

## Who was Jay Cooke?

Hi! This is Kristine Hiller, Interpretive Naturalist at Jay Cooke State Park.

One of the most common questions we get is how the park was developed and who it's named after. Many Minnesota state parks were named after local people or landmarks, but if you search for Jay Cooke on the Internet, you'll find that he wasn't even from the area – the park is named after a banker from Philadelphia who lived from 1821 until 1905!

So you might wonder, how in the world does a man from Pennsylvania get a Minnesota state park named after him? You have to go pretty far back in history to find the answer.

Many people might recognize Jay Cooke from his connection with the Civil War. As a banker, he sold war bonds to help raise almost a billion dollars to fund the Union – or government – side of the war. In the process he also became a millionaire himself, and he made quite a few new influential friends.

After the war, Jay Cooke became interested in developing the western frontier and looked for projects to invest his money into. One of the projects was the Northern Pacific Railroad, a railway that would start in Carlton, Minnesota and head west toward Tacoma, Washington. If you check out Carlton, Minnesota on a map, you'll find that this town is right outside the boundaries of the park. The answer to where the park came from is hopefully becoming clearer.

In 1868, Jay Cooke sailed by steamer ship along Lake Superior into Duluth, Minnesota so he could see where his new railroad would begin. At the time, Duluth was just a small town with fewer than 300 people living along the shore. To get around, he traveled by small boat, walked, or rode a horse along an extremely rough military road. He started up the St. Louis River by boat until dangerous rapids forced him to continue the rest of his journey on land.

Finally, he reached the dalles of the St. Louis River between Thomson and Carlton, Minnesota. As he stood along the banks, he was so impressed by the power of the St. Louis that he decided to buy land along the river, with the idea that someday he could harness that power for industry.

It took quite a while before that idea would actually be developed – it wasn't until 1891 that he built the St. Louis River Brick and Slate Factory. Although it was only in production for a few years, this factory used the power of the river's water to operate the machinery to produce slate bricks. Many of these bricks were used to construct buildings in the growing towns in the area. Today if you go to the site of the Thomson Dam, you can still find the crumbling foundation of this factory and maybe even one of the bricks that it produced.

In 1905, at the age of 83, Jay Cooke died at his home in Ogontz, Pennsylvania, just a few days after the second phase of his river development project had begun. On February 12 of that year, work began on the construction of the Thomson Hydroelectric Project, which would use the power of the river to generate electricity for the growing city of Duluth. On September 13, 1907, the second largest hydroelectric plant in the world produced its first spark of electricity. More than 100 years later, this power plant is still in operation and occasionally opens for summer tours of the facilities.

Now, let's see... So far, he's funded the Civil War, and he's built a railroad, a brick factory and a power plant. We're getting closer to figuring out how the park came to be!

After the power plant was built, Jay Cooke's heirs and the owners of the power company realized they had a lot of leftover land that wasn't needed for the project, so in 1915, they decided to donate the land to the State of Minnesota to make a state park. There was one little problem though – the land had \$18,000 in back taxes that needed to be paid off before the State could accept the land donation.

Several local businessmen got together to raise the money needed to pay off these taxes. One of those men was Henry Oldenburg, and if we hadn't named the park after Jay Cooke, we probably would have named it after him. If you look at the park map you'll see Oldenburg Point, a popular picnic area with an incredible view of the St. Louis River Valley. While you're out at the point, take a hike along the Ogantz Trail, which is named after a childhood friend of Jay Cooke's. This is yet another connection to the man from Pennsylvania who managed to get a Minnesota state park named after him.

For more information on Jay Cooke State Park, attend one of our many year-round naturalist programs or stop by the visitor center.