

Gibraltar in Jay Cooke's Time:

Excerpts from The Journal of Jay Cooke or The Gibraltar Records 1865-1900 by James E Pollard, The Ohio State University Press, Columbus, Ohio, 1935.

“At the time Gibraltar was opened Jay Cooke was 43 years of age and, thanks chiefly to the Civil War financing, was one of the best known men in America.” (p.24)

“Not long after he acquired the island and began his frequent pilgrimages there, Jay Cooke erected the Gibraltar monument as it stands today. The bronze table tells its story:

ERECTED
BY
JAY COOKE
PATRIOTIC FINANCIER
OF THE
CIVIL WAR
TO MARK THE
CORNER STONE OF A
PROPOSED MONUMENT
COMMEMORATING
COMMODORE PERRY'S
VICTORY AT THE
BATTLE OF LAKE ERIE
SEPT 10 1813

‘We have met the enemy
and they are ours’ ” (p.19)

“It was on the heights of Gibraltar, as the highest point of land in the vicinity, that he (Perry) maintained a lookout to watch for the British. The point is still known as Perry's Lookout...” (p.9)

“It was Cooke's custom to visit the island twice a year, usually when the fish were running. He came as a rule in June for a spring visit and returned in September or October for another. On each occasion he remained from three to six weeks, unless the visit was interrupted. When he was not there, Gibraltar was open to his guests.” (p.22)

“Between its opening in 1865 and 1873, when he lost possession of it for some years, it pleased him to invite to the island between his own visits groups of ministers of different Protestant denominations. In later years there were many guests, but the long season at Gibraltar was divided among the members of his family.” (p.23)

“All of his life he loved to entertain and to have others about him and Gibraltar was one of the chief means to this end.

The Gibraltar establishment was like a hotel. It sometimes housed 25 or more guests and required a full time staff to run it. To oversee these myriad details, Cooke employed Mrs. Anna C. McMeens, widow of Dr. R. R. McMeens of

Sandusky, who had died during the Civil War and who had been active in the Perry Monument project. For practically 30 years she did her task so well as to earn the affection and appreciation of the entire family and the (p.24) many guests.” (p. 25)

“Surrounded by trees, the house was built on the ridge toward Perry’s Lookout from the limestone native to the region. Its chief distinguishing characteristic is an octagonal tower whose parapet affords a view for miles in every direction. A broad porch fronts on the Lake side of the house and another on the bay side . . . From a flagpole atop the tower and from another on Perry’s Lookout, it was the custom to unfurl the American flag, particularly on the arrival of the owner or distinguished guests.” (p.23)

[In 1867, three years after he had built the house, Jay Cooke made the following journal entry:] “ ‘ June 6 A *glorious* morning & an early start most of the party including the Ladies went fishing & boating for an hour & a half before breakfast and prayers, returning at 7:30 with 24 fine fish & as ravenous an appetite as the black bass evince- we did indeed enjoy Mrs. McMeens good things –*not* the poorest of which by any means was the splendid fresh black bass so nicely *browned* and brot in *hot*. This is the place to catch and *eat* nice fish. . . After breakfast &c we all started out and a portion went fishing – caught 56 more in all 80 for the day as we did not go out this P.M. a thunder & wind storm coming up and occupying most of the P.M. Sundry after dinner naps occupying the balance of the time— We had an early tea, read our letters & papers just in from the Evening Star --& after dark were engaging in various groups of reading chatting music & - when *Crash* down came the big hall chandelier – the oil burning all over the Carpet & oil cloth setting fire to the door & wood work & for a moment it seemed as if a conflagration must take place. The whole household & guests rushed to the spot & the contents of the hat rack – shawls over Coats Etc. were used top put out & smother the fire Some of these caught fire also – but at last owing mostly to the efforts judicious- cool & collected of Jay Cooke Jr. the burning (p.158) oil was put out & some wiped up – *What a miracle* & we see in its *timely* falling –if it had to fall- an evidence of Gods goodness & special care & which we delight to acknowledge here. If the chandelier had fallen when no one was near to put out the flames speedily – the house would have been consumed – or if it had fallen when some one was *beneath* it - it might have killed or seriously injured that one – as it was, the damage is not great & a lesson has been learned. Why will these manufacturers of Chandeliers &c run such risk of killing their customers- we must *talk* to them!!’ ” (p. 159]

