

CHAUNCEY B. WHITNEY

Ellsworth Co. 1873

The inscription is brief as was his life and career, but he led an active life while in Kansas. Chauncey Belden Whitney was born March 31st, 1842. Table is known of his early life, nor when he came to Kansas. Forsyth listed him as one of those who had service in the Civil War.

Ellsworth, Kansas, was established in January 1867 and Whitney was one of its early settlers. At the September 11th, 1867, meeting of the Ellsworth County commissioners he was referred to as constable. In April 1868, he was reelected constable.

Although C. B. Whitney was listed as the Second Lieutenant on the August 19th, 1868, roll of the First Independent Company of the Kansas State Militia at Hays City, he joined the Forsyth Scouts on August 28, 1868. Historians appreciate Whitney's help because he kept a diary from August 29, 1868, through September 30, 1868. As time tends to shade dates and sequences, the diary has served as a reference but even it shows confusion which may have been caused by stress. It seems strange but the following are the only entries in the little book that Whitney used for a diary:



Former scout Chauncey B. Whitney, while Sheriff of Ellsworth County, was shot and killed by Billy Thompson, August 15, 1873. Courtesy Kansas State Historical Society.

August 29, 1868

Left Hays at two P.M.; marched until eleven and camped among the hills.

30th

Started at seven o'clock for the Saline river; reached it at noon and camped for dinner. Rained last night.

31st

Rained part of the day yesterday. Killed some buffalo. About four o'clock a scout, Jo Lane reported Indians a mile or two away; false report. Camped at dark on the south fork of the Solomon.

September 1, 1868

Crossed Solomon yesterday morning. Marched until sundown and camped on Prairied Dog Creek. Was on guard last night with A.J. Pliley, my "Bunkie".

2nd

Camped last night on Beaver Creek; followed its course about ten miles for grass. The country is almost a barren desert. Prairies covered with thousands of buffalo. About ten o'clock yesterday, as a few of us were on rear guard, a sudden volley of shots brought us to the front in double-quick time. As we came over the bluff a poor, frightened antelope was seen and all unharmed.

3rd

Broke camp at eight o'clock. Country very broken. Followed Beaver to its source, then crossed to Little Beaver, on which we camped last night. Are making for Sheridan or Wallace. Ration played [out]. The country along the creek is covered with wild plums and grapes.

4th

Broke camp at 8'30 o'clock. Marched until 11:30 o'clock and fed the horses. No breakfast or dinner yesterday. Marched about forty miles and camped at eleven o'clock; made a kettle of soup for supper. Guards all asleep last night.

5th

Broke camp at eight o'clock; marched forty-five miles. Reached Fort Wallace at eleven o'clock last night. Horses all tired out. About five o'clock last night Indians were reported among the bluffs. A charge was ordered. Away all went as though the Cheyenne had rocked us, and charged upon a Mexican train. One man was thrown and badly hurt. Fort Wallace is situated on the broad level prairie, 180 miles west of Fort Harker and about 5 miles (?) east of the Colorado State line, on the south fork of Smoky Hill river. The buildings are built of a pink sandstone, dressed and polished.

6th

Lay at Wallace all day.

7th

In fort today; up to Pond City tonight, about three miles from the Fort.

8th

In fort to-day, and up to city again.

9th

In for to-day. Wrote some letters, but did not receive any.

10th

Ordered to march this morning. As we were ready to move, received a telegram from Sheridan that Indians had surrounded the town. Made a hasty march and found some

dead cattle and two dead Mexicans, but the Indians had decamped. Following the Indians about twenty miles and camped in a ravine.

11th

Marched today about twenty-five miles and camped on the head of Beaver Creek about three o'clock.

12th

Marched about forty miles without water; camped at night on Big Timber.

13th

Marched down Big timber to south fork of Republican until found an Indian camp; then struck across the country. Camped on middle branch of Republican, or Chief creek, at dark. Marched about thirty miles.

14th

On Guard last night. Marched down Chief Creek and camped. Marched about twenty-five miles.

15th

Marched up the Republican yesterday. Struck an Indian trail and followed it until sundown. Camped on Republican. Marched thirty miles.

16th

Stuck cam at sunrise. Followed Indian trail until sundown and camped on Dry Creek.

17th

About daylight this morning was aroused by the cry of Indians. Eight tried to stampede the stock; got seven horses. In a few moments the bottoms were completely filled with Cheyenne. Went across the river onto an island, when the fight commenced. About 500 attacked us on all sides, with their unearthly yells.

The Balls flew thick and fast. The colonel was the first man wounded. Lieutenant Beecher was wounded twice, as was the colonel. In a few moment eight or ten were hurt, some fatally.

The ground on which our little squad was fighting was sandy. We commenced the scoop out the sand with our hands to make intrenchments for ourselves. In a few moments I was joined by two others, who helped me.

With a butcher knife and our hands we soon had a trench which completely covered us from the enemy. Behind the works we fought the Cheyenne all day till dark.

Only two men were hurt after we intrenched ourselves. Culver was killed and McCall wounded. William Wilson was also killed early in the morning.

