

Edward A. Whitney



Sheridan's First & Foremost Benefactor

Edward A. Whitney created the first charitable trust for educational purposes in Wyoming when his estate trustees established Whitney Benefits Incorporated.

In the planning stages for the last three decades of Whitney's life, his Foundation was established in 1927, ten years after his death. Since then, the trust's earnings have contributed over \$50 million to various community institutions to improve the lives of Sheridan County residents.

No less important, in 1885 Whitney brought much-needed capital, as well as his skills as a banker and community leader, investing these in the fledgling town of Sheridan.



Living very frugally, Whitney never married, left no descendants, and little record of his personal life. The photos in this exhibit are the only known images of the man.

The majority of what is known about him came to light in 2004, when a trunk of Whitney's possessions was discovered. The trunk contained Whitney's personal items, along with photos, receipts for hotels and travel, passports, a few letters, and several ledger books.

Among the papers found was a page from a family history entitled *The Descendants of John Whitney, Who Came from London England, to Watertown, Massachusetts, in 1635*. It was published in 1895, and while it contains much information about the prosperous, prominent, and numerous Whitney family, there is scant information about Edward's immediate family, and later researchers have acknowledged errors in the report.

Sheridan's Very Own *International Man of Mystery*



Another factor that makes Edward Whitney's past a bit vague is that neither he nor his brother had any descendants, making them less interesting to family genealogists.

The photographic evidence of Whitney's life is scant too. One of the best photos of Whitney (and one of perhaps three photos of him in Sheridan) shows him with his back to the camera, and getting a good look at the man who "adopted" Sheridan is quite difficult.



The Early Years – Family Ties Lost and Found

The third child of Abel and Pamela (Babcock) Whitney, Edward Augustus was born March 24, 1843 in Dalton, Massachusetts.

Edward's father, Abel was a prominent merchant in the wholesale flour business there. Edward's brother John, was four years his senior. Edward also had two sisters; Clarissa, two years older, and Mary Louisa, two years younger. Tragedy struck the family when Edward was very young. His sister Mary Louisa died in 1846, and in 1849, both his mother and older sister died within three months of each other.



Between 1843 and 1850 the family moved from Dalton on the far western side of the state, to Lowell, Massachusetts, in the northeast corner of the state. In Lowell, Edward's father owned a book store and his brother John worked there as a clerk.

The Early Years

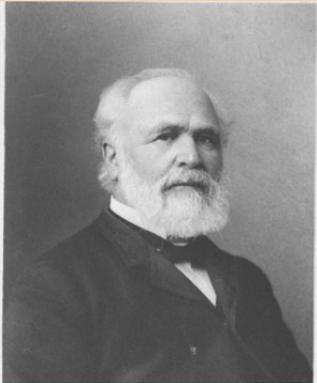
Edward's father Abel remarried in 1850, this time to Belinda Baxter Bliss, and they had two children, Henry Dwight, and Mary Ella.



The Early Years



From 1856 to 1859, Edward attended the Sillig Institution, a boy's school near Vevey, Switzerland. The school promoted its high quality education in classical, scientific, military and commercial subjects, as well as guidance in general, moral, mental, and physical development. All lessons were taught in French, and the school itself was located on the Swiss Riviera, an area noted for its healthful climate. Great emphasis was placed on healthful outdoor exercise, and hiking in the Alps was apparently one of Edward's favorite activities. The length of Edward's stay there is a bit uncertain, however, he was back in the states in time to be counted on both the 1850 and 1860 census.



Edward's uncle,
Josiah Dwight Whitney, Sr.

Lost Siblings

Tragedy struck the family again, when Henry died in 1860, and Mary Ella died in 1867.

After returning from Switzerland (1859), Edward, now 17, moved to Northampton, Massachusetts and lived with his uncle, Josiah Dwight Whitney. Now retired, Josiah had been in the flour business, and was a broker and private banker before becoming the cashier (manager) of the Northampton Bank. In the 1850s he served as the bank's President and Director. Uncle Josiah was also active in charity, community, and church work.