“For nearly 40” (p.23) “years the routine hardly varied, yet never grew monotonous. The family and guests put in their time fishing, boating, bathing, picnicking, reading, resting, conversing and in music and games and visits to Put-In-Bay and the other islands. Through the long years Gibraltar was self-sufficient in interest and entertainment. There were devotions at breakfast and again at night, usually led by Cooke himself when he was there, and occasionally by visiting clergymen. Sunday was the day of rest when the family crossed to Put-in-Bay to the little church which had been established and was long maintained there under the financier’s patronage. Frequently they went twice or even three times, and in case of bad weather they held their own service of praise and thanksgiving at Gibraltar.” (p.24)

He made the following entry on “ ‘June 16, 1867 – Sunday. This morning after breakfast & prayers we all went to Church & had a delightful service & sermon – Rev Mr Duerr preached admirably & *more so* because his sermon was only 23 minutes in length – in which he said enough to give us food for the reflections of the days & week – subject, Belshazzars feast & the handwriting on the wall- *Short* sermons – condensing the subject are an hundred fold more profitable than the old fashioned lectures during which one could take a nap & wake up at ‘thirdly’” & again at 9thly! In these exciting – quick-active days – telegraph &c we want even religious services & especially sermons & lectures – to be short & like the modern modes of boiling down & condensing meats for future use –’ ” (p.165) [Jay Cooke would have loved the WEB!]

In 1868 Jay Cooke, who was on the Board of Managers of the National Asylum for disabled volunteer soldiers, invited the Board to Gibraltar for its meeting of October 8. For that day he wrote: “ ‘Weather cold rainy & rather bad for us fishermen- Willie and I went to the east side of So. Bass & caught 12 fine bass before dinner. The Jay Cooke [steamer] came in from Detroit at 2:30 & found all our flags at Gibr waving a welcome to Gen. Butler. (p. 188) Genl Martindale and daughter & Gov Smyth & wife. The *guns* of Put in Bay also fired a salute of welcome. In the Evening Star at 5 PM came the balance of our guests Honl LB Gunckel & Judge Bond, also retd my wifie and Mary Patterson – After supper we held an Asylum (sic) meeting at which much important work was done for the welfare of the poor soldiers. Our session was protracted till 11 PM & was held in the Library –which was blue with smoke from the cigars of the guests’ ” (P.189)

“In October, 1869, he made this entry: ‘I came here this fall to do some work nights & rainy days –Here after all are abed I am writing up the correspondence and originating the plans necessary to the enterprise of the North Pacific Rail Road – It will occupy all my thoughts & time till I leave except time given to fishing which of course is preferred time!! If these cogitations result in our taking hold and of & building this great National highway my time will have been well spent. May God guide us in all our undertakings & further us with his help. JC’ ” (P.82)

“Virtually eight years elapsed between the last visit of Cooke and his family in 1872 and the reopening of the Gibraltar house in 1880... In his entry for the fall visit of 1880 he himself described ‘what sad changes have taken place within those eight short years’ ‘Shortly after our return to Phila in 1871 Mrs. Cooke died & in 1873 came the great Panic in which he lost Gibraltar & every dollar of his large fortune. In 1878 he lost his Mother & in 1889 (early winter) his brother Pitt died. Besides these dear ones of his own family he discovers on looking over these records the names of many dear fr’ds who have died. We hope to meet them all again safe amongst the “Islands of the Blessed.” This beautiful Isle being – with all its delights, but a faint foretaste of that which we trust is in store for us. God in his wisdom and goodness has permitted Mr. Cooke to regain Gibraltar & much of that which he lost, of the worlds goods, so that now we are permitted to enjoy –with we trust a chastened satisfaction, this beautiful home once more’” (p.85) [He was able to regain his fortune and Gibraltar through an investment in the Horn Silver mine in Utah.]

“He and his family resumed their old routine at Gibraltar – picnics, fishing excursions, recreation on and about the island, and the interest in the Put-in-Bay church, about which he was perennially optimistic. For 25 years after regaining the island he continued to come there twice a year to fish, to hunt and to rest.” (p.85)

In 1886, “He reiterated that he regarded Gibraltar as ‘the gift of God to me’ in the following entry in the *Records*: ‘Many years from now when we old ones are all gone I suppose my childn and Grand & great Grand Cildrn will read these records with curiosity & interest—Let them all understand that this dear Gibraltar was the gift of God to me and I receive it as such & enjoy it as such - & have tried to know God here & show forth the Saviour’s love by doing good –I wish them to follow in my footsteps & to realize that every thing we have is from God-We can hold it only so long as He pleases & to love & acknowledge & honor & serve Him – will add a hundred fold to one & this capacity to enjoy all this.’ ” (p.88)

