

MAHANAOY CITY CHRONICLES/Researched by Lorraine Stanton

He knew Mahanoy and wild West

By BILL O'BRIEN
Herald writer

AMOS WHETSTONE was a pioneer who knew Mahanoy City in its primitive days, then spent much of his adult life pursuing an even more primitive pioneer existence as a cowboy riding the ranges of the wild wild West.

Despite the fact that two-thirds of his life were devoted to high adventure in the great western expanse, he never forgot Mahanoy City and always considered it his home town.

The educational background Whetstone received in the schools of Mahanoy carried him through the remainder of his life and enabled him to write an autobiography so that the people of Mahanoy might know where the fortunes of life had taken him.

This was the story of Amos Whetstone's life, written by his own hand and published in the Record-American in 1925, two years before his death:

Feb. 3, 1865, I was born about two miles from Tamaqua on the old Whetstone farm. I moved to Mahanoy City with my parents, Mr. and Mrs. Elias Whetstone, the following year.

My family lived at 92 S. Main St. The first school I attended was the Spruce street house, Miss Mary J. McHugh being the first teacher. The school was so crowded we only attended the morning session each day.

My next school was the little old log school to the east of the Spruce street building, Miss Maria Doeppin was the teacher.

My third year was spent in the old Pine street building with Miss Hannah Seligman as teacher. My fourth and fifth years found me back in Spruce street with Miss Doeppin and Mr. Alexander Burroughs.

My grammar school teacher was Mrs. Jane M. Lyon and my high school teacher and principal was Mr. Geoffrey Wade. I was very fair in drawing and my maps were on Mrs. Lyon's school room walls for a number of years.

No special incident occurred other than the average boy's life, except a visit to the Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia in 1876. This was the great adventure up to that time.

I GRADUATED from high school in June 1881 and on the evening of July 4 my sister Amanda (Class of 1876) and I left Mahanoy City to join our family in Colorado, they having left the previous year for the western country. A short distance beyond Denver we had to finish our journey by wagon over the Rocky Mountains to Middle Park. My sister contracted mountain fever and died six weeks after we arrived.

The first work I did was mining for gold under my older brother, John. This was in the mountain at an elevation of 10,000 feet. After a few months at this work I went to my father's ranch at Middle Park and for the next 12 years I lived the life of a cowboy except for short periods some winters when I worked in the gold mines.

During this period I covered in the saddle much of Colorado,



Amos Whetstone
Coal cracker cowboy

Wyoming and Utah. The life was wild, free, crude, hard and healthy. Days and nights were spent outdoors. Unless heavy rains came, we did not use or tents and for months at a stretch we were not under a roof. I became an expert horseman and rode many wild bucking broncos. Deer, elk, antelope, bear and other game was plentiful. We always had an abundance of fresh meat.

IN PARTNERSHIP with my brother James we settled ranches in northwest Colorado on the Yumpa or Bear River. It was beautiful country. Grass from two

to four feet tall with game so abundant we always had more than we could use. This section became the greatest cattle country in the state and my brother still lives on the ranch we located there.

Our nearest railroad point was 175 miles away. Denver was 240 miles from us and we went to market only once a year. We usually took two four-horse teams to bring supplies enough to last a year. It would take from 12 days to two weeks to make the round trip.

As one can surmise, in a wild country like this, where you could ride for fifty miles without seeing habitation of any kind, and wild game everwhere, many stirring adventures occurred. Yet, so natural were these occurrences, in spite of results, that we thought little of them, for they were the lot of all who lived this life.

IN THE WINTER of 1886, on the day of my 21st birthday, I left my work in a gold mine at Breckonridge and I started on a snowshoe trip of 160 miles to locate a piece of government land. I used Norwegian skis. The snow was from two to 10 feet deep. Much of the route was unfamiliar to me and there were no roads or trails to follow.

Habitations were from 15 to 25 miles apart and I guided myself through the mountains by descriptions of ranges, streams and a general knowledge of the topography.

Many things happened — a snowslide, a runaway snowshoe, a 20-foot fall over rock ledge, saved by the snow at the bottom.

I became snow blind and traveled one day practically sightless, finally arriving at a cabin with no one at home. There I stayed for three days with nothing to eat but some flour and water baked without leavening, almost blind all the time and suffering agonies with my eyes.

I was found by a rancher passing by on snowshoes who led me to his cabin where I stayed until my eyes recovered. I resumed my journey, traveling on moonlit nights and finally arrived at my destination. It was another incident in a pioneer's life.

AFTER 12 YEARS in the cattle business I sold out and went to Denver where I became connected with a large coal company which sent me to one of their mines in southern Colorado. There I married and remained in the coal business at Trinidad until 1904 when I sold out and returned to Denver to engage in brick manufacturing.

After living there four years I went to Seattle, Washington, to superintend the building of a large brick plant. I remained five years and returned to Denver for six months before finally returning to Seattle to make it my home ever since.

For years my health has been poor due to rheumatism and bronchitis, probably due to exposure in the earlier years on the ranches. For nearly a year I could do nothing, but in 1914 I went north to Prince Rupert, British Columbia, to superintend the construction of a large brick plant. The great war starting out

put an end to this enterprise so I returned to Seattle.

In the fall of 1914 I went to Escondo, lower California, to superintend the installation of a hydro-electric power plant. Since 1920 I have been connected with the Northern Life Insurance Company of Seattle.

Only twice since leaving Mahanoy City in 1881 have I visited the old home town. The first time was in November 1893 when the death of my niece, Edna Bailey of Dealno, took me to the old scenes of my boyhood for two weeks. The next time was for only 24 hours in the summer of 1904 when I was east to buy machinery for the Denver Brick Plant.

MR. WHETSTONE died at his Seattle home on July 8, 1927. He was 58 years old and left a wife, two sons and two daughters.

His brother John was living in California and a sister, Hannah Phelps, in Denver. The other brother, James, died July 24, 1926.

They had a halfbrother and halfsister, Frank and Edna, residing in Oklahoma.

The descendants of Amos Whetstone today are probably scattered all over the land. Some months ago we received a letter from one of his great-grandchildren, Alison Hinman of Charlotte, North Carolina, seeking information about him.

Page 37 of the 1963 Mahanoy City centennial history book contains a picture of the class of in which his sister Amanda was a member before she left with him on the fateful trip to Colorado which cost her her life.