

### The Whitmore Oxygen Co.

For many years, after quarry operations in the canyon by the Utah Granite and Marble Company ceased in the late 1920's, the only business in the Granite area which employed many people was the Whitmore Oxygen Co., located at Wasatch.

The Whitmore Oxygen Co. was started by A. O. Whitmore, a very energetic, enterprising and intelligent man. As a very young man, he worked for the Telluride Power Co. At the age of 18, he was a construction foreman for them. Among other things, he worked on the construction of the first power plant in Provo Canyon and the power line across the valley to the mining town of Mercur. Later, he had a business on East South Temple in Salt Lake, selling and servicing electric automobiles. In this business, he set up facilities to charge the batteries for these cars, and this required the use of direct current electrical power. Mr. Whitmore, during this period, visited a fair or exposition at which he saw a demonstration of the production of oxygen and hydrogen by the electrolysis of water. He then set up his own system to use his direct current electrical power to produce oxygen. Thus began the Whitmore Oxygen Co.

About 1919, Mr. Whitmore leased a hydropower plant in Little Cottonwood Canyon above Wasatch Resort from the Utah Granite and Marble Co., (or its predecessor) and set up a larger oxygen plant there. In 1925, he purchased some of the property, and in 1930 still more so that he then owned almost the entire bottom of the canyon from just below the present forks of the road at the mouth of the canyon to a point about 3 miles farther up the canyon, except for most of the lots in Wasatch Resort. During this period, he built the larger oxygen plant which still stands at Wasatch Resort. This plant is still in use as an electrical power generating facility.

A. O. Whitmore and his wife, Jeannetta Richards Whitmore, had one son, Rich, (short for Richards) and two daughters, Geneve and Ellen.

When my wife, Jean, and I moved into Wasatch Resort in May of 1946, the oxygen company was being managed by Rich Whitmore, who lived in a house north of the plant just below the highway with his wife, Vivian Conger Whitmore, and their two daughters, Patricia Ann and Antonia Lee (Pat and Toni). Geneve Whitmore Pingree and her husband, Clair C. Pingree, lived in a new house on the highway north of the

plant. They had previously lived in a small house near the plant. They had one son, Richard (Dick) and two daughters, Joellen (Tibe) and Laurel (Sis), (now Joellen Dillard and Laurel Caldwell). All three still live in the Granite area. Vivian Conger Whitmore lives in her home near the Whitmore Oxygen Co. plant on 2300 East. Some of her grandchildren live near the old plant at Wasatch Resort--one of them in her house there. The Whitmore and Pingree families were all fine and delightful people, who were friendly and generous neighbors.

The superintendent of the oxygen plant and other related activities in the canyon was Emerson S. Hand, who was Bishop of the Granite Ward when we moved in, and who later was a member of the Mt. Jordan Stake presidency, who also lived near the plant. Other men who lived in the Wasatch Resort area year round with their families, and worked for the company included Dewey Dowding, Rex Green, Elbert Stoker, Joe Roberts, Marvin Beckstead, and Hoyt Conger. Jean and I were the only year-round residents who were not involved with the oxygen company.

Residents of Granite who worked regularly for the company at that time included David Archibald, Glen Archibald, Thomas Blair, Sheldon (Bud) Parker, Ivan Schow, Jay Archibald, Elvis Evans, and Jay Springer. Walter Mennsen also worked for Whitmore for a time after he came here from Germany. There were also several men who worked in the canyon but did not live in the area including Howard Madsen and Chic Anderson. In addition, younger men from Granite worked in the summer, including Clifton Higgins, Lavoy Whitmore, Ravell Beckstead, Deon Springer, Dale Springer and, I am sure, others before and after I lived in the canyon. Over the years of its operation in the canyon, the Whitmore Oxygen Co. provided employment for a substantial number of residents of Granite, and was the main local employer. In addition to the people employed by the oxygen company at Wasatch, there were a number employed at the office and warehouse and distribution center on East South Temple in Salt Lake. In 1946, the population of the whole Granite community was only about 225 people.

When we first moved to Wasatch Resort in 1946, the only electric power available was direct current from the oxygen plant. We found an old refrigerator with an external motor, and replaced the A. C. motor with a D. C. motor. When we got a washing machine, we had to do the same thing. We had to use special light switches and other



devices which would not burn out with the D. C. power. About 1950, the oxygen company started to build a new plant on some property which Mr. Whitmore had purchased west of 2300 East and north of 7200 South. (The Salt Lake County Whitmore Library now stands on some of the property which Mr. Whitmore donated for the purpose.) As part of this project, the generators at the plant in the canyon were changed to alternating current and two additional generating plants were built--one above the plant and one down the canyon. A high voltage private power line was built from the canyon to the new plant on 2300 East, and the oxygen, hydrogen and acetylene production was moved to the new plant. About this same time, a rock crushing plant was built on the north side of the highway across from the entrance of the road leading from the highway into Wasatch Resort.

