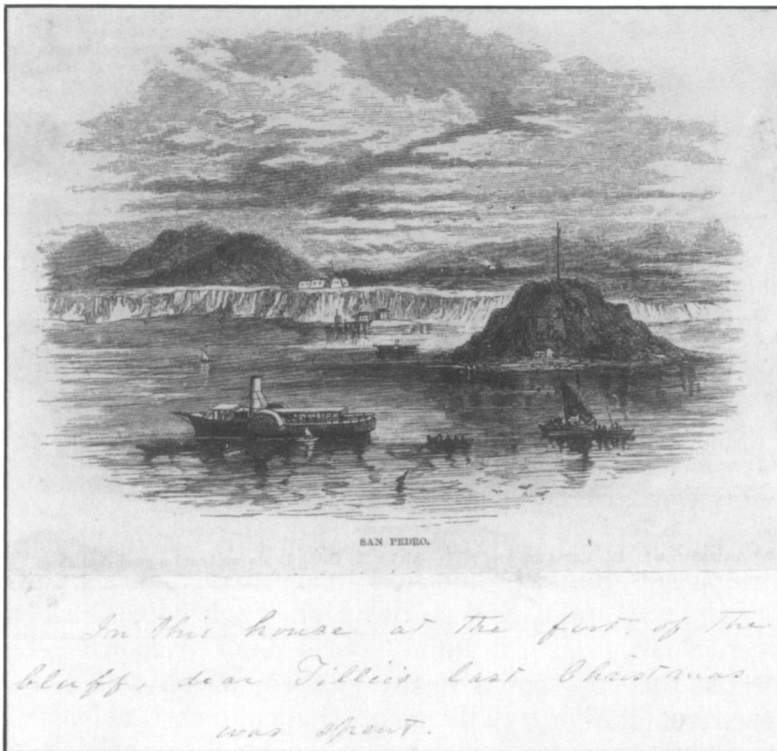
museum at Fort Tejon can read the epitaph—in relief and in reverse—on a piece of bark that grew over the original inscription. The town of Lebec takes its name from the bear's victim, who probably was a French trapper.

The enlisted men at Fort Tejon lived in adobe barracks alongside the parade grounds. The officers had separate houses, also of adobe, and one and a half stories high. Each house had two porches, a large yard, a stable, and a chicken coop. A shed connected the back porch to the kitchen, which was a little removed from the house. Tillie wrote that she had transformed a mattress box to a sofa, laid a brightly colored carpet, and put green shades at the windows. Her good white curtains she was saving until spring, when she would no longer have to contend with the soot from wood fires.

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Only one domestic problem recurs in her letters: the difficulty of finding fresh food for the table. Her husband hired a soldier to ride out in search of milk, butter, eggs, “or any of the desirables,” but he generally returned empty-handed. In mid-January Tillie detailed her woes: she could not buy a cow until spring, her hens were too young to lay, there were no vegetables except potatoes, the ham had given out, and the baker’s bread was sour and disagreeable. “So you see,” she wrote, “we shall have to rise superior to such common things, as the necessity of eating.”²¹

Phineas Banning, the McKees’ host in San Pedro, had the contract for hauling supplies between Los Angeles and Fort Tejon. His teams also hauled telegraph poles to the Fort Tejon area. A telegraph line was completed between Los Angeles and



The McKees spent Christmas of 1860 with Phineas Banning at San Pedro. Tillie’s mother added the poignant note below the picture. *Courtesy Huntington Library.*

San Francisco in October 1860—one year, almost to the day, before the telegraph linked East Coast and West. Tillie wrote from Fort Tejon, “The telegraph passes through here to Los Angeles, and the news has to be taken down rapidly in writing, as it passes over the line. There is only one person who can do that, and he is a boy of sixteen, who is fonder of shooting quails than of receiving telegraphic game, so whenever they hear that important news is coming, someone is sent out to catch this boy, and keep him at his post.”²²

In January 1861—unaware that three states already had seceded from the Union—Tillie wrote home, “Sam says there is supposed to be important telegraphic news on the way, to the effect that matters have been settled amicably in the East. Don’t I hope it though!”²³ On January 16—three weeks after the event—she learned that South Carolina had seized Fort Moultrie in Charleston Harbor.

