

# Pierre Wibaux

## Early life

Pierre Wibaux was born on January 12, 1858 to a prosperous family (Achille Wibaux, Cécile Vernier) of century-old textile industrialists in Roubaix, situated in the north of France. Pierre's father, Achille, ran the family textile factory he had inherited from his own father, Desiré Joseph Wibaux, and it was expected that Pierre would be the next in line to manage the family business.

He received a liberal and technical education. In 1876 he spent a year serving in the army with the French Dragoons (as Pierre was an excellent rider), then left to England for 2 years to observe how English textile industry worked. It was during this time that he first heard mention of the promising cattle-ranching opportunities in America from relatives of British families who had emigrated and found success overseas. He also met a young lady who was to become his wife.

Upon his return to France, he announced that he was going to travel to America to try his luck at cattle farming rather than taking over the family business in his Roubaix. With much reluctance his father agreed and gave him \$10,000 to start his new venture.

## Cattle-Ranching

In 1883 Pierre (age 27) gets to America and travels to Chicago to learn more about the range stock business before investing any capital. There he meets the Marquis de Mores, a fellow Frenchman, who tells him of the prairies in North Dakota and Montana. Wibaux and an army friend came to present-day Wibaux in 1883 and engaged in ranching. During this time he lived in a very primitive dugout where he ate and slept during brief intervals while learning the duties of a cowboy, foreman and rancher while eating and sleeping beneath the stars. After three years he was at the end of his resources and returned to France.

The region was hit by an extremely harsh weather that winter of 1886-87. It is estimated that around 70%-85% of the cattle in the area perished in the long snowstorms. Pierre Wibaux saw an opportunity in this: only the sturdiest and most resilient beasts survived this trial, In 1887 Wibaux returned to Montana with his young English bride, French servants and an almost unlimited supply of capital. Undaunted Pierre bought the remnants of the large herds that had survived. Also, the shortage of beef available ensured high sale prices for Wibaux's stock for the following 3 years. In the 1890s, Wibaux had amassed one of the largest herds in the world, with over 65 000 cattle heads and 300 horses. He ran cattle on the open range in an area covering nearly 70,000 acres. This prestige earns him the friendship of a certain Theodore Roosevelt, who was then ranching about 30 miles east of Wibaux in the Dakota badlands, who would give up the stock business to go on and become the 26th president of the United States from 1901 to 1909. He remained friends with the Marquis de Mores, who had undertaken a grandiose meat packing and meat marketing enterprise in Dakota.

The W Bar Ranch operated from 1885 to 1895, employing 25-30 cowboys. The ranch's cattle ranged from the Little Missouri on the east to the Yellowstone, from the Northern Pacific Railroad on the Yellowstone to the Missouri river. The main ranch for his family and servants was 12 miles north of Mingusville, which he had renamed to "Wibaux". He had a secondary ranch 60 miles north of Wibaux where most of the cowboys lived. A string of line cabins were maintained along the Yellowstone. A wolfer was employed who ran two 50 dog packs on alternate days.

Shortly after locating on Beaver Creek he induced the Northern Pacific to build stockyards at Wibaux, while he took the town of Wibaux in hand and began improvements in the little town. He built an office (originally shared with another rancher) in Wibaux with a sleeping room and kitchen which is currently a museum. The office sported a lawn and many beds of flowers. He divested himself of cattle as more settlers came into the country and competed for resources. By 1900, Pierre had moved to Miles City, but he still engaged in some cattle business near Miles City until 1908. One of the first rodeos was put on by the W Bar cowboys as entertainment for visiting Frenchmen. (Source calls them "nobility", probably included his father.)

The house on the main ranch burned down in the 1920s. A stone barn survived much longer.

### **Post-Ranching Activities**

Wibaux, being a main land-owner in the area started to develop infrastructures and services in the area. He became the President and 95% owner of the State National Bank in Miles City, and also opened his own national bank in Forsythe of which he was the president. This particular position gave him the right to sign dollar bills to issue money, making him the only ever Frenchman ever to do so. Pierre was also to be the only owner of the Clover Leaf Gold Mining Company which was thriving on gold-mines in the Black Hills region. He was one of several stockholders in the Yellowstone Coal Company around 1907 which mined low quality lignite coal from the north side of the Yellowstone. He also had business interests in France, Mexico, California, and in the Klondike region of Alaska. By 1910, Pierre turned to traveling, but his plans were cut short by liver cancer. He died at St. Luke's Hospital in Chicago March 21, 1913 (age 58). His wife Nellie and son Cyril returned to France, spent the rest of their lives there, and are buried at Père Lachaise Cemetery in Paris.

