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John C. Gore with his sons, John C. Jr. and Arthur, 1860
(Courtesy of Lee Atha Gore)

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THE GORE FAMILY DIARIES: WHALING IN CARMEL BAY 1858

INTRODUCTION

John C. Gore Sr. purchased 4,000 acres of land on the Monterey Peninsula in 1852. His property was "El Rancho Pescadero" which is now part of Pebble Beach. When he arrived from Boston with his two sons, John C. Jr. and Arthur, in 1851, they built a small home on the property which is now in the area of the The Beach Club at Pebble Beach. They lived here until 1861, and eventually lost their land in legal disputes.

The Gores descended from a prominent Boston family which had come from England in 1635. John C. Gore Sr. was the grand-nephew of the Massachusetts Governor Christopher Gore. Mary James Gore, John Gore's wife and the mother of the two boys, John Jr. and Arthur, passed away in childbirth along with the baby daughter when the boys were young. At the time of their arrival in the Monterey Peninsula, the boys were 10 and 11. The younger boy, Arthur, was quite sickly and a doctor in Boston told the father if he didn't move to a better climate that Arthur wouldn't live to be 20. The father read Walter Colton's book, *Three Years in California*, and decided to bring his family to Monterey. They came on the ship, *Timothy*, in 1851.

The diaries came into the hands of the Monterey History and Art Association in 1999 when Lee Atha Gore, a descendent of the John C. Gore family and a current resident of Pacific Grove, brought them to the Association. While there are many great accounts in these diaries, we have chosen the story told by Arthur Gore about whaling in Carmel Bay. This account was handwritten in 1858, and is part of a diary entitled, "Diary of my Father Dr. Arthur Gore for the Years 1857-1858." The title obviously given by Arthur Gore's son, Arthur Bennett Gore Jr., many years after this diary was written. Arthur Gore was the younger of the two boys who lived at Pescadero Ranch. He was 16 when he wrote this account of whaling in Carmel Bay in a letter to his Aunt Annie James in Boston. The following is an unedited account taken from the diary, with no corrections or updating of spelling or grammar.

A HISTORY OF SOME WHALING IN CARMEL BAY

by Arthur Gore

Captain Davenport has been proposing for some time past to come over here with his whale boat to harpoon whales, bringing them into our bay to cut them up. Father resisted any attempts to make our ranche a fishing station or to make use of it in any way whatsoever. Well on the 2nd of August we noticed a boat glide in along side of our small point and one of the two individuals therein proceeded to tie their boat preparatory to coming on shore. We of course went down to ascertain who they might be and somewhat to our surprise discovered that the visage of one of them belonged to no less a personage than the aforesaid captain (Captain Davenport) came with an assistant to try his boom (bomb) lance as he called it, upon the whales in our bay or rather in Carmel Bay. Father told him that he had no right to land upon his property without his permission:

Captain, "You cannot claim below high water and you might just as well sink a vessel out there (point to sea) in stress of weather by forbidding her to land upon your territory."

Father, "That has nothing to do with the case. I have no personal dislike to you, Captain, but you came here to make a fishing station of this place and I protest against any such use of any use whatever being made of my property."

The Captain found it was no use arguing the case any further, that Father had the right side of the question and that he would certainly stick to it. He could not land any where below high water mark because the tide would rise and sweep him away, and that if he attempted any use of the property without permission he would have a law suit at his heels as quick as a complaint could be made before the Justice of the Peace.

Some time after, he brought his whaleboat and crew over to Still-water Bay and on a Sunday the 5th of last September he struck his first whale. It was a still day, the ocean being very calm with very little wind stirring. He had a small boat behind, sailing, which followed the larger boat to pick up the men if he should happen to get stove which relieved the men of some of their fears for safety and the arduous task of swimming ashore, if indeed they knew how

