

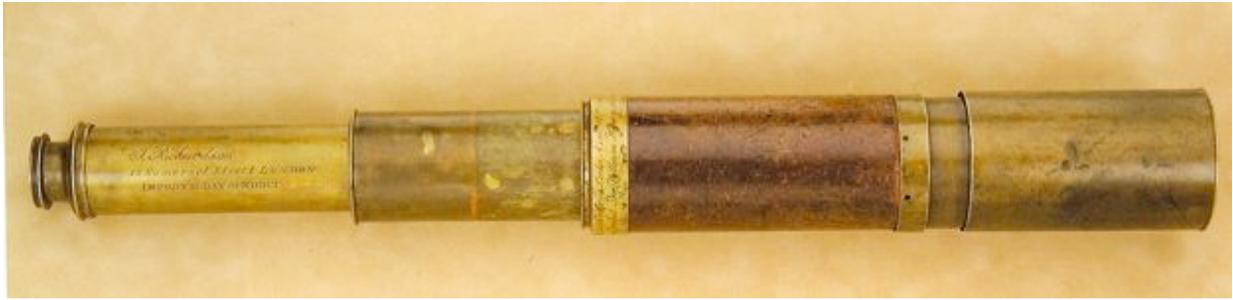
OLIVER HAZARD PERRY'S TELESCOPE: A LOOK INTO THE PAST



by Charles W. Thayer
University of Pennsylvania

This telescope was the most important weapon in Perry's arsenal at the Battle of Lake Erie on September 20, 1813. He used it to view the British fleet from Put-in-Bay, whence he sailed to battle; to assess his enemy's strength and intentions; and to read the signal flags of his own fleet. After his flagship *Lawrence* suffered 80% casualties and virtual destruction, Perry took his flag "Don't Give Up the Ship," and presumably this telescope, as he was rowed to the *Niagara* to continue the contest. Fifteen minutes later, the battle was won -- the first time American arms had prevailed over an enemy fleet -- opening up the old Northwest to settlement in what is now Ohio, Indiana, and Michigan.

Instrumental to Perry's victory was General William Henry Harrison, later to become president of the United States. Harrison had greatly aided Perry's preparation for battle, even contributing 150 Kentucky riflemen as sharpshooters for his fleet, in contrast to Perry's own unsupportive commander, Commodore Isaac Chauncey. Perry's control of Lake Erie then made possible Harrison's victory over British land forces at the Battle of the Thames on October 5, 1813. As a result of these accomplishments, the pair were fêted at an elaborate dinner in Buffalo, New York, on October 25th: the first of a long series of triumphal celebrations in which the grateful young nation lauded its new heroes. An article in the *Buffalo Gazette* on November 2, 1813 (reprinted June 29, 1913) recounted that each of the 18 toasts were accompanied by a thirteen-gun salute for the two men.



Further cementing the pair's friendship and support, Perry presented his telescope to Harrison, likely during the same round of celebrations, though it is assumed that the two-line presentation inscription on one of the telescope's brass mountings was added on Harrison's order after his return home. It reads:

*Used by Com. Perry in the action on Lake Erie 10th Sept 1813,
and presented by him to his friend Gen. William Henry Harrison.*

When a reporter, Brooks, visited Harrison during his presidential campaign in 1840 at his home on the North Bend of the Ohio (just downriver from Cincinnati), he observed this telescope in a place of honor over the fireplace alongside framed resolutions of Congress and Kentucky. Brooks noted that there was "a little Telescope, his near and dear friend Commodore Perry gave him, used in espying the enemy's fleet in the battle of Lake Erie, when he wrote to Harrison – 'we have met the enemy and they are ours.'" Brooks wrote that these testimonials were worth more than "all the wealth of Croesus."

Indeed, the telescope is all the more valuable because neither Perry nor Harrison left many tangible relicts, having died young. Nor do they appear to have met again after the events of 1813. Harrison was in Ohio. Perry was stationed on the East Coast, then sent on a diplomatic mission to Venezuela, where he died of Yellow Fever in 1819. In light of these events, this telescope becomes perhaps the only, and is certainly the most significant, of any object so closely linked to both men.

Clearly, Harrison's family prized it. It was passed directly from father to son, and finally to daughter, until it was sold at auction in 2002. Its provenance is as follows:

- 1) William Henry Harrison, U.S. President.
- 2) John Scott Harrison of North Bend, Ohio, U.S. Congressman.
- 3) John Scott Harrison, Jr. of North Bend, Ohio. His father gave him the telescope in 1872 when John Scott Harrison, Jr. moved to Kansas City, Missouri. During his ownership, the objective lens was lost; it is still missing. The deformed threads will no longer accept a lens-mounting ring. Their deep patina shows that this has long been the case.
- 4) Lytle Harrison of Kansas City, Missouri. Lytle Harrison received the telescope from his father in 1907 when he moved to Mercedes, Texas.
- 5) Lytle Harrison, Jr. of Beverly Hills, California. His father presented him with the telescope in 1940 along with a presentation letter detailing this history; a copy of this letter accompanies the telescope. A Bicentennial newspaper article in the *Glendale News Press* pictures Lyle Harrison, Jr. with the telescope, recounting this provenance.
- 6) Loretta Harrison Frank, daughter of Lyle Harrison, Jr. and great-great-great granddaughter of President William Henry Harrison. She sold it via Hewlett's auction in Le Grand, California, to the present owners.

Other markings include:

J. Richardson
16 Somerset street London
Improv'd Day or Night

This text is engraved on the smallest "draw," near the objective, and refers to the telescope's maker, John Richardson II, who was at this London address from 1801-1822.

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*Thanks to Walter Rybka of the Erie, Pennsylvania Museum
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