The rock-crushing plant crushed granite and screened it into several sizes to be used as grit for turkeys and chickens to help them grind the food in their crops. I had never heard of this before, but apparently there was a considerable market for this grit. A number of young men from Granite, some of whom I have mentioned above, worked at the grit mill. The rock was largely obtained from the remnants of the huge boulders which were split up during the Temple granite quarry operations. Despite this, there are still many locations where remnants from the Temple quarry work can be seen.

Emerson S. Hand first worked for the Whitmores in 1931 on the construction of Rich Whitmore's house. They liked his work and hired him to work at the plant, and shortly afterward made him superintendent, which position he held for many years until he retired. He was a skilled builder and all the construction of the various buildings, pipelines, generating plants, etc., was under his direction. He had a crew of men, most of whom I listed above, who among them had great skills in carpentry, concrete work, welding, steel construction, electrical work, etc., and they built things well and efficiently. It was to me, as an Architect and Engineer, an admirable organization and group of men. Each one was a fine person and skilled workman in his own right.

Emerson Hand built a large house in about 1960 on some land west of Mount Jordan Road and south of Little Cottonwood Road which he had purchased from Amasa Lyman. A short time later he started one of the first large subdivisions in Granite on this land. The Grandview subdivision was also started about that time by

James Larkin. Rich Whitmore was not a member of the L. D. S. Church, but contributed much to the Granite Ward. For years he paid the Boy Scout troop's annual assessment and contributed many other things to the Church. I will mention this later in connection with the Church Records Storage Vault project.

Rich Whitmore died a number of years ago. Before he died, he told me that he hoped the Whitmore land in the canyon would not be developed for residential or commercial use. Through a series of transactions involving Salt Lake City, the Nature Conservancy and the Forest Service, most of this land is now National Forest. I am sure Rich Whitmore would approve.

#### Other Economic Activity in the Granite Area

I have mentioned previously the main economic activities in the area, including timbering, sawmills, quarrying, and mining. At the same time, from the beginning of the settlement around the mouth of the canyon, there was some agricultural and livestock activity, but this was quite limited because of the small amount of irrigation water available. Most of the water rights in the streams had been taken up by people lower in the valley.

The construction of ditches and reservoirs to serve the Granite area is an interesting story in itself. The main success in agriculture was in the production of fruit and berries.

Some of the early residents of Granite made a living by hauling ore from the mines with teams and wagons, and by other activities connected with the mines, such as cutting mine timbers.

One other mining activity in the area was the discovery of rich white quartz gold ore on the north side of the mouth of the canyon and on the mountain front north of the canyon. This occurred about 1890 to 1900. A number of small mines were dug and at least one small mill was built. The mine dumps can still be seen, one of them being on the east side of the Wasatch Fault graben east of Wasatch Boulevard, across from the Green Hills subdivision, and others on the hills above. My grandfather Clayton worked a mine near the top of Jefferson Gulch, the first gulch north of Little Cottonwood. He



found ore that assayed more than \$50,000 a ton at that time, which was equivalent to about \$800,000 a ton at today's gold price, but of course he never got more than a fraction of a ton of such ore from the whole mine! The quartz ore veins were so tiny that the gold fever here was very short lived.

The L. D. S. Church Records Vaults  
(Now known as the Granite Mountain Records Vault)

One activity in the Granite View Stake area in recent years which is of particular interest to the Church was the construction of the records storage vaults on the north side of Little Cottonwood Canyon about a half mile east of the forks of the road at the mouth of the canyon. The site of this project is where the main quarry of the Utah Granite and Marble Co. was located.

The preliminary studies, design, and supervision of construction of this project were done by the firm of Barker and Clayton, Architects and Engineers, with Nelson W. Clayton, the author of this brief history, as chief designer and supervisor.

To give some of the basic facts about the project, I am including a copy of a brochure which was put out by the Church Building Department to hand out to visitors to the vaults when public tours were allowed for a short time after the vaults were put into use. The information in the brochure is quite accurate except for the statement that the natural relative humidity is about 50%. If the vaults were not ventilated and controlled at all, the humidity would rise to nearly 100%.