A Banker's Apprentice

Josiah had a very large family, and Edward must have enjoyed his cousins immensely. (In fact, Josiah fathered fourteen children with two wives). The photos of other young people found in Whitney's trunk (right) are probably those cousins.

According to the 1860 Census, Edward worked as a clerk in his uncle's bank, and his cousin Henry, who was the same age, was a student at Yale College.



Cousins Rachel and Henry,
Edward A. Whitney, and his
aunt.

Touched by the Civil War



Edward and Henry

In August, 1862, Edward and his cousin Henry enlisted in the 52d Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry Regiment. Their unit was involved in the assault of Port Hudson in July, 1863, which gained control of the Hudson River for the Union Army. Both Edward and Henry rose in the ranks and mustered out at the end of their nine month term of enlistment.

Cousin Henry served in other positions related to the war, and later resumed his studies in theology at Princeton. He was later a pastor in the Congregational Church, a professor of rhetoric and English literature at Beloit College, Wisconsin, and retired as the librarian of Blackstone Memorial Library, Branford, Connecticut.

A Famous Cousin

Another cousin, Henry's brother, J.D. Whitney, was quite a bit older, was a Yale College graduate, and later a professor of mining and practical geology at Harvard University. Cousin Josiah was also employed on a number of official geological surveys for the U.S. government around Lake Superior, and in Wisconsin, Illinois, and Iowa. He was appointed the state geologist of California in 1860, a post he held until 1874. Josiah's team produced *The Geological Survey of California* which included recommendations to set aside Yosemite Valley as a national park. He was also involved in a scientific feud with John Muir over a geological formation theory, of which Muir turned out to be the winner. Josiah was though, the first white person to climb the highest mountain in the United States, which was named in his honor.

Edward's cousin Josiah Dwight Whitney, Jr. and members of the California Geological Survey.



Namesake of Mt. Whitney

This connection may be where Edward's interest in geology developed. At some point, it is believed that Edward spent another three years in Europe, this time studying geology in France. Due to the number of acknowledged errors in the source document of this information, Edward's previous study may have been mistaken for further studies abroad, and the subject of his study may have been in error also, since he was never employed as a geologist, and the remainder of his career was in banking and investments. It is possible that Edward accompanied his illustrious cousin on several surveying expeditions in the 1860s, and those experiences later brought him back out west.



Mt. Whitney, named in honor of Edward's cousin, Josiah Dwight Whitney, Jr.

Madrid, 1869



The photo at left is marked Madrid, 1869, and would seem to indicate further travels for young Whitney. He is wearing the cloak that he kept all his life – it was found with his other possessions in the trunk. Another photo made at about the same time was found in Whitney's trunk. It is also a tintype, and the young lady appears to be Edward's cousin, Alice.



There are no other records of Edward's studies or activities until 1870, when he appears on the US Census. Now 26, Edward is living alone or in a rooming house, still in Northampton. His occupation is listed as Bank Accountant, and he owns personal property worth \$5,000. It seems his talent for banking and investment was developing quite effectively.

West Union, Iowa

In 1872, Whitney moved to West Union, Iowa and co-founded the Fayette County National Bank, serving as its first cashier. A newspaper article from the West Union Gazette revealed that he was “an energetic public spirited citizen...and during his term as mayor of the city he made his mark in the line of public improvements that will exist for all time.” The article goes on to say that “His popularity never waned, and none of those who have gone from West Union are more warmly greeted on a return visit than he is.”

One of the few photographs in Whitney’s trunk was from friends in West Union. The warm inscription on the back indicated that they were good friends.



To Take in the Dry Western Air

Mr. Whitney next turns up in Miles City, Montana, with investments in livestock being a possible connection. In 1885, Whitney arrives in Sheridan. Miles City seems to have funneled several livestock dealers down to Sheridan around this time and into the 1890s, including William and Malcolm Moncrief, and Oliver Henry Wallop.