18th

This morning the Indians made a slight charge on us, but were speedily repulsed. The were after the three of their dead who lay about twenty yards from us.

About fifty of the Cheyenne were killed and wounded. They kept firing from the hills and ravines all day. No one hurt to-day. Two men start for Wallace [Stilwell and Trudeau started the night of the 17th].

19th

The Indians made another attack this morning, but were easily driven off. About ten o'clock this evening myself and A.J. Pliley were requested by the colonel to go to Wallace. We started, but a few rods from the battle ground we found the Indians had surrounded the camp, and forced us to return [Pliley and Whitney attempted to leave the night of the 18th and Donovan and Pliley started to Wallace on the 19th.] Was awake all night. It rained all night steadily and everybody was wet and cold. Am very lame from rheumatism.

20th

Sunday and all is quiet. No attack this morning. Last night I slept for the first time in three nights.

Our sugeon, Doctor Mooers, died this morning about daylight. He was shot in the head, He did not speak from the time he was shot until he died. We have twenty men killed and wounded; four dead.

21st

No Indians seen to-day.; all dined and supped on horse meat.

22nd

No Indians today. Killed a coyote this morning, which was very good. Most of the horse meat gone. Found some prickly pears, which were very good. Are looking anxiously for succor from fort.

23rd

Still looking for relief. Starvation is staring us in the face; nothing but horse meat.

24th

All fresh horse meat gone. Tried to kill some wolves last night but failed. The boys began to cut putrid horse meat.

My God! Have you deserted us?

25th

A day long to be remembered by our little band of heroes. Arose at daylight to feel all the horrors of starvation slowly but surely approaching. Got a light breakfast on rotten

meat. Some of the boys wandered away to find something to satisfy and appease their hunger.

About ten o'clock the cry of Indians rang through the works. Some of the men being out, eight or ten of us took out guns to rescue them if possible.

The word was given it was 'friends'. In a few moments, sure enough our friends did come.

Oh, the unspeakable joy;

Shouts of joy and tears of gladness were freely mingled. Such a shaking of hands is seldom witnessed.

Soon our hands were filled for our inner man, both in the shape of victuals and stimulants.

The day passed off in joy and gladness among friends who condoled with us over our hardships and shouted for joy at our success against the enemy.

26th

Very little sleep was done in our camp last night. To-day several hundred men came on with two field pieces.

Tomorrow we are to start for Fort Wallace, where I shall bid good-by to our brave band of scouts to prepare to return east where I will try to forget in a peaceful home the scenes of the past two years.

One man very sick to-night.

27th

Arose early this morning to prepare to start for Fort Wallace. Rolled out about ten o'clock marched twenty miles and camped at four (o'clock) on the south branch of the Republican.

Five of our boys killed and scalped a Cheyenne about one-half mile from camp.

28th

Marched thirty miles to-day and camped on a branch of Beaver. Had buffalo for supper and cooked on buffalo chips.

29th

Broke camp at seven o'clock, marched thirty miles, and camped within seven miles of Fort Wallace; wounded very bad.

30th

Broke camp at 7:30 o'clock and reached the fort at ten o'clock.

Helped get the wounded into hospital.

Drew and set up tents.

End of Diary

C.B. Whitney was not wounded and was discharged October 11, 1868.

The following excerpt from the *Leavenworth Times* honors their hero:

10/8/1868- Special to the times, Hays City, Kansas, Oct. 6th, 1868:

To-day C.B. Whitney starts for below [Hays City], I understand for the purpose of receiving a commission for his gallant and meritorious services during the campaign. Of all the scouts who left here none are more worthy than Mr. Whitney. He has acted in the capacity of Deputy Sheriff of Ellsworth county since that county was originated, and discharged the duties of that office with satisfaction to the citizens and credit to himself. We are glad to see that his services are now being appreciated.

Chauncey B. Whitney was commissioned a first lieutenant in Company A of the Second Battalion of the Kansas Militia. The battalion was called into service by governor Harvey in July 1869, and was mustered out on November 20. Company A was commanded by Captain A.J. Pliley, another veteran of the Battle of Beecher Island. The Company spend most of its Active duty as a block house on Spillman Creek in Lincoln County, just north of Ellsworth. The three officers and fifty-four men (according to Bernhart there were eight-two) were on constant guard in that area, determined to prevent further Indian depredations.

Following his Indian fighting, Whitney returned to Ellsworth County and on July 23, 1871, married Miss Nellie V. Henry at Ellsworth. Four days later he was named marshal of the city of Ellsworth. It is believed that Marshal Whitney was elected sheriff of the county at the election on November 7, 1871. Many stories exist of his adventures as marshal or sheriff. This complimentary report appeared in the December 12, 1872, *Reporter*:

Sheriff Whitney arrested at Wallace a bond thief who was trying to escape with \$8,000. He stole in the east. It takes Whitney to find them. The K.P. [formerly the Union Pacific, Eastern Division] is not a safe road for jail bird to fly over.