There are a few things I would like to say about the project. The land for it was obtained by the Church from the Utah Granite Corp., which owned several patented placer mining claims along the north side of the canyon. Mr. Graham Doxey, of Doxey-Layton Realty Co., negotiated with the Utah Granite Corp. which was inactive at the time, and bought all the stock of the corporation. Mr. Doxey also negotiated with Rich Whitmore and worked out a trade whereby the Church obtained a strip of land between the highway and the placer mining claims in exchange for the easternmost of the placer claims and a small piece of land north of Whitmore's grit mill. The Utah Granite Co. was owned largely by the Ashton family, several of whom still own summer homes at

Wasatch Resort. The option to buy the property or all the stock of the Company was signed for the Company by Reed E. Ashton as President, and Harries Lloyd as Secretary. These people were good members of the Church and sold the stock at a very reasonable price.

It would not have been feasible to build the vaults where they are if it had not been for the cooperation of Rich Whitmore and the Pingree family, first in making the land trade to provide access to the site, and secondly, in providing water, electric power, and compressed air to the contractor. Mr. Whitmore instructed Emerson Hand, his superintendent of operations in the canyon, to help the project in many ways. As I mentioned previously, Mr. Whitmore was not a member of the Church, but he contributed in many ways to the Granite Ward over the years, and was a man of great integrity, honesty and generosity. On the Church vault project, he had agreed with the contractor to furnish water, power, compressed air, and some other services. The excavation of the exploratory tunnel and the main excavation were done under a competitive bidding process at fixed total cost. The steel and concrete lining of the tunnels and all other finish work was done under a cost-plus percentage contract. When the project was finished, I asked for the final cost statement so final payment could be made. The contractor said he had not been able to get the final bill from Rich Whitmore. We estimated that this final bill from Whitmore's should be about \$70,000. I went to see Mr. Whitmore at his office in Salt Lake to tell him I would like to get the final payment made to the contractor and that final payment had to be made to Whitmore first. He said he did not intend to submit any more bills. I told him I felt obligated to see that he was fully paid, but he said, "Aw \_\_\_\_\_, I would only have to pay most of it to the I.R.S.," and he refused to take any further payment. This amounted to a very sizeable donation to the Church. Earlier in the project, I had told J. Reuben Clark, who at that time, shortly before his death, was in charge of the project for the First Presidency, about Mr. Whitmore and his great help on the project. President Clark had me arrange for him to meet Mr. Whitmore at the vaults, at which time he expressed the appreciation of the First Presidency, and we toured the project, driving through it in my old army jeep. President Clark was in very poor health at the time, and we had to



lift him in and out of the jeep, but he was determined to see the project. He died only a few weeks later.

President Clark had been the main proponent of the project for many years before it materialized. He was succeeded as First Presidency representative on the project by Henry D. Moyle and later by N. Eldon Tanner.

I would like to also mention that Emerson S. Hand, as superintendent for Whitmore, was of especial help in construction of the vaults, as was Dewey Dowding, one of the Whitmore employees who still lives at Wasatch Resort. Mr. Dowding was constantly busy making sure that the services provided by Whitmore to the contractor were working, and doing all sorts of things to facilitate the work. When it came time to put the steel lining in the tunnels, Mr. Dowding, a highly skilled welder, helped set up new types of welding equipment and instruct the employees of the contractor how to weld and how to use the equipment

The contractor on the vault excavation and construction was Centennial Development Company, of Eureka, Utah. They got the contracts for the exploratory tunnel and the main excavation by competitive bidding. Their organization and work on these projects was so excellent that we proposed to them that they do the tunnel lining, electrical work, mechanical work, finish work, etc., on a cost-plus basis, because it was not yet fully decided as to what would be done and by what methods it would be done. Mr. James Quigley was Vice President of the company and in direct charge of the vault project. I proposed a cost plus 10% contract, the 10% being to cover all office and general overhead and profit. Mr. Quigley said no, they would do it for 5%, which he said they did on most of their mining contracts, so the contract was written this way.

Centennial Development Company was owned and managed almost entirely by non-Mormons, mostly Catholics, I believe, except that the treasurer of the company was the Mormon Bishop in Eureka. The company and Mr. Quigley proved to be meticulously fair, honest and competent. I have never dealt with better contractors or with a finer person than Mr. Quigley.

Two residents of Granite who were also involved in the construction of the vault project were L. L. (Vern) Morgan and Elmo Despain. These two fine men had been working together doing carpentry and construction work, and were hired by Centennial

Development Company to do some carpentry and finish work which the miners were not trained to do. Elmo and Vern did this work very well. After the work was finished, Vern was hired as custodian of the vaults and served with distinction and devotion in this assignment until he retired. Elmo's wife, Thea, and Vern's wife, Kaye, still live in Granite.

The following pages are copies of the Church Building Department brochure which I previously mentioned.