It has also been said that Whitney came to the Sheridan area for his health. His medical records indicate that he suffered from chronic broncheictasis, one of the chronic obstructive pulmonary diseases (COPDs). This condition may have caused Whitney to keep to himself, but the dry western climate must have offered some relief.



Sheridan 1885

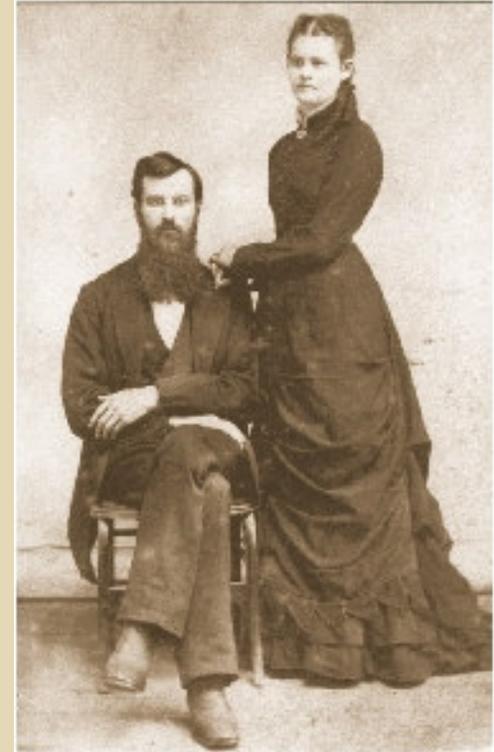
In the photo at left, Mr. Whitney, right stands next to B.F. Perkins in front of the Bank of Sheridan around 1901, when concrete sidewalks were installed downtown.

Whitney must have seen potential in the then, three year-old town. He purchased John Loucks' store on the northwest corner of Main and Loucks Street -- the structure that just happened to have been made from the logs of the original Mandel Post Office. Loucks had moved it to Main Street in 1883, expanded it, and added a second floor.

Sheridan, 1885

The cabin had “history” already: it was the site of Sheridan’s first Post Office, store, election, Christmas party, and school. Mr. Whitney made it Sheridan’s first bank too; the Bank of Sheridan. Whitney added the clapboard siding and other amenities, and moved into an upstairs room. The building also housed the office of Sheridan’s first attorney, Tom Cotton, and later, Loucks and Whitney installed a reading room which served as Sheridan’s first library.

A model of Mr. Whitney’s bank is on the northwest corner of Main and Loucks streets. See if you can find it and Mr. Whitney in the nearby diorama.



Mr. and Mrs. John
Deitrich Loucks.

A Frugal and Solitary Life

From all appearances, Mr. Whitney lived a frugal and solitary life. While it would probably not be fair to call him a hermit, he did seem to be a man who enjoyed his privacy. According to long-time Whitney benefits board member Vernon Griffith, “Whitney frequently ate dinner at the old Windsor Hotel, and he always sat in at a corner table and faced the wall.”



Investor and Sheridan Mayor

The town of 70 in 1885 grew to nearly 1,000 by 1890, and the bank's depositors numbered 560. Partnering with other Sheridan investors including, John Kendrick, Whitney's bank became the First National Bank, and he continued at the helm as President and stockholder. His investments multiplied in other endeavors as well, including the livestock business, and he owned about 10 ranches in Sheridan and Johnson Counties. One of these was the Adams Ranch, now the site of Sheridan College, which Mr. Whitney's foundation still holds.