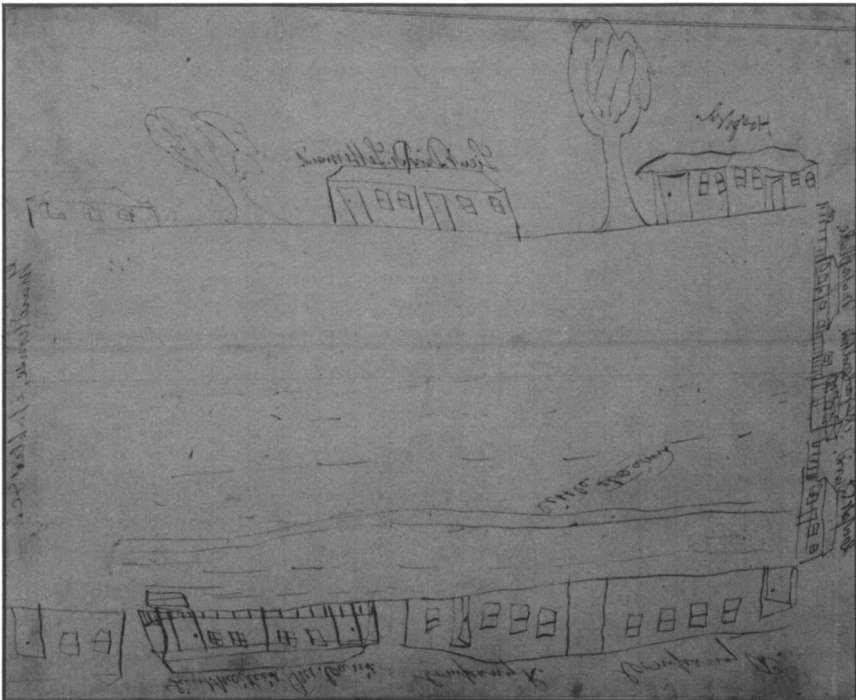
“Do tell us all you know about the position of the Army, &c.—we know nothing here at all,” Tillie wrote home in February.²⁴ She begged her family to clip newspaper articles and to speed them west by Butterfield stage. In March, however, Congress ordered the Butterfield route abandoned because it went through secessionist territory. Overland mail service was disrupted for several months, until a new route opened. “We are going to be deprived of the chief thing that makes this isolated Post bearable, and that is our mail,” Tillie lamented. “Hereafter, the only way we will get our mail will be to send an Express for it twice a month to Los Angeles: that will be very different from expecting four mails per week.”²⁵

In April Tillie wrote her mother “the precious intelligence” that she was expecting a baby in the fall. “I did not want a child at first,” she confessed, “but have become even anxious for its arrival now, and feel so interested in *tiny* clothes.”²⁶

She was homesick for her family, especially during the month that her husband was off on an expedition. He had to lead an armed detail of twenty-five soldiers escorting the Superintendent of Indian Affairs to northern California. “The Indians have always been perfectly harmless,” Tillie protested, “and seem to be a very well-disposed tribe—better than Indians go generally—

and there is not the most remote excuse for an escort, except to add grandeur to these miserable Agents. Isn't it too provoking!"²⁷ In another letter she argued, "I think they ought always to send some of these worthless bachelors whom no one would miss, and not take the *only* devoted husband in the Garrison."²⁸

Tillie longed for some congenial friends. "Nearly all the *wives* of the soldiers (there are only two in one company, and four in the other) are *wives* only 'par courtesie,' and drink dreadfully,"²⁹ she wrote. Nor did she care for the officers' wives: Clara Davidson, who had ridden with her from Los Angeles, and Sophia Carleton (wife of Major James H. Carleton), who gave occasional "purgatorial state dinners." Although Tillie was often lonely, it was quite otherwise for her widowed servant, Ellen. Regarded back home as quiet and rather plain, Ellen was a belle at Fort Tejon. Scarcely a month after her arrival, she and a mustachioed corporal were engaged, and in another two months they were married.