Philanthropy- Like the Carnegies and Rockefellers of his time, Wibaux too was a philanthropist. He always remained attached to his native Roubaix and was among the large contributors to help building the Hôpital de la Fraternité. He donated 25 000 Francs to establish "model Farms" which would produce quality milk for those in need (in early 1900s France, bad nutritional hygiene was a major cause for infant mortality). This generous contribution helped put in place the "Goutte de Lait" foundation, of which Wibaux was named president. Finally, for all of his industrial and agricultural achievements and philanthropic work, Pierre Wibaux was awarded the "National Order of the Legion of Honour", the highest and most prestigious decoration in France (much like Knights and Dames in England).

### **Legacy**

Wibaux's "W-Bar Ranch" was so successful that a community of employees, cowboys, cattlemen and their families emerged from this business and grouped to form a village then a town, named Wibaux after Pierre himself. Wibaux County, surrounding the town of Wibaux, is also named after him. The town which emerged from the Wibaux's gold-miner community in the Black Hills region also bore the mark of Pierre Wibaux as he named the town after his beloved and native Roubaix. St Peter's Catholic Church in Wibaux is named after him. The original church that he had built is still standing, although a newer building replaced it in the 1960s. Supposedly, when Wibaux's father visited him from France, he was upset to find that there was no church for his son and others to worship in. A twice-size statue of Pierre Wibaux stands on a hill west of Wibaux overlooking the town, looking north toward the ranch twelve

miles away, and some of his remains are contained in the base of the statue. In Miles City, a large building bore his name until it burned down in the 1960s. A city park still bears his name. Wibaux Park was created using the \$10,000 that Pierre bequeathed in his will to the city of Miles city for a park. The city bought the land from L. W. Stacy who had purchased the land from the estate of the deceased Judge Jason W. Strevell.

## **Personal Life**

Wibaux was known as a good person to work for, fair to his employees, kind and thoughtful to proven friends, but overbearing and haughty to those who tried to use him for their own purposes. He loved to display his wealth, but didn't put on airs. His horsemanship served him well first in the French army, but also on his ranch, where he would participate in some work with his hired cowboys, taking orders from his foreman on roundups and enduring cold and rain. He was a capable boxer. A little taller than average, he weighed about 200 lbs. when he first arrived in the US. He loved flowers and brought his gardener Jules Accart with him from France.

It is assumed that he wintered in England at least briefly in 1884-85, since his son was born in 1885. While in France during the winter of 1886-87, Pierre married Mary Ellen "Nellie" Cooper, a woman that he had met in England and arranged to have several hometown locals accompany him to work as servants. When returning from France, the men came first, followed by the women (Nellie and servants) who were met at the railroad station in Keith by a group of Indians, but were soon escorted to their new home by Pierre and some of his cowboys. Stories are told of the women being alone at the ranch and having to hide when a stray Indian would come by and finding no one, would ransack the house. Nellie and her servant Victorine Accart returned to France in 1890 and returned with her maid's son and another servant girl. Victorine's husband Jules was Pierre's gardener and caretaker.

Cyril, the Wibaux's only child was born in 1885. He was educated at home until the age of fifteen when Wibaux leased a fashionable apartment in Paris for his wife and son from 1900 on, in order to assure that his son served in the French army and received a thorough business education.

## **L. W. Stacy**

Lorenzo Winchester Stacy was a cattleman, land developer, banker and early resident of Miles City, Montana. Lorenzo was born in Athens, Ohio on 24 August 1847 (or 1850) to Joel A. Stacy (1817 - 1868) and Sally Amelia Elston Stacy (1819 - 1858). He had at least one sibling, Alvin W. Stacy, who lived near Lorenzo in the last years of Alvin's life. He moved to eastern Montana, about 80 miles south of Miles City, on a large ranch between the Tongue and Powder rivers in 1883. At one point, he was the manager of the L U Bar Ranch on Phillips Creek in the Little Dry, running three wagons and about 30,000 cattle between the Yellowstone River and the Missouri River.