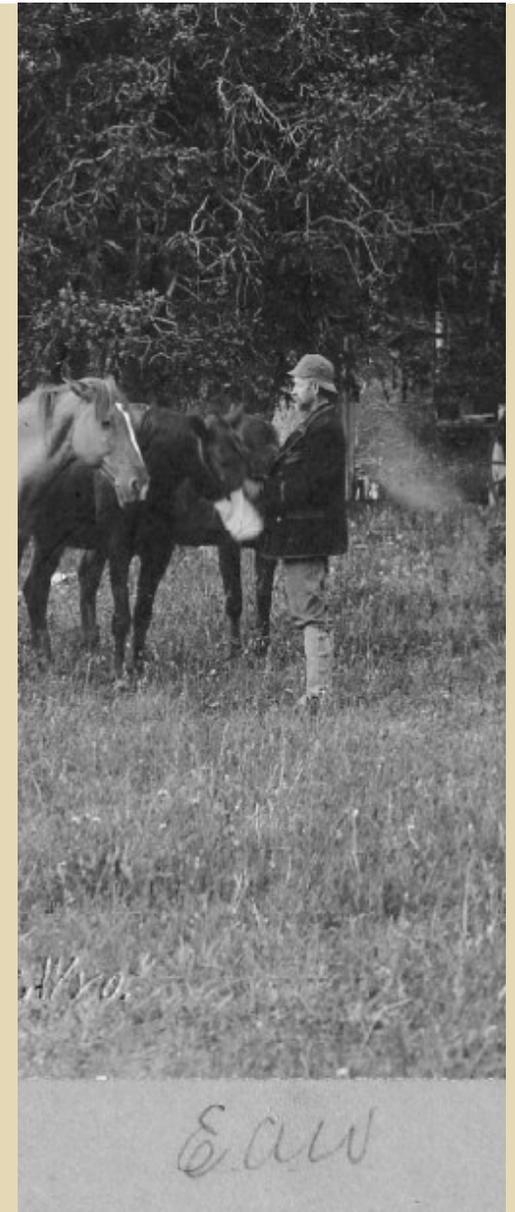
Whitney was also a partner in the Sheridan Land Company which re-channeled Little Goose Creek and built the Sheridan Inn. It is no surprise that Whitney also invested in the area's coal mines. And like in West Union, Iowa, Whitney became an active citizen of the community, following John Loucks as mayor of Sheridan.

A “new” photo of E.A. Whitney

A new photo of Mr. Whitney was recently found in the Historical Society’s collections. It was taken by J. G. Stimson on a camping trip in the 1890s. Once again, we are not able to get a really good look at the man.



A close-up



The First National Bank



In 1909, the little frame bank was moved to Loucks Street, and Mr. Whitney moved with it. A large brick building replaced it, and it continued to serve the town until it was torn down in 1970.

The present Bank of the West sits on the site of Sheridan's original bank.

Photo courtesy of Whitney Benefits, Inc.



During Whitney's life in Sheridan, much of his time was spent traveling abroad, and stories of his trips appeared in Sheridan newspapers. Receipts, tickets, passport, and letters found in his trunk illustrated a busy life of travel from the 1890s through the 1910s.

A March 20, 1902 article in the Sheridan Post reported that *E. A. Whitney, President of the Sheridan Banking Company, departed yesterday morning for his trip around the world. ... He will go through New York, Liverpool, Moscow, Siberia, Japan, China, the Philippines and expects to reach Australia by the time warm weather sets in. Mr. Whitney travels more than half of his time, he is a close observer, and already has a mint of information which is only gained by visiting the different countries.* Other trips took him all over Europe, Africa, and the Hindu Kush, the high mountains of modern day Pakistan.

A Trip to Tokyo

A letter in Mr. Whitney's trunk revealed that this photo was taken by a friend who was a German physician. It is one of only a few photos of Whitney and the one on which an oil painting of him was based.