In 1887, “Upon the occasion of his autumn visit . . . he thus described ‘A Day at Gibraltar!’ in answer to some one’s questions as to how he spent the time on the island, whether he was not lonesome, and how he could put in six long weeks at a time.” (p.88)

“ ‘ We rise at 7. We have prayers with singing & reading the Scriptures at 7.30 & then breakfast. Today our breakfast consisted of Cantelopes Oatmeal, blackbass, beefsteak broiled ham, Apple Sauce, fresh Cucumbers brown & white bread & butter Potatoes hot waffles & maple sugar, Milk tea & coffee & peaches & cream. For dinner, Tomato Soup, Boiled bass (p.89) with egg sauce, Roast Turkey & celery & all vegetables that are produced in a dozen states north & south of us --& a dessert of fruits & melons puddings & cakes, etc etc. For supper we always have a hearty meal, broiled chickens, hot corn cakes potatoes tea coffee milk preserved & cakes and frequently about 9.30 or 10 o’clock ice cream of domestic manufacture (& delicious) is brought in.

Our amusements are then entered upon, some of the Ladies & girls play croquet, others take their knitting & sit on the rocks under the trees whilst one of their number reads from some interesting book. Others sing & play or read in the Library. The boys take their boats & rowing & the Gentlemen go a fishing & hunting sometimes to the surrounding Islands bringing home supplies of birds rabbits quails & always enough fine blackbass to keep the table well supplied. Sometimes a visit is paid to the opposite Islands & the vineyards and orchards are invaded & all are well filled with delicious Peaches & Grapes – besides in the Hall at Gibraltar you will always find baskets of many varieties of Grapes & Peaches accessible to all. There are swings for the childn & bathing places where the majority of those here enjoy their baths in the open Lake. Boat races, & fishing races for prizes are often inaugurated- & Picnics & excursions to the other Islands – some of these lasting two or three days – three or four of the Party are skilful Photographers as well be seen by an examination of the photos in this book & this is a source of constant interest and employment to such as engage in photography.

In the evening our letters & papers arrive & sometime is spent in reading & answering our Correspondence.

On Sundays we went to the little Church on Put in Bay Morning & Evening in boats. We refrain of course from all secular work & amusements, but the day passes delightfully & rapidly – we read & rest take naps & walks on our own Island & the day is gone all too rapidly.

The atmosphere of Gibraltar is at least 5 to 10 degrees cooler in summer than it is on the Island opposite & we always have a breeze on our porches & in the hall. It has proved to be a remarkably healthy spot & thus far no serious illness has been experienced by any one who resided here permanently or temporarily for 25 years past.

Our days here are indeed days of pleasantness & all our paths are peace.

May God long spare us to enjoy Gibraltar and to make it the means of good, & of rational & healthful rest to the dear ones who come here—At this date I have 2 daughters and 2 daughters in law, two Sons and two sons in Law & 15 grandchildren -6 boys and 9 Girls & a beautiful & happy group they are- besides these visitors & myself we have Miss Bronaugh, Dr. Appleton Mr. Fuller & others from the East & frequent visits from fr'nds and relatives in Sandusky and elsewhere. . . ” (p.90)

“When he arrived for his fall visit in 1894 he was not well and traveled from Philadelphia to Sandusky in a private car provided by the Pennsylvania railroad. But ‘under the blessing of God-pure air- outdoor exercise sailing fishing hunting etc,’ he noted on his departure from Gibraltar a month later, he was ‘almost completely restored’ He had been suffering from ‘ the effects of a 6 weeks attack of ‘Walking Typhoid.’” Not infrequently on these later visits he arrived alone or with only two or three in his party.” (p.93)

“To the last, he praised God for each visit to Gibraltar and looked forward to coming again. He came early for his spring visit in 1904. . . . In September he returned once more, traveling from Cleveland, ‘in the private car of President Everett of the Trolley R. Rd.’ Five weeks later he made his last entry in the Autograph Book, again expressing his hope of coming again.” (p. 94)

“In truth, it was for him a farewell to ‘dear old Gibraltar,’ for less than four months after he left its halls, his life was rounded out, and he died peacefully after an illness of less than 24 hours.” (p.95) [on Thursday evening, February 16, 1905]

“In four decades of his comings and goings at Gibraltar in wealth and in adversity, in vigorous manhood and in old age, surrounded by others or alone, the island knew him as a plain man, unaffected by his means or by his station in life, yet conscious of their responsibilities and obligations.” (p.97)