It takes more than a good resume to get a government contract.

George Frederick Whitworth (1816-1907)

Written and edited by Jerry Olson

From: HistoryLink.org¹:

“George Whitworth was born in Boston, Lincolnshire, England, on March 15, 1816, to Matthew and Suzannah Whitworth. In 1828, he came to the United States with his parents and sister Emma, Settling first in Mansfield, Ohio, where he learned harness making from his father. The family moved on to Terre Haute, Indiana, where the young man graduated from South Hanover (or Hanover) college. In 1838 he married Mary Elizabeth Thomson, a Kentucky descendent of Presbyterian ministers and missionaries.”

Mary Thomson was the sister of Samuel Harrison Thomson, a teacher of mathematics at Hanover College. His son, Reginald Heber Thomson, would later move to Seattle to partner with Frederick H. Whitworth in engineering businesses and ultimately lead monumental construction projects as Seattle City Engineer.

Continuing From: HistoryLink.org:

“The couple settled in Lancaster, Ohio, where George Whitworth became the principal of a high school, but soon began studying law, practicing in Greensburg, Indiana, and Dayton, Ohio. In 1847, he completed a divinity course at New Albany Theological Seminary in Indiana, was ordained a Presbyterian minister and began serving churches in Indiana and Kentucky. From his boyhood in England, George Whitworth had been fascinated by the Pacific Northwest, especially from accounts of the Hudson’s Bay Company. Then during the 1840s, he became steeped in the
lore of Missionaries to the region, the Whitmans, Spaldings, Eells, and Walkers. He began conceiving the idea of forming a colony of Presbyterians to settle in the Puget Sound area. Education, as well as religion, would be a central feature of the endeavor.

Although Whitworth enlisted some 50 families for the colony, none of them completed the trek to the northwest. Reports of danger from Indians and disease dissuaded most: Cholera along the Oregon Trail had been especially devastating in 1852. As the time for departure approached, the number had dwindled to 15. Finally on May 11, 1853, only two families actually departed from St. Joseph, Missouri, with the Whitworths. However, the party caught up with two other wagons of the colony that had gone ahead through a miscommunication. Using Whitworth’s diary, U. S. Census and other sources, Karl M. Donaldson Jr., lists the following families as traveling with the Whitworth’s at some point: Edmund Richardson, John Carson, Clark Hay, and John Pitney. However, they all eventually abandoned the migration to the Northwest for other destinations.

The Whitworth family band that completed the journey to Puget Sound consisted of George and Mary and their children James Edwin, Frederick, John Mathew, and Clara, Mary’s two nieces, her 70-year-old mother, and two young men named Bell. They were also bringing cattle and horses. For the first three months, the party rested themselves and their oxen (and listened to Whitworth preach) on Sundays, but rumored dangers in Indian country forced them to abandon the restful Sabath and hasten the remainder of the journey. Later Whitworth would describe the overland journey as “in nowise remarkable” (Druary, 1). His diary records the usual Oregon Trail problems of weather, straying or sick cattle, difficult river crossings, mosquitoes, Indian alarms, and illnesses. At least there were no deaths among the Whitworth party from disease, accidents, or Indians.

The family arrived in Portland, where Whitworth and Dr. J. S. Yantis established the First Presbyterian Church. On March 4, 1854, Whitworth himself arrived at Olympia, the new territorial capital of Washington. He soon took out a Donation Land Claim of 320 acres north of Olympia, where Governor Stevens was presiding over Washington Territory’s first legislative session. Whitworth’s family joined him in May.

His claim was No. 44 of T18N R3W, a part of Sections 1, 2, and 11. It was not on Budd Inlet, but was East of and behind the claim of Pascal Hicard. Lying North of 26th Ave. NE and West of Friendly Grove Rd., the claim is still mostly rural, but on the edge of urbanization. Thomas F. Berry surveyed the Claim for the GLO in May 1857, and Whitworth received the patent in August 1865. It is unknown who surveyed for the notification.

Continuing From: “History of Washington”ii, 1893:

“The summer was passed upon his claim living in a tent and board shanty, while he split siding from white fir and cedar timber to build a more comfortable home. In the fall of 1854 he established at Olympia the first Presbyterian Church in the Territory, and in 1855 he removed his family to Olympia to seek the protection of the stockade. During the Indian War, he continued his semi-monthly visits to supply the church at Grand Mound and Chehalis, a distance of from twenty five to forty miles, through a deserted region as the families had all fled to the forts for protection. He continued this service about three years, never missing an appointment.”

Everywhere he went, he would establish a new Presbyterian Church, starting in Portland, then Olympia, then Grand Mound, then Chehalis, and then in Coupeville. In an unsurveyor-like position, he started the Washington Temperance movement, culminating in the defeat of his initiative to ban alcohol in the state in 1855. His temperance zeal continued, but waned somewhat with his association with Sumner Academy in the heart of the hop growing region around Puyallup.
After petitioning the church to be relieved of full time duty, Whitworth moved to Coupeville to perform a GLO Claim Contract to survey 40 Donation Land Claims in Island, Whatcom, and Jefferson Counties, beginning in 1860. His son James Edwin Whitworth was one of the chainman. At the same time in 1860, he became Island County Surveyor, continuing until 1872. Prior to that, the GLO records show he surveyed 15 claims in T32,33N R1E, just north of Oak Harbor in September 1858. This was a joint contract with John Tennant. It is important to note that Deputy Surveyor Dominick Hunt was killed by the Indians in July 1858 near Oak Harbor. Deputy Surveyor Matthew O. C. Murphy surveyed the subdivisions of T33N R1E in September 1858, just before Whitworth was surveying the DLC’s in the same township.

