clearly indicate the exact route the Pioneer Line followed. If there is any criticism of this excellent book, it is that the diary is crowded by excessive editorial commentary and supporting material — an introduction, editor’s afterword, biographical information on the men mentioned in the text, graves recorded, notes, bibliography, and index. One wonders whether some of this material could have been consolidated, shortened, or eliminated. The diary seems strong enough to stand without so much editorial support.

Aside from this, Overland to California with the Pioneer Line stands out as a remarkable addition to a growing list of documentary sources on the American West.

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Skibo. By Joseph Frazier Wall.


The name of Andrew Carnegie is still impressive, as is evidenced by the fact that this history of an otherwise rather undistinguished Scottish castle (though by a well-known author) is published by a very prestigious press.

Skibo (a name perhaps derived from Schytherbolle — fairy place — the name it bore when first recorded in 1225) has a long history. Excavations show the area was occupied early by Picts, and perhaps almost a millennium ago by Norsemen, who may have called it ski-bo, place of ships. They may have had a castle there upon whose ruins Gilbert de Moravia may have had the castle Schytherbolle built as his home about seven and a half centuries ago.

In 1222 Gilbert was named bishop of Caithness, and he erected a cathedral at Dornoch, on the ruins of an old Culdee church. Following his death in 1245 he was canonized by Rome, and for three hundred more years Skibo Castle continued as the residence of the bishops until it was deeded to John Gray, whose family occupied it for two more centuries. Following this time it changed hands rather frequently except for the Dempster family’s ninety-one years, often because its owners were in financial difficulties. Charles Sutherland-Walker razed and rebuilt Skibo in 1872 and went bankrupt. Its relative obscurity is
evidenced by the fact that its entire history, prior to Carnegie’s purchase, occupies but thirty-four pages of Wall’s book.

In 1897 Carnegie leased Skibo with an option to buy, and concluded the purchase the following year for £85,000, including the castle and about 22,000 acres. He immediately began reconstruction of the building erected only a quarter century before, retaining only the central part, adding a wing to the north and extensive ones — much larger than the original — on the south and west.

From this time forward, Skibo is much more the story of Andrew Carnegie and his family than of the castle. And while much of the material — such as the addition of a waterfall and Skibo’s distinguished visitors — is appropriate and even important, this cannot be said of the political situation in America, the details of Morgan’s formation of United States Steel, and some of Carnegie’s philanthropies.

Following his death in 1919, until Skibo was offered to the United Kingdom Trust Fund in 1981, the story is largely concerned with his widow, Louise Whitfield Carnegie, until her death in 1926; her daughter, Margaret Carnegie Miller, and their families. During the last thirty-five years of Carnegie ownership of the castle, the book reads distressingly like a “how the other half lives,” with a rather tedious segment on Scottish game and fishing laws and customs (pp. 136-40).

Some of this space might well have been used for the economics of the castle and its environs — matters occasionally referred to in a vague way, but never explained: taxes, service and upkeep costs, and dealings with the numerous farm tenants. Wall recognizes the importance of such matters: “Always Skibo has gone to the economic victors of any particular age,” the Vikings, the Church, landed gentry, and industrialists (p. 181f.). The final purchaser of the castle was Derek Holt, who had made his fortune in recreational facilities and who planned to live in the castle and develop it as a luxury guest house.

For the most part Skibo is charmingly written, but it is marred by one serious error. Carnegie’s “A League of Peace,” Independent, October 1914, was not “his last published article” (p. 91) by fifteen months. There are also some unfortunate solecisms (“retreated back” twice) p. 7; “... not the least of which being” (p. 13); and even confusing statements: “No detail was too insignificant to be overlooked or disregarded” (p. 72).

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