to swim. The first we saw of the whale it was some distance ahead, swimming very leisurely, coming to the surface every few minutes to blow. As soon as the large boat saw it she started in pursuit the men sailing to avoid making any noise which would frighten the fish and keeping in as nearly a direct line behind as possible to prevent its seeing them, for the eyes of the whale are so situated and its sides so much larger than its head that the unfortunate creature is not aware of their approach until they are directly upon it and the barbed harpoon is buried deep in its flesh. It sometimes happens that when they arrive at the place where the whale is expected to rise they are either too far behind or the fish has gone farther ahead than they calculated and though it may not be out of reach yet maybe it is a long throw, and the whaleman will venture it rather than lose his chance and wait in expectation of a better. So it appeared to be in this case for the whaleman threw his harpoon from a considerable distance and the whale started off dragging the boat at a racehorse speed and leaving a wake far behind. The whale made almost a direct line for Carmel, then made several short, quick turns, as if to overturn and if possible to get rid of its tormentor, but the helmsman who sharp on the look out and with no long trailing oar whirled the boat round like a piece of cork, so that before the line could be drawn tight, and brought to bear upon the whale, it was fronting the whale as before. And the fish finding it of no use continued the course that he first took and made for the beach. Just then the fog rolled in and hid them from sight, and the next we saw of them was in the bend of the Carmel beach not far from the mouth of the River, going to and fro as if heading something off or searching for something which they had lost. Just after it came in we went over the Promontory towards Carmel and as we arrived there the mist cleared up sufficiently to allow us to watch their movements. A few minutes after the boat had become visible we saw the whale on the other side of a point of rock on the side this way of the River. It was evident from their actions that they were trying to keep the whale in and that the whale was trying to escape, and we surmised that the harpoon had drawn out and that they were waiting for the assistance of the other boat to aid them in obtaining another opportunity or striking it. But before the small boat arrived the fish succeeded in making his escape on the further side of the bend, the boat immediately put in pursuit and for a while neither seemed to gain or lose ground. So the chase continued as far as Stillwater By and a little past it when the whale gained on the men became tired and lost. I do not know which. The whale making for Point Cypress and the boat following the shore of Point Lobos and trying to gain the end of Point Cypress first in order to cut the fish off and drive it back, but the

whale seemed to be perfectly aware that he had the start of them and fully resolved came what would to maintain it. So that Captain Davenport the whaleman lost his whale.

All the week following, day after day, excepting Sunday, he cruised to and fro, sailing out at sea and sailing back again, for sailors will obey the dictator of their superstitions. Searching along the shore in every nook and corner, but no sight of the much coveted prize rewarded his labours. We learned the next time we went to town that the harpoon did not draw out, but broke, the instrument being a bad one and not rightly made. We learned from the Captain that after he had struck the whale he turned around and saw one of his men (a new hand), not paddling as was his duty but sitting most intently and interestedly gazing with his mouth wide open. The Captain reprimanded him afterwards and dare say his ship-madtes did not give him much peace about it for some time after. They asked him why he did not put in two harpoons while he was bout it and he said that he did not at the time think there was any need of it as he had lanced him severl times and the whale was going a long very quickly in the direction of the beach, but he would be very careful in the future always to put in two harpoons.

On Sunday exactly a fortnight after this, the sun rose bright and clear, shedding its flood of morning light over land and water and the fresh northwest wind so the waves dancing in the sunlight, and renting with a perfectly clear sky gave the sea that beautiful blue appearance which we seldom see on our side of the continent on account of the dense fogs and overcast weather which prevail and sometimes in failure of that a dim and murky atmosphere which gives anything but a pleasant cast to the expanse of water exposed to our view. We had just been down to have a plunge in the salt water and were eating our frugal breakfast of bread and whatever else we could muster up for the occasion, when we noticed the Captain creeping along, or in sailor phrase, "hugging the shore" of Point Lobos until arriving at the extremity of the point when he steered his direction so as to stand more out at sea and stand on his course, followed by the small boat as usual. When some distance of the Point several of the oily monsters were accommodating enough to show themselves within a respectable distance, and the boat pursued. After something of a chase which led them some way out, the Captain succeeded in getting one under his bow and plunging in his weapon. He used both, oars and sails this time in the pursuit, and we were not aware before that he could sail upon them

for we had always censured his pertinacity in approaching them with the sail set, when it seemed to us he might just as well and better leave, thinking that when the fish saw such a large white thing towering above him he would be much more frightened and make more strenuous efforts to escape than if he had been approached with the sail down. The whale after he had been struck, took several turns round and started up the coast, when all of a sudden the boat seemed to come to a stand still. The fish appeared after some seconds had elapsed a long distance ahead. And for the second time Captain Davenport the whaleman lost his whale. So much for Sabbath breaking, and it served him right for if he cannot let them alone one day out of the seven and have some kind of respect for Sunday, he ought to lose them. We have not preaching once every alternate Sunday and perhaps the parson will endeavor to instill in to him some idea of the sinfulness of whaling on Sunday though I doubt if he could effect much, having in opposition avarice backed by a species of whale madness.