In December 1888, he married Mary Louise Hotchkiss to whom five children were born, Edward W. Stacy, Florence Stacy, Lorenzo Winchester Stacy, Jr., Frances May Stacy and Alvin W. Stacy (younger). Florence preceded her father in death and Wibaux park, located in the southwest part of the city, was dedicated by the family to her memory. Mr. Stacy was president of the Commercial State Bank from 1906 to 1911. Determined to bring the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad to Miles City, Stacy organized his fellow businessmen to secure and donate property for the railroad's right-of-way. In 1908, the Milwaukee Road arrived, rewarding their efforts; that same year Stacy hired local architect Brynjulf Rivenes to design an elegant, if isolated home on the eighty acres he owned at the edge of Miles City

(2206 Main St.). Rivenes' eclectic design featured such classical details as a monumental, two-story back porch (enclosed in the 1920s) and a balustraded front porch with a central one-story portico; its hipped dormers, wide eaves, and Spanish roof tiles reflected the newly fashionable Prairie style. The "commodious and attractive residence of modern architectural design" did not remain isolated for long. The Milwaukee Railroad delivered the predicted boom, and Stacy found a ready market for lots. By 1915, when Stacy sold part of the land he had purchased from Jason Strevell's estate to the city for Wibaux Park, his house had been joined by many others, and East Main Street had become home to Miles City's most fashionable residences. The street that ran on the west side of Wibaux Park had been named after Strevell, the street that bisected the park was named Stacy and the street on the east side of the park was named after his son L. Winchester Jr. A portion of Winchester street was called Cale, after S. Fred Cale who had a farm at that portion.

He was a member of the board of directors of Commercial State Bank at the time of his death. He had been in ill health for several months and spent considerable time in the south, where it was believed a milder climate would be of benefit. He died at 8:15 o'clock morning, Friday 3 September 1920 at the family residence in Miles City, age 70.

## **Strevell**

Strevell was born in 1832 in a Dutch Reformed household on the Hudson, in Albany, New York to Harvey & Elizabeth (Lewis) Strevell, natives of New York, but descended from German immigrants named "Strübel" from Beiningen, Württemberg. Harvey was a teacher, then a farmer. His grandfather, Woolrick Strevell, was wagon master in Gen. Washington's army during the Revolution, in which he served until the close of the war without injury. He located in the state of New York more than 2 centuries ago. His wife was a niece of Col. Lyman Lewis, an officer in the Continental army of the Revolution. She became the mother of six children, Jason W. Strevell being the fifth in order of birth. Jason W. Strevell was educated in the Rensselaerville Academy, in Albany county, N. Y., and then began reading law with Peckham & Tremaine, prominent members of the Albany bar. His siblings were: Estes H. who was for some years a merchant at Ravena and died there May 22, 1896; Amidon M.; Emily; William; Edwin.

Illinois- Strevell migrated to Illinois in 1855. He was admitted to the Illinois bar that same year, and began his twenty-four year practice in Pontiac. Besides practicing law, Mr. Strevell engaged in merchandising, conducting the first exclusive hardware store in Pontiac, for a time at least, as the partnership "Strevell & Kinsell". This business also involved William J. Murphy. Strevell was heavily involved in the incorporation of Pontiac in 1856 and was one of the five first trustees of the village. He was selected to spearhead the selection of land for the first town cemetery.

On 15 August, 1858, Jason was married to Elizabeth Butler Kelly Nettleton, daughter of Dr. John Kelly, a physician and surgeon of Lake City, Minnesota. She was a recent widow with two children and a one month old baby. Their father was Zelas H. Nettleton, probably "Z. N. Nettleton", a founding father of Pontiac, also one of the five first trustees in 1857. Zelas had died in late 1857, after Elizabeth became pregnant. The marriage took place in the bride's home town. Jason moved in to the house that Nettleton had shared with Elizabeth and added on to it. The house has been restored.

John Nettleton was age 7 when his father died and was age 10 when Abraham Lincoln visited the home. In addition to that house, Zelas Nettleton had owned a lot of farmland and Jason Strevell also assumed ownership of that land. After being spared by a tornado in May, a strong tornado swept through Pontiac at 4:45 o'clock on the afternoon of November 26, 1859 from the southwest. The roofs of J. W.

Strevell's hardware store and four other businesses were blown off. The roof of the court-house, cupulo and gable end were blown down. The two-story Sinsel house was torn to splinters, burying two women and a child, but none was seriously injured. Several other houses were either blown to pieces or were blown from their founda-tions and turned around. Barns all over the vil-lage were demolished.

