

HISTORY VISITING OUR STORIED PAST

AMASA B CAMPBELL

A LOCAL TREASURE



by Blythe Thimsen

WELL BEFORE PIONEERS settled in the rugged mountains of North Idaho, long-in-the-making riches were buried deep beneath the earth. Silver and lead, first discovered in the area in the 1880s, were used to aid the expansion and industry of our country. They also created some of the richest men in local history – not just rich in pocket book, but rich in personality and character – who shaped our region’s destiny.

Amasa B. Campbell was one such man, though his simple beginnings betrayed the life he would one day lead. Born in Salem, Ohio, on April 6, 1845, Campbell was the youngest of ten children. His father died before he was born, stripping him of the chance to get to know the man who headed the family. Without his father to provide, Campbell quickly learned the need for hard work to secure financial stability in what could be a tough world. Shouldering that loss, at the age of 15 he took a job in the grain and wool commission.



Left: Amasa B. Campbell holds his daughter, Helen Campbell (age five) in this 1897 picture. Photo courtesy of Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, L86-287

Below: Amasa and Grace Campbell's house at W. 2316 First Avenue, ca. 1900. Photo courtesy of Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, L85-128.2



Below: Mrs. Amasa B. (Grace) Campbell and daughter Helen, pictured in the Campbell house, ca. 1908. Photo courtesy of Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, L91-119.3

After several years working near home, Campbell left for Omaha, Nebraska, at the age of 22, taking a job with the Union Pacific Railroad. It was four years later, in 1871, that he took his first foray into the mining industry, investing in a mine in Utah. Mining would one day bring him his fortune, but financial success would have to wait nearly twenty years.

Though the exact date is unclear, at some point in the late 1870s or early 1880s, Campbell moved back to Ohio, where he took a job as a chief clerk at a freight terminal. It was a stable job, but not one that would build a life of wealth.

In 1887, 27 years after leaving home for his first job, Campbell took a step that would lead toward his future success. He accepted a job as an agent for a group of wealthy spectators from Youngstown, Ohio. He and a fellow agent, named John A. Finch, were sent to the Coeur d'Alene area to find mines and businesses in which their employers could invest.

Both men were bachelors who were willing to live a rough and tough life in exchange for the adventure and potential for wealth that came with the job. Neither Campbell, forty-two at the time and working at the freight terminal, nor Finch, an unemployed salesman for a bankrupt iron mill, could have guessed they would become two of the wealthiest, most successful and socially respectable men in young Spokane's society.

Truth be told, neither Campbell nor Finch knew much about mining, but they developed a smart system for navigating the industry. When a mine in the area struck a vein, they would quickly invest in nearby mines for their employers, assuming the fortune spreading deep beneath the earth would be found in their mines as well. It was a well-planned system, and as they made money they became more respected in the mining industry.

Their time within the mining industry consisted of one success after another. After buying into the successful Gem mine in Coeur d'Alene, they helped organize the Milwaukee Mining Company. This was followed by their investment in the Standard and Hecla mines in 1891, which would prove to be brilliant moves.



By 1893, they had expanded their mining enterprises to British Columbia, with the knowledge that they were two of the most successful businessmen in the mining industry. The book *Spokane and the Inland Empire* described their success: "There was hardly a successful mining enterprise in the whole district in which they were not interested financially and otherwise, and no firm did more to develop the mining industry in the Inland Empire. The firm name of Finch & Campbell became synonymous with the important mining activities of the Northwest."

With a solid business reputation and an equally solid income, Campbell was ready to marry. His career was spent hunting for

great mines and investment opportunities, but when it came to women, he was hunting for a fox – specifically for Grace M. Fox, a schoolteacher back in Youngstown, Ohio, who had captivated Campbell's heart while he was living there.

When they married in Youngstown, on March 26, 1890, Amasa Campbell was 45 and Grace was 31. Being a single woman at the age of 31 was strange for the day, but it bode well for Grace, who married an established and successful man. After marrying, Mr. and Mrs. Amasa B. Campbell boarded a train together and headed west toward their new home of Wallace, Idaho. Campbell owned a fine house in town – it was large with two-

stories, a porch and lovely fence – but it was nothing compared to the house they would later build in Spokane.

When the local Mammoth mine hit a vein, Campbell and Finch knew that where there was smoke there must be fire, and they heavily invested in two nearby mines, the Standard and Banner, assuming they too would be successful. Campbell and Finch has struck gold, so to speak (actually, they had struck silver and lead). During the years they held Standard's stock, it paid out more than \$2.5 million in dividends.