In spite of his resolutions to put in two harpoons he neglected to do it. He seems to glory in the excitement of the present moment without providing at all for the future security of his prize. Twice since these eventful days he had killed two whales, the first he captured was almost abreast of our place and he acted quite in accordance as far as we could judge it the qualities of a good whaleman for he followed up his first attack with a celerity and promptness that gave the creature no time for reflection and although he did not use a second harpoon yet he planted the first one in so advantageous a place that he was able to work with good effect before the fish had recovered from the fear and astonishment with which it seems for a moment to be overcome. This one was not a very ugly one though it was pretty large, never the less it had considerable life and carried him a long distance towards the end of Point Cypress, where it was forced to yield to the approach of death and having no longer sufficient strength to keep at the surface it soon found the bottom of the sea. The whalemen in striking these humpbacks, which I believe only inhabit the coasts of California and Oregon, seek to if possible to succeed in getting the weapon in a little forward of the hump. They then have free play and are not burdened by the fishes tail but if the harpoon when thrown enters much below the hump, the rope is drawn between the two divisions of the fluke and besides not being able to draw the boat alongside as they do he rises, it is very apt to deprive the men's hands of more valuable skin than they can well afford.

The second one killed was not far from Stillwater Bay, it was quite a small one and I do not suppose it took much more than twenty minutes to dispatch him being hauled in to the bay that same evening. The next one of which I have to speak was, I think, the toughest customer that he had to deal with during his experiences on this side of the mountains. I will not be certain whether it was Sunday or not but I think it was anyhow. Father and Brother had just departed for Monterey when we saw him leave Stillwater Bay, and a few minutes after Brother came back for the spyglass and had me made haste to follow him to our small promontory on the left. Where to after fastening the hands I accordingly did, finding there Father with the horses. He engaged it watching the Captain who appeared to be among several fine whales but from want of more management as it appeared to us he could not get near a single one. I watched the boat for some time after they had gone away but not deriving much amusement from the operation I returned home. During the rest of the morning afterwards I noticed several blows outside of our bay and wondered why they were not seen from the boat. When it was past noon they came our way and finding nothing proceeded to a patch of kelp off Sanctuary Point, there stationing himself in wait for any chance that providence should see fit to send him for among this growth of seaweed is a favorite place for the whales to roll and clean themselves. Well, sure enough, fortune favored him.

We had hardly got things prepared for dinner when several very nice looking fish passed our islands on their way to that place. When they arrived they commenced rolling and one of them that seemed rather suspicious of the aspect of affairs kept only his head above water while he reconnoitered. But fatal curiosity, as he neared the enemy post the Captain seeing that this evidently was his best advantage gave the word and away they glided with the swiftness of a shark after its prey. In a moment the fish wheeled and rove and strove to gain the lower regions but they were too quick for him. At its last was yet near the surface (a moment more would have been too late) the iron laced the water and instantly took effect but only it was before the hump. After several times the whale started in a direct line for our place passed our islands and at full speed and disappeared from our intensely interested gaze behind our largest promontory. We instantly left our dinner untouched and scampered like a bevy of frightened rabbits to the end of the point where we were told by the Chinamen that they were gone and so they were on a long ride of two or three minutes. We were desirous of catching a sight of the boat, so we followed on by the coast but we had our trouble for our pains as respected

seeing any whale for when we had viewed almost to Point Cypress we met the Captain coming back with sail up. He had cut the rope being no longer able to hold on as the boat rose over the larger rolling and fell into the gulf below without eminent danger of being hauled under. The rope in this case was drawn between the dominance of the fluke and was the reason why he was dragged so far without being able to do much damage to the fish. Besides skinning the hands of the men the captain was drenched from head to heels and had acquired a lame shoulder from his exertions in throwing the line from such a distance.

So much, my dear Aunt, of whaling in Carmel.

Editor's Note: This diary was transcribed by Christina Higby, and the Introduction written by the editor. We are grateful for Lee Atha Gore's contribution of the diaries and the cover photo.

Marilyn McMorran
Editor

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