Tillie McKee's rough sketch shows the layout of Fort Tejon in 1861. *Courtesy Huntington Library.*

As early as January 1861 rumors circulated that Fort Tejon would be abandoned and the dragoons moved to a more strategic location. "Still waiting to hear what is to be done with us," Tillie wrote in February. "Captain Davidson hopes to be ordered to San Bernardino where he would be in command. It is a small town, and we would be able to live better and more cheaply there than here, as we would have vegetables and fruits of our own."³⁰ More compelling reasons for abandoning the post appeared in Los Angeles and San Francisco newspapers:

Fort Tejon offers no protection whatever for the white settlements, as it can be easily avoided and passed by the savages. It is located in a cold, bleak, inhospitable and worthless region of country, racked by earthquakes, unsuitable for the habitation of the white man and deserted by the Indian; besides which, it involves the Government in an unnecessary expense for its maintenance. Captain Davidson, Regimental Quartermaster of the 1st Dragoons, clearly pointed out, more than a year ago, that the annual cost to Government for the support of Fort Tejon is about \$55,000 more than it would be were the post located in San Bernardino or Los Angeles.³¹

On April 12, 1861, Confederate troops fired on Fort Sumter, and twelve days later the Pony Express brought the news to San Francisco. Brigadier General E.V. Sumner, Commander of the Department of the Pacific, expressed concern about secessionist zealots in California. In a report to army headquarters he wrote: "I have no doubt but there is some deep scheming to draw California into the secession movement; in the first place as the 'Republic of the Pacific,' expecting afterward to induce her to join the Southern Confederacy. The troops now here will hold their positions and all the Government property, but if there should be a general uprising of the people, they could not, of course, put it down."³² Sumner ordered the depot quartermaster, Captain Winfield Scott Hancock, to lay out a military camp in Los Angeles, and Major Carleton and Company K of the First Dragoons proceeded there from Fort Tejon in May.

The newly established Camp Fitzgerald—named for a major who had served at Fort Tejon—was on the southern outskirts of town, at the base of a hill between 1st and 2nd streets on what is now Broadway. Carleton and his men arrived on May 14, and the

band arrived ten days later. On May 25 they took part in a flag-raising ceremony at the new Los Angeles courthouse. "The command with their glistening sabres and burnished carbines added much to the pomp of the occasion," one reporter noted.³³ Southern sympathizers had threatened to shoot anyone who raised the Stars and Stripes, but the flag went up as the band played and the cannon fired a thirty-four-gun salute to the Union.

After Major Carleton left Fort Tejon, there seemed to be a lack of discipline at the post. According to Tillie desertion was rampant, and in May she wrote her mother, "I suppose if the Company were removed to another Post, nearly the whole command would desert before reaching their destination. Twenty-eight men of Capt. Whittlesey's Company deserted about a week ago carrying with them their horses and arms. The Officers are disheartened, and no wonder."³⁴

She was pained that many of the soldiers—formerly members in good standing of the Dashaway Society—had broken their temperance pledge. No longer would they sing:

With manly self-control
We'll *dash away* the bowl,
That would ensnare the soul
To wine's dark sway.³⁵

Orders came on June 7, 1861, to abandon Fort Tejon. The news must have delighted Tillie, who had just written her mother about the cold, damp weather at Tejon, and the prevalence of diphtheria. Company B, under Captain Davidson, left on June 15 to join the rest of the garrison in Los Angeles. Tillie rode in the ambulance that Davidson had bought to carry his family on the four-day journey. On the first day they went only eighteen miles, to E.F. Beale's Rancho La Liebre, where Tillie was invited to spend the night instead of camping out. "I cannot account for the unceasing kindness of Mr. Beale and his nephew," she wrote home. "We have no claim on them, but they cannot do enough for us, and seem to think we are doing them a favor in accepting of their hospitality."³⁶

At Camp Fitzgerald, Tillie set up housekeeping in a tent just large enough to hold a bed, a washstand, and a box used as a small table. The space left, she said, was "only as much as I can cover

with my hoops, laying them on the floor.” Tillie improvised a parlor and a dining room under some willow trees by spreading two tarps—one at the front of the tent, the other at the rear. When the couple undressed for bed, they left their clothes on a chair in the open-air parlor. “There isn’t room in the tent for ourselves and our clothes, unless they are *on us*,”³⁷ she explained to a sister.

Because of the dust and burrs and sand, Tillie had put away her good silk dresses and now dressed in calico. She did her best to stay cool. “The water here is dreadful,” she said, “making everyone sick—so we all take to beer—very much like *spruce* beer, and a very harmless, cooling drink.”³⁸

Tillie had hoped to attend a Protestant church in Los Angeles, but found there was none. The cornerstone had been laid for a Presbyterian church, but the minister—the Reverend William E. Boardman—was away in San Francisco. “I don’t think Mr. Boardman *ought* to wait till his church is finished,” Tillie observed. “He *can’t* be needed as much in a city where there are a dozen ministers as in a *very* wicked town where he is the only one. And now, with four companies of soldiers, he could do real missionary work.”³⁹

Boardman agreed that missionary work was needed, but as his wife wrote some years later:

We found it very hard work to gain the attention of the people. The population was largely Spanish and native Indian, Papists connected with the church of Rome. Worship on Sunday morning, bull-fights in the afternoon, and cock-fights in the evening had been, until recently, the order of Sabbath observance there. Drinking and gambling were sadly prevalent. Dancing was the general amusement, kept up all night long, especially on Saturday nights.

