

COMING TO ST. CLOUD



Mary Wheelock and her sister Alice, 1888.

St. Cloud was a young community when Alice Wheelock left her hometown of Moscow, New York for St. Cloud, Minnesota. She came to take classes at the St. Cloud Normal School, where her sister, Mary “Min” Wheelock, was an instructor of Latin and civil government. Alice quickly established herself in St. Cloud society. “Oh,

Alice, if you only knew how people inquired after you, and seem to think so much of you, you’d be so happy,” Min wrote to her sister, who had returned home to New York for a visit, in January 1889.

Alice had a number of admirers in St. Cloud. An up and coming St. Cloud businessman named Albert Gideon A.G. Whitney was one of her suitors. A.G. Whitney was a self made man born on a farm in Hennepin County, Minnesota. He moved to St. Cloud in 1887 and entered the real estate, loans and insurance business. He also became involved in the city’s transportation and utilities industries. By the early 1920s, Whitney held a virtual monopoly over St. Cloud’s electric power supply. His business eventually became the regional branch of the Northern States Power Company, or NSP. “Dear Mr. Wheelock,” A.G. wrote to Alice’s father on August 7, 1890. “As your daughter Alice and I have become engaged, I write to ask you for approval of our engagement and marriage.” On August 15, Mr. Wheelock replied that he and his wife “willingly give our approval to such engagement. Trusting that neither of you or ourselves will ever have cause to regret this step you are taking, I am, Most Sincerely Yours, A.W. Wheelock.”



A. G. Whitney's St. Cloud Water Power Company, ca. 1912.

'MY DEAR ALICE...'

Alice returned to New York after her engagement to A.G. to prepare for her marriage, which was held in her parents' home. Though this separation proved difficult for A.G., those few months are marked by a series of charming letters between the young lovebirds. In this example, A.G. recounts his visit to St. Paul to have a wedding suit tailored. Still clipped to the original letter are four small samples of dark fabric. Alice and A.G. were married on October 13, 1891.



September 15, 1891

My Dear Alice,

It is 1:10 p.m. Have just come over from St. Paul, having been busy there all the forenoon. While there, I ordered everything I shall need. New shoes with the vest, which I could not resist. Will enclose sample of haveling suit and overcoat.

I also ordered some things from Thad C. Jones & Wright—Gents furnisiers. He had a letter from a friend of his who is to be married at four o'clock wherein he (Wright) was asked to be best man. The gentleman (the would be groom) describes his suit as a three button black cut-a-way with light trousers and asks Mr. W. to wear the same. Wright claims this man to be a real swell dresser.

Truly, I have just about reached the conclusion that there is no real rule governing dress suits for weddings, and am not going to worry anymore about it, but when I start East I shall take—well, how will it be to take the three kinds.

Dreamed all last night (we were married and buying furniture) and night before of my little girlie.

Alice dearie, I do wish I could see you right now. I am very anxious to hear from you. Don't forget the samples you are to send me.

With much love,

Albert

In 1916, the Whitneys built a large, red brick Georgian Revival home. "Mr. and Mrs. Whitney have chosen the site of their old home as the location for a residence, now nearing completion," states a contemporary newspaper account, "which will not be excelled by any home in the city, either for beauty or comfort." Glanville Smith, a family friend, observed that "both the roomy old house, and the new and distinguished mansion, were at all times illuminated from the cellar to attic, as behooved the region's electrical potentates." The Whitney House now stands on the campus of St. Cloud State University.



Whitney House, 1925.

SERVING THE COMMUNITY

Alice and A.G.'s time together in their spacious new home was unexpectedly short lived. A.G. died of heart failure at the age of 62 in 1922. The family was in Portland, Maine attending the marriage of Wheelock, Sr. to Katherine Kimball. As a widow, Mrs. Whitney served the community that she and her husband called home.

In 1934, Mrs. Whitney donated land north of St. Cloud to build an airport in honor of her husband, A.G. Whitney. The main building of the Whitney Airport now houses the Whitney Senior Center. Its grounds are used as parkland. Mrs. Whitney was a member of the First Presbyterian Church and was active in its Women's Missionary League. She was a board member and strong supporter of the Minnesota Children's Home. Mrs. Whitney founded the first St. Cloud chapter of the Camp Fire Girls and was an active member of the Reading Room Society as well as the Stearns County Historical Society.



Crowd gathered for the opening of the Whitney Airport, June 30, 1935.

Mrs. Whitney (front row second from left) attends the January 1948 meeting of the Stearns County Historical Society. The society's then-president, Glanville Smith, is seated at the front table.

'Twas a Typical Whitney Affair...

Glanville Smith wrote a description of a "typical" and very chaotic Whitney dinner that he and his parents attended in August 1930.

