

CHEYENNE GREATLY INFLUENCED BY FRANCIS E. WARREN

By Richard T. Ammon

Many of downtown Cheyenne's buildings were constructed by Wyoming's most honored Senator, Francis E. Warren. Through the many decades he lived in this city and represented the state in Washington, D.C., he contributed to its elegance and vitality. Warren was a builder and many of his achievements are still standing.

The first monument to his business success was midway between Capitol and Carey Avenues on the north side of 16th Street, Warren constructed a large building for his bank and mercantile, started with his friend, Amasa Converse right after the founding of Cheyenne. This three story building, put up in 1876, soon gave way to a fourth floor. But, a fire about a year later forced the removal of any evidence of the top floor's presence and its very elegant façade. The Warren Building had gone through changes over the years, but stood as a symbol of Francis Warren's financial prowess in the Magic City until it was destroyed apparently at the hand of an arsonist in late 2004.

Next door to the west, in 1882, Warren built the second of what would be three buildings for his First National Bank. Immediately to the west of this bank, during the next year, he constructed the Commerce Building. The second story of the Commerce is famed for where infamous cowboy Regulator, Tom Horn, admitted to a lawman he'd killed a fourteen year old boy.

During the hay-day of the ranching boom, rich cattle barons demanded an Opera House. Francis Warren was chosen as the Director to get it built. From 1882, it was the highlight of the city at the corner of 17th Street and Hill (today, Capitol Avenue). Seating a thousand patrons, the Opera House would be graced by world famous performers until a fire in 1902 destroyed its luxurious theatre. The building, rebuilt for offices after the fire and then called the Annex, was razed along with the rest of the structure in 1961 for a new J.C. Penney's store.

In 1882, the Phoenix Block, today painted bright red and white, was built on the southwest corner of Hill and 16th Streets. When Warren constructed the Phoenix, it was Wyoming Territory's first hotel with indoor plumbing and gas heat.

To the east across the street was the Warren Mercantile Building. It was the city's first "mall" in 1884 with twenty-five retail merchants selling their wares from small rooms. Three year later, it became the first Burlington Railroad depot when the tracks from Chicago terminated in front of the building. It was leveled for construction of a new depot in 1928.

On the north side of 16th Street is today's Majestic Building. Built in 1907, it was the third First National Bank building built by Francis Warren. Originally, awnings shaded all the windows of this five story office building.

The first segment of the Capitol Building was built in 1888. Francis Warren was asked to be the Director to raise the money for the project. He collected over \$138,000. Although it was a collaborative effort, Warren is given much credit for the Capitol's construction.

By 1911, the famous, the world famous 1875 Inter Ocean Hotel had seen much better days, causing Warren and a group of investors to build the Plains Hotel at 16th and Central Avenue.

His furniture department had outgrown its space in the old Warren Building. So, in 1913, Warren constructed a new furniture store to the east of the Plains Hotel. He named it "Gleason's" (most recently, Grier's Furniture) after the manager of his furniture department in the old building. It had always been a furniture store, but occasionally shared its location with a funeral parlor.

A half block north of Gleason's is the Lincoln Theatre. It's the last building Francis Warren built two years before he died in 1929. He wanted a classy theater as the city's other three had been associate vaudeville and were showing their age. It was built with Denver's finest theaters in mind. The Lincoln would usher in a modern venue with the new "Talkies".

During his 37 years as Wyoming's Senator, Warren appropriated vast wealth for projects at Fort David A. Russell, located three miles northeast of the city. Many of the buildings on the fort can be attributed to Warren. Upon his death, to honor him, the fort's name was changed on January 1, 1930, to Fort Francis E. Warren. Today, it's an Air Force strategic missile defense base.

Having bought the Terry Ranch six miles south of town, Warren, over the years, regularly added to the property. At the end of his life, his fences for the Warren Livestock Company extended nearly to Fort Collins, Colorado, some 50 miles south.

It's easy to still see the influence Francis Warren had on Cheyenne and why, even today, his name is spoken with deepest respect for all he gave to historic Cheyenne.