Campbell and Finch also helped to organize the Mine Owner's Association, which helped "to unite managers against arbitrary smelter and railroad rates." In 1892, the Mine Owners Association closed their mines in response to the increasing railroad rates. The railroads, serving as the veins through which the blood of the economy pulsed, carried ore to the smelters and the finished product to people and industries that needed the materials. The mines and the railroads were dependent on one another to coexist, but with the mine closures, a storm was brewing. The railroads and managers scrambled to reach a deal: the railroads lowered their rates, while mine managers also lowered the wages they paid their workers, bringing it down to \$3.00 for a 10-hour work day. The unions and the workers were soon embroiled in a nasty war, which saw the arrival of strikebreakers from Michigan, accompanied by armed guards.

Realizing they were in the middle of a firestorm, Campbell decided he needed to move Grace away from the dangers of Wallace, and to the safety of Spokane. Angry miners had already blown up the Frisco mill in 1892, and Campbell didn't want to wait to see what their next act of violent outrage would be, nor did he want to put his wife at risk.

Not only did Campbell have himself and Grace to be concerned for; at the time, Grace was pregnant with what would be their only child.

Away from the danger of Wallace, Grace gave birth to her and Amasa's beloved daughter, Helen, in Spokane, on May 14, 1892. When the volatile situation in

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Below: Campbell house with horse-drawn coach in front, with Coachman Joseph Gladding, ca. 1900. Photo courtesy of Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, L88-454



Wallace had been quelled, the family of three returned to their home there, but it was a brief stay. The rough mining environment of the town was not the type of life to which Campbell wanted to expose Grace and Helen. He dreamed of something better for them.

When Campbell's business partner and good friend John A. Finch finally married, he, too, decided Wallace was not the place for women of society, so he opted to move to Spokane. With Finch making the move, there was little holding Campbell back from permanently taking his family to the more genteel and metropolitan setting of Spokane.

His financial success in the mining

industry, allowed Campbell his pick of any Spokane neighborhood in which to live. He bought six lots in Browne's Addition, (J.J. Browne's portion of land, which abutted that of Anthony Cannon's), the up-and-coming neighborhood of Spokane's society members. The cost for the lots totaled \$9,000, but it was well worth the price tag for Campbell, who wanted to live in this prominent area of town where well-to-do citizens enjoyed the finest luxuries money could buy, including electric lights and horse trolleys, which ran near a neighborhood park. On these lots he had the famous Spokane architect Kirtland K. Cutter design and build a massive English Tudor Revival house with a handsome

exterior of stucco, sandstone, brick and heavy timbers.

From this location in Spokane, Campbell could conduct his business, while the proximity to Wallace meant he could occasionally visit the mines and oversee business dealings. While workers mined for riches from the earth, Campbell was reaping money with his interest in the mines, yet was able to extract himself from the day-to-day responsibilities of the business. The hard work was done; he could watch the money roll in, while living in Spokane and enjoying the people of his social circles.

One family with whom he and Grace were close were their neighbors and fel-

low mining businessman, Patrick "Patsy" Clark. The Campbells toured the Mediterranean and the Middle East with the Clarks in the early 1900s. On this trip, Campbell (whom Grace lovingly called "Mace") broke both of his arms in an automobile accident.

Grace Campbell wrote about the accident to her dear friend, Mrs. John A. Finch in this postcard message dated March 10, 1904: *"My dear Mrs. Finch: Did you do this when you were in Cairo? It's good fun for once. We have thought of you so many times and now I can appreciate your feeling about it all. Never knew what dirt was until we drove through Old Cairo. It has all been most interesting, but we were glad to get away. Mr. Moore has not doubt told you of our automobile accident. Mace is getting on very well. He has one hand out of the cast now. The other will be out in about 10 days. It is a mystery how any of us escaped being killed. Hope you are very well. All send love. Sincerely, Grace M. Campbell"*

Grace was a woman of society, spending her days visiting other ladies of society, as well as entertaining callers in her parlor. Dressed always in the latest fashions – she purchased her clothes from the fashion houses in Paris and New York – she was a staple of society. Despite her society standing and extreme wealth, Grace treated all with love and kindness. While some in her circle looked upon the "hired help" with disdain, Grace was extremely kind to the staff members who lived with the Campbell family, even visiting with them on their time off and filling the parental role for some of the younger staff members who came to live with them.

Grace planned the menus with her staff, keeping in mind Amasa's favorite meal of ham and white cake. A delicious meal, it was no doubt served often to the Campbell family, whether they were alone, or entertaining guests in the formal dining room of their home, a room from which Amasa could summon a second slice of ham or serving of cake, with the tap of his foot on the button that was located underneath the massive dining room table.