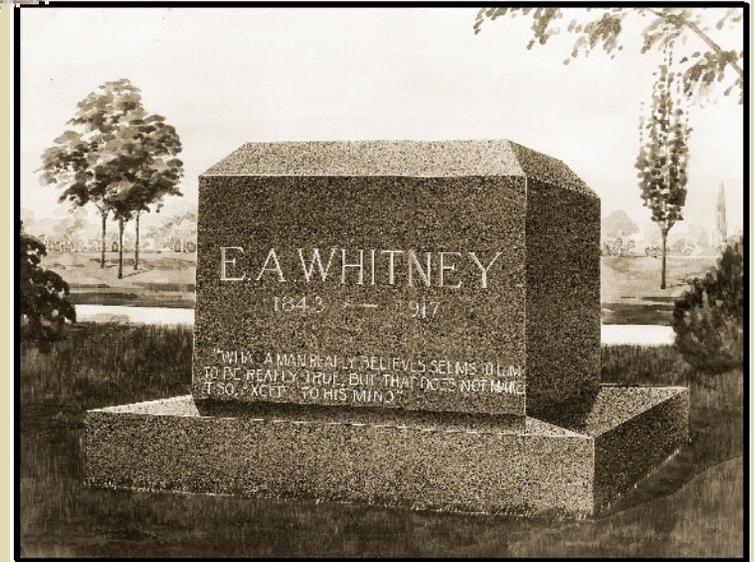


EDWARD A. WHITNEY

NOVEMBER 18, 1917

MARCH 24, 1843

Dead at
age 74



Mr. Whitney died at the age of 74 on November 18, 1917. The cause of his death was chronic bronchiectasis, from which he had suffered for a number of years.

Whitney's will instructed that his cremated ashes be divided and half buried at Sheridan's Mount Hope Cemetery.

This is an artist's rendering of Mr. Whitney's headstone in Mount Hope Cemetery. The inscription he specified reads:

What a man really believes seems to him to be really true, but that does not make it so, except to his mind."

Buried in Sheridan and Switzerland

The other half were to be buried across the lake from the boarding school he had attended as a boy. His wishes were very specific; the burial site was to have an unobstructed view of the Dent du Midi Mountains near Lake Geneva. Vevev. Switzerland



Joseph Dayton Thorn, the executor of Whitney's estate deposited the ashes in 1921 while on a 3 month vacation in Europe. (See nearby photo.)

The Whitney Trust

In 1926, the Whitney Trust Company building was created as the home for the Sheridan Banking Company and Sheridan Credit Savings Bank, founded by Whitney in 1894. Drawings of that building can be seen nearby, and the building itself is now home to the First Interstate Bank and sits at the corner of S. Main and Loucks Street



In 1927, his estate trustees established Whitney Benefits Incorporated according to the very precise instructions in his will. Since the student loan program began in 1928, Whitney benefits has provided over \$20,000,000 in no interest loans to approximately 5,000 college and vocational students. Additional moneys specified in the will support Sheridan College, the Sheridan YMCA, Whitney Commons Park, the Sheridan Ice Rink and the Whitney community building. More recently, the Henry Burgess bridge was built to link Kendrick Park and Whitney Commons.

Hi Gift Keeps on Giving...

Due to government restrictions in 1973, Whitney Benefits was prohibited from mining substantial coal deposits on land it owned. Local attorneys Henry Burgess and Larry Yonkee represented Whitney Benefits in a suit with the U.S. Department of the Interior for compensation for the value of the coal which could not be mined. Heard in at least six different courts, the suit lasted for twenty-two years!

Finally, in 1995 the court ruled in favor of Whitney Benefits. Unfortunately, Henry Burgess died shortly before the settlement was finalized but Yonkee saw the case to its conclusion.

In the largest “takings” award in U.S. history at that time, the court awarded Whitney Benefits over \$60 million in compensation for the lost value of the coal.

Community Benefactor

This sum has enabled Whitney Benefits to dramatically expand its role as a community asset, and no doubt Edward Whitney would be pleased with all his estate has accomplished.

Upon the death of Edward's uncle Josiah in 1869, it was said that

“Many children of other than his own household rise up and call him blessed.”

It seems that the same can be said for his nephew today.

In Appreciation

Edward A. Whitney, Sheridan's First and Foremost Benefactor was one of the museum's featured exhibits in 2007.

Mr. Whitney's artifacts from "the trunk" were loaned to the museum by the Board of Whitney Benefits, Inc. which comprised the exhibit along with the text and photos in this presentation.

Many thanks to the following for their assistance:

Executive Director Pat Henderson

&

Whitney Benefits board members:

Sam Street, Sam Scott,

&

Mary Ellen McWilliams, former member, for her research which has helped us get to know and appreciate this remarkable man.

For further information, please contact Museum Director and Curator,
Dana Prater.