Although the Protestants were glad to have one minister among them to bury their dead, perform marriage rites for the living, and preach once a week, it seemed to be impossible to induce them to heed the word preached, or to turn to the Lord at all.⁴⁰

In July Tillie expressed the wistful hope that her father, the new Surgeon General of the Army, might find an administrative post in the East for her husband. Restless and dissatisfied at

Camp Fitzgerald, where he was quartermaster and commissary, McKee waited every day for news of a transfer and promotion. Word finally came of his appointment as Adjutant of the First Dragoons at Fort Churchill, Utah. His hopes were dashed, however, when Major Carleton protested that he could not spare McKee from Camp Fitzgerald and that in addition he wanted him to serve as depot quartermaster in Los Angeles—"more than he has any right to make him *do*," Tillie fumed. "The first duty will occupy him all *day* in town, away from me, while having the duty in this Camp, and duty with his Company—drills, &c., keeps him from being entitled to Capt. Hancock's emoluments, viz.: pay for the rank of Captain, and quarters in town." In a rare show of anger she declared, "Major Carleton is the meanest, most tricky Officer I ever heard of. He pretends to like Mr. McKee, but prevents him from accepting the most advantageous and pleasant of the Regimental appointments."⁴¹

Tillie thought Captain Davidson, who succeeded Carleton at Camp Fitzgerald, also had been unfair to her husband. She herself undoubtedly was unfair in describing Davidson as "the most credulous man, imposed on by the most ridiculous rumours" of secessionist activity. "He has started off now, after a rumour; he'll be sure to find nothing more tangible," she wrote in September. "The Captain took his entire available command, leaving Dr. Letterman in Camp with about twenty sick and prisoners, and a half dozen forlorn camp-women. Doctor thinks himself a most unfortunate, ill-used man. He and Sam sit together and get up big fits of disgust, and longing for the East."⁴²

Jonathan Letterman was McKee's best friend at Camp Fitzgerald, and also at Fort Tejon. Tillie described him as a thorough gentleman, a good doctor, and a kind person who had provided free treatment for settlers near the fort. In 1862 Letterman became Medical Director of the Army of the Potomac, and in that position he organized an ambulance corps and originated a field hospital system. After the war he became coroner of San Francisco. Letterman General Hospital in the Presidio is named in his honor.

In August Sam McKee succeeded W.S. Hancock as quartermaster in Los Angeles, and he and Tillie moved from Camp

Fitzgerald to a little brick cottage in town. Tillie wrote home happily, "I have formed quite a friendship for a lady next door, Mrs. Thom, wife of a lawyer here. She is so different from our two dragoon ladies—so lady-like, sensible and unselfish."⁴³ The two young women felt a special tie because each was expecting a baby in the fall.

By October it appeared likely that the McKees would be going East within a month. "I don't want Mr. McKee to join the Army in the South," Tillie admitted. "He is not strong, and I do not think he could stand a campaign. But he is like all young Officers, anxious to be in action and promoted, so I say as little about my regrets as possible. He knows it is almost like death to me to be separated from him." In the same letter she wrote, "I cannot get a nurse here to take with me, but if I live, and my baby too, it will be so young as to be no trouble until we reach home, when you can get me a nurse."⁴⁴

On October 10 Tillie wrote impatiently, "We are still in Los Angeles, this most stupid of all stupid one horse towns . . . I can scarcely restrain my joy when I think of seeing you all again." In a delicate reference to her pregnancy she said, "You must write oftener now, for I am expecting every day my summons to a sick bed, and I shall have need of all the nice, cheering letters from home to while away the tedious hours of sickness and pain."⁴⁵

Tillie's daughter, Matilda Finley McKee, was born in Los Angeles on October 13, 1861. Both mother and child seemed well, but premonitions of death haunted Tillie. On October 27 she took a carriage ride with her husband and said to him, "Sam, isn't it strange for a dying woman to be riding out?" He answered, "Oh, Tillie, how absurd to talk so! The Doctors say you are doing very well," and she replied, "The Doctors don't know anything about it, Sam!"⁴⁶

Two days later Tillie fell ill. Doctors Letterman and John S. Griffin placed her under the care of the Sisters of Charity and prescribed warm baths, cupping, tartar-emetic, valerian, and morphia. Nothing availed, and on October 31, 1861, Tillie died of childbed fever. She was buried in Los Angeles Cemetery, on a high hill overlooking the city.