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Below: Amasa B. Campbell and party in front of Sphinx and Pyramid in Egypt, March 10, 1904. Photo courtesy of Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture, L86-479A

As a woman of the times, Grace was also involved with and supported the temperance movement, and she didn't like alcohol in her home. One must wonder if her husband respected that wish when he entertained the gentlemen of Spokane's society in his basement game room. Out of sight and off limits to the women, it is not hard to believe that this room was surely the sight of many card games made complete with cigars and brandy.

In addition to being a frequent dinner host, Amasa Campbell was an avid writer, penning letters and journal entries nearly every day. In one of Amasa's letters to a friend, dated July 7, 1909, he wrote, "...my health is not of the best, still, I am in pretty fair shape, but I realize I am getting old, in fact both of us are, and I have to take pretty good care of myself. I have taken up golf and rather enjoy it."

The poor health he referenced did not improve; rather, this was the beginning of a down hill slide for Campbell. In 1910, he developed serious swelling in his throat. In search of the best medical treatment, he traveled to Paris, where doctors inserted a tube into his throat to help him breathe. After returning from Paris and not seeing any improvement, Campbell traveled with Dr. N. Fred Essig to Rochester, Minnesota, to consult with the famed Mayo brothers. They diagnosed him with a malignant tumor in his throat. Fearing that if they operated it would lead to his death, the Mayos refused to do surgery. Campbell turned to a cancer specialist in New York, named Dr. Colby, who prescribed serum injections. He took these until a month or so before his death, though they offered little help.

In February 1912, with his wife and daughter by his side, Amasa Campbell passed away in his sleep at his beloved home. The following day in the newspaper it was reported, "...Mr. Campbell's life had been despaired of for many weeks. For the last six months he was unable to speak, and for a month, unable eat nourishment, being injected through a silver tube in his throat."



Campbell's death was mourned by citizens in both Spokane and the Coeur d'Alene region as evident in this February 20, 1912 *Spokesman-Review* article. "During the funeral hour, from 2 to 3 o'clock, the doors of the Traders National Bank, in which Mr. Campbell was interested, were closed, as were the doors at the First National of Wallace, the Coeur d'Alene Hardware Company and the store of White & Bender at Wallace."

Another article noted, "The death of Amasa B. Campbell of Spokane brings grief to the heart of every man that knew him. Mr. Campbell was big in every sense of the term – big of body, big of brain and big of heart and faith."

Campbell's entire estate "of considerably more than \$1,000,000" was equally divided between his wife and daughter, allowing Grace and Helen to continue liv-

ing in the family home. While there was a hole in their hearts, they embraced life and continued to carry on as members of society. Grace ended her public mourning in 1913 at the wedding of Hazel Lease, a cousin who had lived with them for a while.

Hazel's was not the only wedding for the family to celebrate. Helen became engaged to William Powell, a Pennsylvania businessman who managed a match block company in Spokane. The engagement was reported in the paper, where the upper crusts of society and the working class alike could read of the details over their evening meal. "Wearing a frock of blue velvet and kolinsky (mink fur) with corsages of roses and lilies of the valley, Helen revealed her betrothal by showing her ring of platinum and diamonds."

Having grown up at, and spent all of the

important events of her life in the massive Campbell house, it was a natural fit for Helen to marry there as well. On June 27, 1917, in the great library of the home, she and William committed their lives to one another.

Helen and William had two sons, on whom Grace doted. They were no doubt a source of joy to her in her final years.

Like her husband, Grace Campbell became sick and gradually worsened, dying in the family home on November 24, 1924.

Just as the death of her husband had impacted the community, the loss of Mrs. Campbell saddened the lives of many. A January 2, 1925 *Spokesman-Review* article reported, "Mrs. Gordon was much moved as she said 'Mrs. Campbell was one of my best friends. I had known her for years, and intimately. She was a most unassuming person, always ready to help those in need. Anything she did was done so quietly that few outside those whom she helped knew of her kind deeds. I hope you will not think I am sentimental when I say that I thought of her always as one of God's masterpieces...'"

The Campbell house was left to Helen; however, married and well established at the time of her mother's death, she didn't need the home. Less than one month later, she donated the home to the Eastern Washington State Historical Society (EWSHS).

The house remains a property of the EWSHS and is operated by the Northwest Museum of Arts and Culture. Tours allow the people of Spokane a way to look back to yesteryear and into the life of one of our city's richest treasures.

Perhaps Campbell's impact on the community can best be summed up by a quote that ran in the newspaper after his death: "The Northwest needs more men like Amasa B. Campbell. An investor not a spectator, a builder not a barnacle, the fortune he is gained was not wrestled from others, but was drawn from the deep treasure vaults of old earth and added to the working wealth of the world." **S**

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