

CHEYENNE'S MOST HONORED U. S. SENATOR

By Richard T. Ammon

In 1844, Francis Emory Warren was born in Hinsdale, Massachusetts. After attending common school and Hinsdale Academy, he enlisted in the Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry during the Civil War.

At the siege of Port Hudson, Louisiana, Warren, at only age 19, became one of the first soldiers to receive the Congressional Medal of Honor for his battlefield gallantry. A Confederate bombardment destroyed his entire platoon, but Warren, with a serious head wound, was able to disable the artillery and save hundreds of fellow soldiers.

Within a couple of days after Grenville Dodge of the Union Pacific Railroad founded Cheyenne in 1867, one of the first to buy land in the new town was Amasa Converse. He started a lucrative business selling china, household wares, and other hard goods to later include metal coffins. In its first few months when the Magic City was overwhelmed by nearly 10,000 railroaders, miners, opportunists, gamblers, and the like, Converse telegraphed his childhood friend in Massachusetts and suggested Warren come to Cheyenne to share in its business opportunities. A street and a school here were named after our early pioneer as well as Converse county in mid-state, north of Cheyenne.

In early 1868, Francis Warren arrived in Cheyenne nearly penniless and went to work with Converse. Their small store was located in the middle of the north-side block on 16th Street between Hill and Ferguson (today, Capitol and Carey Avenues). Warren contributed much to Converse's mercantile as an articulate and savvy businessman. He soon became very popular with customers and area business owners.

Within a few short years, when a very wealthy Converse wanted to move into state politics, Warren bought him out. Together, they had expanded the small store to a multiple of storefronts, covering a half a city block. By 1876, the wooden stores were razed and ground was broken for one of the largest buildings in town, the Warren Block. Sadly, this building was apparently torched by an arsonist in late 2004 and the burned-out shell was torn down soon after. Over the years, Warren built a total of seven buildings in downtown Cheyenne; five still remain. He was instrumental in the promotion of lighting systems for Cheyenne; the first in the world with electric streetlights and alternating current for private home lighting.

Warren's popularity led to his election to the City Council in 1873 and several times to the Council for the Territory, later becoming its president. He was the city's Mayor and twice the Governor for Wyoming Territory, being appointed to separate terms by two U. S. Presidents. When Wyoming became the 44th state, Warren was immediately elected its Governor. But, he only held that office for six weeks before being elected Wyoming's first Senator in November 1890. He held that office for over 37 years before passing away while in Washington. He was on eight Senate committees over the years and Chairman for several. His tenure in the Senate was the longest of any other to that time.

Tragedy struck in 1915 when Warren's daughter, Frances, who was married to General "Black Jack" Pershing, was killed with their three daughters in a house fire at the Presidio in San Francisco. Only the young son, whose first name was Warren, was carried to safety by a servant. Mrs. Pershing and their daughters were buried in Cheyenne at one of the city's most-attended funerals.

Upon his death on November 24, 1929, renaming the city of Cheyenne to Warren, Wyoming was seriously considered. However, due to his vast contributions to Fort D. A. Russell near the city, the facility's name was to be changed on the first day of the new year, 1930, to Fort Francis E. Warren as it remains today. Warren was buried with his daughter and granddaughters in Cheyenne's Lakeview Cemetery.