Sam McKee had little Matilda baptized by the Reverend Mr.

Boardman. He then sailed for the East Coast with his daughter, a nurse, and two milk goats. McKee arrived at the Finley home in Philadelphia on Christmas Day 1861 and left his daughter with her grandparents. "Isn't it hard," he asked, "that all the brightness has been taken from my life, and I am only twenty-seven?"⁴⁷ On the day after Christmas, McKee reported to his regiment. He died on June 3, 1864, of wounds received in action at Cold Harbor, Virginia. "His loss to the country and service was incalculable," his commanding general wrote in an official report. "A pure, unaffected, modest man, a chivalrous, educated, accomplished soldier, he fell at the post of honor, doing his duty as but few could, and died a true American soldier with warm words of patriotism and valor on his lips."⁴⁸

After Tillie's death, Elisabeth Moore Finley copied her daughter's letters into an album, added biographical notes, and pasted in lithographs of scenes that Tillie had visited: San Fernando Mission, Tejon Pass, Fort Tejon, Los Angeles. The resulting book—"Memorials of a beloved child, collected and arranged by her Mother"—was a gift for Tillie's orphaned daughter, Matilda McKee, who grew up in the Finley home.

Matilda was especially fond of her mother's youngest sister, Lydia Finley, and in the 1890s the two women began making annual trips abroad. About 1903 they settled in Cornwall, in the little village of Flushing, on Falmouth Harbor. Neither woman ever married. Lydia died in Cornwall in 1923, and Matilda died there in 1943. She left her mother's letters—originals as well as transcripts—to an English friend asking that she burn them. The friend complied in part, burning the originals but saving "Memorials of a beloved child" and bequeathing it to her son. In 1984 he sent the album to California, where he thought that it belonged. Because of his generosity, the Huntington Library now owns "Memorials of a beloved child," the poignant reminder of a young army wife in California more than a century ago.

NOTES

The author is grateful to the Huntington Library for permission to use the Elisabeth Moore Finley Collection and to quote from it.

¹Elisabeth Moore Finley, "Memorials of a beloved child, collected and arranged by her Mother," HM 50508, p. 22. The book is a manuscript volume with transcripts of Tillie McKee's letters to her family. Mrs. Finley is cited hereafter as EMF.

²Matilda (Tillie) Finley McKee to [Lydia M. Finley], November 9, 1860, "Memorials," p. 29.

³EMF, p. 31.

⁴EMF to Lydia M. Finley, November 20, 1860, HM 50509. Vanderbilt steamers had an unenviable reputation as overcrowded, undermanned, badly provisioned, and unclean. For a thorough discussion of voyages by way of Panama, see John Haskell Kemble, *The Panama Route, 1848-1869*, University of California *Publications in History*, vol. 29 (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1943).

⁵McKee to EMF and [Mary Finley], November 22-29, 1860, pp. 43, 41.

⁶Ibid., p. 37. Dr. Shorb's brother, James de Barth Shorb, settled in southern California in 1867. The Huntington Library is located on a portion of his San Marino Ranch.

⁷For his account of the 1857 voyage see William Ingraham Kip, *The Early Days of My Episcopate* (New York: Thomas Whittaker, 1892), pp. 249-62.

⁸EMF, p. 22.

⁹McKee to EMF, December 31, 1860, p. 51.

¹⁰Ibid., pp. 52-53. For a biography of Phineas Banning, see Maymie Krythe, *Port Admiral: Phineas Banning, 1830-1885* (San Francisco: California Historical Society, 1957).

¹¹McKee to EMF, December 31, 1860, p. 53.