"Twas a typical Whitney affair: Wheelock [Whitney, Sr.] did not come in until the salad-course (he was playing tennis) hence father had to carve; the maids were bewildered by contradictory orders; despair! The coffee thin as water." In the middle of dinner with Glanville and his family, Mrs. Whitney and daughter Lois began planning a train trip for Lois to take the following week. "Lois then got up and began hunting and hunting for a pencil, and when one was found, she asked: mother, what would you like to have me make you for Christmas?" In the meantime, Wheelock drove Glanville's father, W.W. Smith, downtown. Wheelock parked the car and left Smith in a no-parking zone while he asked his friends to teach him how to use his new yoyo. "But," Glanville wrote, "in spite of these absurdities I enjoyed myself."

AN OPEN DOOR

Mrs. Whitney's hospitality was legendary. A "continual open handed generosity and elegantly managed good taste" were her trademarks as a hostess, noted Glanville Smith. "Whoever was amusing, or a good card or tennis player, or dancer, or just plain lonely, was taken care of on a glad and cordial basis." Mrs. Whitney opened her door to prominent African Americans who visited St. Cloud. When singers Marian Anderson and later Roland Hayes were turned away from St. Cloud hotels, they were welcomed at the Whitney home.



Marian Anderson arriving at St. Cloud train station. She was greeted by Myrl Carlson and of the Civic Music Association

Glanville Smith recalls Roland Hayes' visit: "On arrival one day at my mother's house I was met by the message not to take my coat off, but to proceed without delay to Mrs. Whitney's, to act as host at luncheon for this eminent Negro—she had just remembered that she was supposed to be at a luncheon in St. Paul. So there I was. The accompanist, a white man, came down the beautiful staircase first, to introduce himself; he thus was ready to introduce me to the great tenor, who came down after an astutely-judged interval, and we had a very good time of it. As for Mrs. Whitney, who regularly made half-a-dozen flying trips to the Twin Cities per week, she was back for the evening's concert, and presided over an oyster-stew supper after it for proof (though none was needed) that the color of her house guest's skin was not at all the reason for her absence at noon."



First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt with St. Cloud Times editor Fred Schilpin leaving the Whitney home.

First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt traveled to St. Cloud in October of 1941. Mrs. Roosevelt spent her one night in St. Cloud at the Whitney home. "I am seeing the first snow flakes fall as I sit in a delightful enclosed porch in Mrs. Whitney's home in St. Cloud, Minn.," Roosevelt wrote in her 'My Day' newspaper article on October 30, 1941. "It is a charming spot, where one can envision hours spent looking out on stormy weather, and rejoicing over a book and a happy feeling that one is in such comfortable surroundings." The First Lady had a pleasant trip to St. Cloud. She wrote to Mrs. Whitney, "I can not tell you how much I enjoyed my time in St. Cloud and how much I appreciate all you did to make my stay so very pleasant and comfortable. P.S., If you happened to find a pair of shell rimmed eyeglasses in the room I used, I shall appreciate your sending them to the White House." Within a few days a small package arrived at the White House with a note reading: "Mrs. Roosevelt's Glasses."



Alice Wheelock Whitney died in her home in 1954, nearly 70 years after coming to St. Cloud. Throughout her life, Mrs. Whitney maintained a deep and abiding interest in the fate of the city that she called home. "She never thought of herself as a leader," remembers Mrs. Whitney's granddaughter Sally Whitney Pillsbury, "she thought of herself as a friend."

Pledges as Memorials to Alice Wheelock and Albert Gideon Whitney

Descendents of Wheelock Whitney, Sr.

Irene and Wheelock Whitney
Wheelock Whitney III
Pennell W. Ballentine
Joseph H. Whitney
Benson K. Whitney
Helen and J. Kimball Whitney
David K. Whitney
Lucy M. Whitney
Julia K. Whitney
Sally and George Pillsbury
Charles A. Pillsbury
George S. Pillsbury, Jr.
Sarah Pillsbury Kletter
Katharine W. Pillsbury

Descendents of Lois Whitney Forbes

Donald I. Perry
Pauline Perry
Deborah Perry Clark
Jocelyn Whitney Clark
Victor Fuller Clark, Jr.
Hillary Perry Clark
Kimberly Forbes Clark

Descendents of Pauline Whitney Macmillan

Cargill MacMillan Family Foundation
Martha and Cargill MacMillan, Jr.
John C. MacMillan
Martha MacMillan Benett
William B. MacMillan
Cargill MacMillan III
Elizabeth and Whitney MacMillan
Elizabeth Whitney MacMillan Schmidt
Whitney MacMillan, Jr.
Paula MacMillan and Warren Keinath
Warren C. Keinath
Steven W. Keinath
Carolyn Keinath Rayner
David S. Keinath

