

BOOK REVIEW

Eyewitness to the Settlement of the West: Jacob Wright Harlan's California 1846-1888. Compiled by Bruce E. Mowday. Uwchlan, PA: Squire Cheney Books, 2007. 183 pages. ISBN-13: 978-0-9774200-1-8. \$19.99.

George Harlan was an English Quaker who settled in New Castle, Delaware, in 1687. William Penn appointed George a governor in Delaware, and he was elected to the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1712. One of his children settled in Kentucky, founding the first permanent white settlement west of the Appalachians. A later member of this branch of the family was John Marshall Harlan, who became a U.S. Supreme Court Justice.

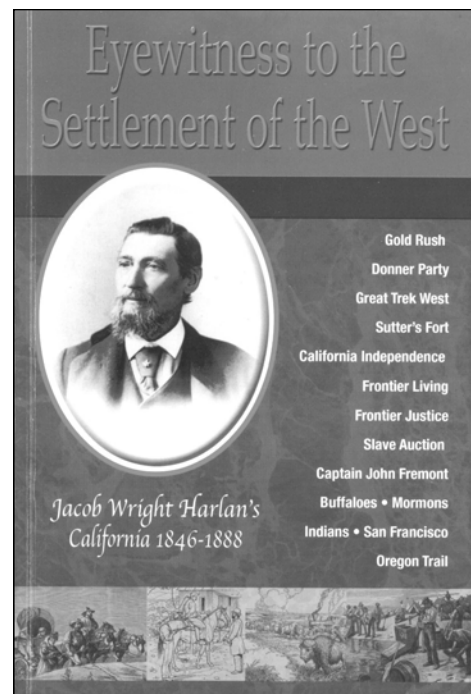
Several generations later, on October 14, 1828, Jacob Wright Harlan was born in Indiana. He was treated cruelly by his father, stepmother, and an uncle, and in 1845, at the age of 17, he went to live with another uncle, also named George, in Michigan. George was inspired by a book, *Emigrants' Guide to Oregon and California*, and in 1845 he sold his successful farm for \$3,000, gathered a party of 25 people, 22 wagons and prairie schooners, and 80 head of cattle, and started out for the west. Encountering considerable hardships, the Harlan party blazed the first trails and built the first roads over the mountains near the Great Salt Lake. Jacob was often sent ahead to procure food and supplies when they ran low. The Harlans met up with the Donner party but later they split up, each taking a different route around the Great Salt Lake.

In 1846, one year after starting out, the Harlan party reached California. They visited Sutter's Fort, Yerba Buena (later called San Francisco) and the nearby missions. In 1847, Jacob fought with John C. Frémont in the Mexican War. After the war, Jacob settled in the Sonoma area where he quickly built up several businesses—livery stables, general stores, a dairy business, a ferry operation, real estate—all of which became very successful after gold was discovered in 1849. Jacob tells how in 1850 he bought a lot at the corner of Bush and Dupont Streets in San Francisco that he describes as “a sand hill about forty feet high . . . and all covered over with scrub oaks” for \$2,000 and sold it two days later for \$4,500.

For the next 35 years, Jacob's fortunes rose and fell several times. His tales of these times are full of fascinating details. By 1886, alone, “crippled with rheumatism and bronchitis,” and “flat broke,” he entered the county infirmary. He died in San Leandro, California on March 7, 1902.

The major part of this book is Jacob's memoir of his California days that he wrote 40 years later, and that the Bancroft Company published in 1888. This is preceded by two essays: a “History of the Harlan Family” written by Louis R. Harlan in 1997 and “The Great Trek,” a summary of the events in the memoir, by William K. Harlan. This 2007 book is an updated version of Jacob's memoir and was published for the Harlan Family in America on the occasion of their 320th reunion, in 2007. Bruce Mowday's wife is Katherine M. Harlan.

Mowday's book is available at the Chester County Historical Society and the Chester County Book and Music Store, both in West Chester, and can be special ordered by any book store. Signed copies are available directly from the author at mowday@mowday.com. Mowday is the author of 9 books, including *Six Walking Tours of West Chester* and *September 11, 1777: Washington's Defeat at Brandywine Dooms Philadelphia*.



Courtesy Squire Cheney Books, Uwchlan.

Reviewed by Joyce Post