¹²For an account of Davidson's career, see Homer K. Davidson, *Black Jack Davidson, A Cavalry Commander on the Western Frontier: The Life of General J. W. Davidson* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1974). A recent biography of Beale is Gerald Thompson, *Edward F. Beale & The American West* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1983). For more on the Tejon Indian Reservation, see Richard E. Croute and Andrew Rolle, "Edward Fitzgerald Beale and the Indian Peace Commission," *Southern California Quarterly*, 42 (June 1960): 107-32. The Camel Corps is discussed in Odie B. Faulk, *The U.S. Camel Corps: An Army Experiment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). Although camels were corralled at Fort Tejon, and later at Camp Fitzgerald, there is no mention of them in Tillie's letters.

¹³McKee to EMF, December 31, 1860, p. 54.

¹⁴Ibid., pp. 54-55. The fabulous Comstock Lode was discovered in Nevada in 1859. Soon afterward, silver was found on the western side of the California-Nevada border.

¹⁵McKee to EMF, December 31, 1860, p. 57.

¹⁶Ibid.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 58.

¹⁸Helen S. Giffen and Arthur Woodward, *The Story of El Tejon* (Los Angeles: Dawson's Book Shop, 1942), p. 60. See also Clarence Cullimore, *Old Adobes of Forgotten Fort Tejon* (San Bernardino: Kern County Historical Society and The County of Kern through its Chamber of Commerce, 1941).

¹⁹McKee to [Mary Finley], January 14, 1861, pp. 63-64.

²⁰McKee to [Lydia M. Finley], January 16, 1861, p. 70.

²¹Ibid., p. 73.

²²McKee to EMF, January 10, 1861, p. 62.

²³Ibid.

²⁴McKee to [Mary Finley], February 4, 1861, p. 83.

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- ²⁵McKee to [Lydia M. Finley], April 2, 1861, pp. 102-3.
- ²⁶McKee to EMF, April 6, 1861, p. 105.
- ²⁷McKee to [Lydia M. Finley]. April 2, 1861, p. 100.
- ²⁸McKee to [Mary Finley], March 23, 1861, p. 92.
- ²⁹*Ibid.*, January 21, 1861, p. 76.
- ³⁰McKee to EMF, February 27, 1861, p. 88.
- ³¹Los Angeles *Star*, January 26, 1861; reprinted from the San Francisco *Herald*.
- ³²*The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 1st ser. 50, pt. 1 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1897), p. 472. For more on the secessionists, see Percival J. Cooney, "Southern California in Civil War Days," *Annual Publications of the Historical Society of Southern California*, 13 (1924): 54-68. See also John W. Robinson, *Los Angeles in Civil War Days, 1860-65* (Los Angeles: Dawson's Book Shop, 1977).
- ³³Aurora Hunt, *Major General James Henry Carleton, 1814-1873: Western Frontier Dragoon* (Glendale: Arthur H. Clark Co., 1958), p. 191.
- ³⁴McKee to EMF, May 24, 1861, pp. 120-21.
- ³⁵Pauline Jacobson, *City of the Golden 'Fifties* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1941), p. 67.
- ³⁶McKee to EMF, June 14, 1861, pp. 126-27. The "nephew" (actually a cousin of Beale's wife) was Fred E. Kerlin. Mary Austin, who met Beale in 1889, also mentioned his kindness and friendly interest.
- ³⁷McKee to [Lydia M. Finley], July 3, 1861, pp. 128-29.
- ³⁸*Ibid.*, p. 130.
- ³⁹*Ibid.*, August 3, 1861, p. 139. The church was completed in 1863. In 1866 the Episcopalians acquired the building and named it St. Athanasius.
- ⁴⁰Mrs. [William Edwin] Boardman, *Life and Labours of the Rev. W.E. Boardman* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1887), p. 113.
- ⁴¹McKee to [Lydia M. Finley], August 3, 1861, p. 141. For a more temperate view of Carleton, and a discussion of his career, see Hunt, *James Henry Carleton*. Tillie's father, Dr. Clement Finley, retired as Surgeon General of the Army in 1862. Three years later he was made a brevet brigadier general for long and faithful service.
- ⁴²McKee to [Mary McKee], September 27, 1861, p. 150.
- ⁴³McKee to EMF, August 25, 1861, p. 143. Cameron E. Thom had served simultaneously as city attorney and district attorney. In 1883 he became mayor of Los Angeles.
- ⁴⁴McKee to EMF, October 5, 1861, pp. 151-52.
- ⁴⁵McKee to [Mary Finley], October 10, 1861, pp. 152, 153.
- ⁴⁶EMF, p. 169.
- ⁴⁷EMF, p. 168.
- ⁴⁸*War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records*, 1st ser. 36, pt. 1, p. 849.