Unfortunately the news about Whitney in the August 21, 1873, *Reporter* told not of another capture but of his death:

COLD BLOODED MURDER

Sheriff C.B. Whitney Shot and Killed by a Drunken Desperado. [August 15, 1873]... In a moment of desperation a reckless, headstrong, half drunken man shot down in cold blood Sheriff C.B. Whitney, who was unarmed, unaided, and was advising in a friendly way the threatening desperado to give up his arms and keep the peace. We will the particulars of the unfortunate affair as correctly and as briefly as possible. Coroner Duck held an inquest Monday,...

The trouble originated over a game of cards, the players being well filled with whiskey. One or two blows were given and the parties rushed for their guns. Ben and Bill Thompson obtained their arms, went into the street and called out: "Bring out your men if you want to fight." At this time Mr. Whitney came over to them and asked them to stop their fussing; then they all started towards [Joe] Brennan's saloon. Ben remained outside,

walking up and down in front, with a rifle in his hands. Presently he pointed his rifle up street towards [Jerome] Beebe's store to Happy Jack [Moroco]. who was standing in the door-way, and fired; the ball hit the door casing, which saved Happy's life. The next moment Bill Thompson came out of the saloon with a double barreled shotgun, which he pointed at Mr. Whitney who made two attempts to get out of the way before he shot said "don't shoot"- Thompson fired and Whitney received the charge. He whirled around twice, screamed out that he was shot and called for his wife. Friends rushed to his aid and carried him home...

The unfortunate Sheriff was, in the meantime, suffering intensely, but there was a slight hope for his life. Everything was being done to relieve him; Dr. Finlaw, of Junction City was sent for, but he could not help him. The wound was mortal. The gun was loaded with buck shot and the whole charge was emptied in Whitney's arm, shoulder, and the fatal shot entered his breast, passed down through the lungs and lodged in the back bone, making an incurable wound.

Mr. Whitney was a member of the Masonic order, and he was attended by his brothers in Masonry at his bedside, and buried by them in the Episcopal church yard. Dr. Sternberg preached the funeral sermon before a very large audience of mourners and friends. The services at the grave were also impressive. Dust was rendered to dust; safe from the storms, free from cares, in the bosom of mother earth, rests the body of our late Sheriff C.B. Whitney.

It is interesting to note that the issue that told of Whitney's murder also carried an advertisement proclaiming, "C.B. WHITNEY and G. KENDALL," as "Dealers in Furniture since June 18th, 1872." The following issue, August 28, carried a similar advertisement, but it listed only, "GEO. KENDALL," as the "Dealer in Furniture." With our without the widow's agreement, the partnership appears to have been quickly dissolved.

Following Sheriff Whitney's death, on August 22, 1873, Governor Osborn issued the following proclamation:

WHEREAS, C. B. Whitney, Sheriff of Ellsworth County, Kansas, was murdered in the said county Ellsworth, on the 15th day of August, 1873, by one William Thompson, said Thompson being described as about six feet in height, 26 years of age, dark complexion, brown hair, gray eyes, and erect form; and Whereas as, the said William Thompson is now at large and a fugitive from justice;

NOW THEREFORE, know ye, that I, Thomas A. Osborn, Governor of the State of Kansas, in pursuance of law, do hereby offer a reward of FIVE HUNDRED DOLLARD for the arrest and conviction of the said William Thompson for the crime above named.

More than three years after Whitney's death, Billy Thompson was tried for the murder and on September 14, 1977, was acquitted.

The Kansas Census of 1875 listed one Nellie V. Whitney, a teacher, of Ellsworth Township, Ellsworth County. She was also listed as being 19, female, white and born in New York but as having come to Kansas from Michigan. If this information is correct, then in 1871 when she and Chauncy were married, she was a bride of fifteen. Also listed on the same page was one Bessie Whitney, age 2, female, white of Ellsworth. Thus, "Bessie" must have been born in 1873, the year that her father was killed.

In the small 3 ½ by 8 ¾ account book in which Whitney kept this diary of Beecher Island is evidence that Bessie was also known as Elizabeth. The notebook which is in the files of the Kansas State Historical Society contains this notation "Chauncy B Whitney, daughter Elizabeth Whitney (Mrs. Chas. E. Sutton, Lawrence)." In 1919 the Suttons lived in a fine home at Lawrence, Kansas. Chas E. Sutton was listed as a prominent stockman and one of the most successful businessmen in Lawrence. He also had extensive holdings in Colorado.

The 1915 census listed C.E. and Mary E. Sutton and their eight children as residents of Wakarusa Township, Douglas County. Mary Elizabeth was listed as being forty-two, so she would have been two in 1875 but her mother at the time must have called her Bessie. It seems appropriate that the oldest son of Chas. E. and Mary E. Sutton was named Whitney.

Thus ends this brief biography of –

CHAUNCEY B. WHITNEY
1842-1873
Lawman
Ellsworth County, Kansas

From Book:
Fifty Fearless Men: The Forsyth Scouts and Beecher Island

By Orvel criqui

Library of Congress #: 93-72482

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Marceline, Mo

Pgs. 245-254