Strevell and Abraham Lincoln were close friends and shared many hours together in conversation. One of the most documented meetings between these two gentlemen occurred on the evening of January 27, 1860 at the Pontiac Presbyterian church. Lincoln, earlier that same day, accepted a standing invitation to speak to the Pontiac Young Men's Literary Society, of which Strevell was president. He was in Bloomington for a trial and took an afternoon train to Pontiac. His speech was not very successful, as Lincoln was exhausted and had only decided to speak a few hours before appearing. After the presentation, Lincoln went to the Strevell house, a blaock and a half away, to spend the night, after a small reception. Strevell and Lincoln stayed up late, talking about politics, slavery, and other national and local issues of the day. During the course of the conversation, Strevell suggested that Lincoln might be selected as the Republican Party's presidential candidate at the upcoming party convention. Lincoln argued that he might be chosen as a vice-presidential candidate, but did not believe he would gain the top spot on the ticket. In less than four months from the time Mr. Lincoln delivered his lecture in Pon-tiac he was nominated for President of the United States by the republican convention in session in Chicago, on May 19, 1860.

As the conversation turned to less important topics, Strevell, who was six foot tall, said he did not believe that Lincoln was really 4 inches taller than himself. Lincoln offered to let himself be measured and stood in a doorway in his stocking feet while Strevell made a scratch in the door frame to mark Lincoln's height. Strevell then measured, from floor to the mark on the door frame, and found Lincoln to be exactly, 6 foot, 4 inches tall. One source says that Lincoln did not spend the night, but took the midnight train to Springfield. He was ordained and installed as an elder of the Presbyterian Church in 1861.

He served as a Republican in the lower house of the state legislature for four years (1864-1867). This was during Lincoln's second term, at the end of the civil war.

The news of the assassination of President Lincoln 15 Apr 1865 was received in Pontiac with feelings of abject horror. Never in the history of Pontiac was there such universal mourning. True, most all of the male population of the village were in the army, but their wives' and children remained, and when word came that the special train bear-ing the body would pass through Pontiac on the afternoon of May 2, 1865, business was entirely suspended, schools were dismissed, and the entire population of the village and of the surrounding country marched to the Alton depot to pay their last respects. After remain-ing at the depot for about two hours, word came over the wire that the funeral train would not leave Chicago until 9 p. m., and the assemblage broke up and wended their way homeward. However, when the special train bearing the body of the martyred President arrived in Pon-tiac at midnight, there was a large gathering at the depot, as there was at nearly every station between Chicago and Springfield, giving evidence of his hold upon the heart of the nation and the universal sorrow which his revolting assassina-tion had produced. He supported Grant as president in the 1868 election and allowed 10 year old son Charles to march in the back of the Republican marching club "Grant's Tanners", dressed in leatherette caps and capes and waving a smoky kerosene torch.

He served as a member of the senate 1869-1872.

He was a member of the Electoral College that elected Hayes to the presidency in 1876.

In 1869, when John was about 19 years old, he went on a surveying adventure that almost cost him his life. A local town founder, who was a surveyor, obtained a contract to survey Indian land west of Fort Kearney, Nebraska. He recruited 8 local boys to accompany him, none older than 17 years old. They traveled by rail to the Fort, but there were no soldiers available to escort them. Buck made the mistake of being impatient and set out anyway. After journeying two days west-ward and encountering many of the Sioux tribe, Mr. Buck became alarmed and sent young McGregor and Nettleton back to Fort Kearney with a request to the Colonel that he send an escort at once. The boys returned to the fort and delivered the message, but no troops being available they waited and finally decided to go back home. Many weeks later it was determined that the party had all been killed by Indians and the bodies were never found.

John Nettleton, married Olive Potter in Pontiac in 1870. In 1871 he and Olive had a son name Wilson. However, in 1872 he filed suit in Livingston County as the oldest son and rightful owner of the farmland. He was granted ownership of the land, plus was given a monetary settlement for a share of the crops raised and sold over those years. John then packed up his family and moved (60 miles NNE) to the Joliet-Plainfield area (SW of Chicago outskirts).

In 1874, Strevell built a store room on the north side of the town square, as part of a building boom.

Before the Strevell's left Pontiac, they removed the door jam which was marked with Lincoln's height, and it was subsequently placed in the Salt Lake City museum started by Charles Strevell. Strevell's home in Pontiac has recently been purchased by the Livingston County Historical Society and is currently undergoing restoration with the goal of turning it into a local history and Lincoln museum.