The Lincoln victory in Washington D. C. in 1860 brought Anson Henry to Washington State as Surveyor General and generally good times for the Republicans. In 1863 Whitworth moved back to Olympia to take the position of Chief Clerk to the Superintendent of Indian Affairs, a political position. Next he was appointed Collector of Customs of Puget Sound District, with headquarters at Port Angeles, definitely another political position. The Democrats returned to power in 1865.

In 1866, the Whitworths moved to Seattle where George was appointed president of the Territorial University (U. of W.). During his short term as president, the school had to close for lack of funds, as it did also in his second term as president in 1876. From 1872-1873 and from 1877-1879 he was appointed and elected as King County Surveyor, and in 1870 was recorded as Seattle City Surveyor.

Prior to his surveying on Whidbey Island, there is no history of surveying by Whitworth. He was involved in local religious and political society affairs, was an educated teacher and lawyer, and in the 1850’s lived in Olympia, the seat of government. His first contract was authorized by Surveyor General James Tilton, a Democrat, although Whitworth’s affiliation is assumed to be Republican, and prior to 1860 he was a Whig. It may be just a coincidence that President James Buchanan, a Democrat, was also a Presbyterian.
His children all received a very good education. Frederick, John and George graduated from the University of California in Civil Engineering. Frederick and James pursued careers in engineering and surveying in Seattle, John became a lawyer in San Francisco, and George Jr. attended Medical school and practiced in California. John, George, and James all participated in the surveys in some capacity, and may have done more than the notes indicate.

Surveyor General Elisha P. Ferry, a Republican, awarded Contract 117 to Whitworth to survey T29N R2E on Whidbey Island in 1870. The contract was signed in October and completed in December. The area surveyed was around the southern end of Holmes Harbor.

Surveyor General, Louis P. Beach, a Republican, awarded Contract 151 to a joint venture of George and John M. Whitworth T23N R6E in September 1872. The work, lying south of Issaquah, began in November, 1872 and was completed in April 1873. George F. Whitworth, Jr. was a chainman on the crew. This work was originally Whitworth’s Contract 116 in 1870, but wasn’t completed at that time. John would partner with Thomas M. Reed in Whatcom County the next year. That Contract, number 168, was issued to Whitworth, Whitworth and Reed, but only John Whitworth and Thomas Reed appear in the notes.

Continuing From: “History of Washington”, 1893:

“He has taken an active part in developing the coal interests of Washington, and was associated with Rev. D. Bagley and Philip H. Lewis in opening the New Castle Mines in 1862, the first mine developed in King County. He was a member of the syndicate who opened the South Prairie Coal Mines in 1884, and superintended the work during the first year, still retaining his interest. As a gas-producing coal, the product of this mine is said to be the best on the coast. He also owns valuable residence property in Seattle with substantial improvements, and a portion of his original donation claim.”

Continuing From: HistoryLink.org:

“In 1883, George Whitworth, with four colleagues from Sumner and Tacoma, established the Co-educational Sumner Academy, essentially a high school or preparatory school, thus reviving the idea he had for educating his colony. The fertile
Puyallup Valley stretching west from the flank of Mt. Rainier was increasingly settled and needed such a school. For lack of a dedicated building, the first classes were held in the sanctuary of the Sumner Presbyterian Church on January 7, 1884, with its pastor, the Reverend George A. McKinlay, as head and with a board of trustees consisting largely of Presbyterian ministers. Although the school was heavily Presbyterian, its students were free to attend other churches. In 1889, the school got its own handsome wooden building, complete with turrets and mansard roof, largely underwritten by a loan from L. F. Thompson, a trustee and the Puyallup Valley’s leading hops grower. George Whitworth’s leadership of the school, as chairman of the board of trustees for years, and later, as his fortunes improved, through financial contributions and travels for fundraising, helped to assure its survival.

In 1890 the incorporators of Sumner Academy changed the name to Whitworth College, and the school began offering a higher college level curriculum based on that of eastern universities. The first catalog espoused principles of educating both “heart and mind” (Gray, 17) that have guided Whitworth College ever since. In 1899, the trustees voted to relocate the college to the more populous city of Tacoma, thus assuring a larger pool of students. There the trustees bought for the new campus the Allen C. Mason mansion and its grounds at Inspiration Point.

In 1914, seven years after George Whitworth’s death, the Whitworth College was again relocated, this time across the state to Spokane. The school was literally recruited by Spokane boosters, especially railroad and real estate tycoon Jay P. Graves, who donated land for the campus near his estate on the Little Spokane River north of the city.”

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i HistoryLink.org: The Online Encyclopedia of Washington State History