Montana- Strevell considered moving west. Part of the reason was to live in a drier climate for his son Charles, whose health was still affected by a year of recovering from typhoid fever. It is also probable, like so many others, Jason was attracted to the opportunities to become much more wealthy in a frontier town. Pontiac was fairly well established and any increases in wealth would be hard fought and subject to luck. After an exploratory visit, the family moved from Pontiac to Miles City in autumn of 1879, where he and Charles reestablished themselves as involved citizens of Miles City. When they left Chicago, Jason told the family that with the new start, they would drop the final "e" from "Strevelle".

On the way to St. Paul, they stopped they stopped in Minnesota for a day to visit Elizabeth's father, Dr. John Kelly. Kelly had made his fortune the California gold rush. At St. Paul, they met with Jules Hannaford, then general freight agent of the Northern Pacific Railroad and later its president. Most of the inventory for their future hardware sales would be shipped by this railroad, only part way, at first. A visit to Jules would become an annual event. They then continued by train to Bismarck and waited for their belongings to catch up to them via teams that had left Illinois traveling overland before and during the family's train travel. When they arrived, the journey continued, crossing the Missouri River, passing through Mandan country (where Lewis and Clark had enlisted the previously kidnapped Shoshone Sacajawea. They came to the Yellowstone River about where the Powder River flows into it. At some point, they experienced a buffalo hunt, securing a head as a trophy, as well as an Indian scare.

Arriving exhausted at Miles City, they checked in to the Yellowstone Hotel and soon found a small almost finished house to move into. It had no domestic water, so Looney Roach was hired to dig a well on the lot. Judge Strevell practiced law in Miles City for many years until his death. He homesteaded a

tract of land on the east side of town, where the Veterans' Hospital now stands -- in fact his residence was right in the middle of what is now Wibaux Park. In 1893, he was one of three attorneys who assisted in the defense of Alvah Tilton, the young cowboy who killed James Pym, a decorated veteran of Custer's campaign (he was in Reno's fight, went for water).

### **Helen Strevell Miles - George M. Miles**

While not primarily a farmer, a record exists of a planting of sugar beets in 1898, which includes an accounting of his costs, but (as he laments) the yield record was lost, though he waxes exuberantly about the yield being as good as anyone ever saw.

Besides Charles, Jason and Elizabeth had a daughter Helen, who married George M. Miles in 22 December, 1880. Miles was also active in the Presbyterian Church. Strevell partnered with his son-in-law in livestock (with Hawes) using a range 100 miles from town. If he ran livestock independently, he had closed out those interests by 1902 or so. He was a director of the First National Bank of Miles City and the owner of real estate in Montana and in Phoenix, Arizona, and Tacoma, Washington. He undoubtedly financed part of Charlie's hardware store partnership with Miles. Helen Strevell Miles died in 11 July 1887. George Miles remarried.

Jason's son, Charles Nettleton Strevell, married Elizabeth Crawford in 1881 in Pontiac, Illinois, and then moved to Salt Lake City, Utah, where he devoted his life to archeology, after partnering with his sister's husband in hardware stores ("Miles & Strevell", then "Miles, Strevell & Ulmer", which later was just Miles & Ulmer. They also had a store in Odgen, Utah). Charles N. Strevell was one of the organizers of Strevell-Paterson Hardware Company and was the president for many years before his retirement in 1912. He became well known for his essay, "Dinosauro-podes," which was published several times during the 1930s.

Since coming to Montana Mr. Strevell took little part in politics. He was actively concerned in the first presidential nomination of William McKinley in 1896.

Mr. Strevell was a Presbyterian, an elder in the local church. He was three times a delegate to the general assembly of the church and a regular attendant of the synod and presbytery. While still in Pontiac, he was the first superintendent of their Sunday school. He enjoyed reading good literature and traveled to Turkey, Palestine, Egypt, and Europe.

Elizabeth died 11 July, 1902, 15 years to the day after Helen died, and after 14 years of being an invalid, the last few years being bedridden. Her church group would meet in her home for much of that time. Strevell died 27 February, 1903 (less than 8 months after his wife) and his remains were brought to Chicago for burial beside those of his daughter Nellie. In 1899, she had published a book of short religious poems dedicated to her daughter Helen Strevell Miles.

Jason argued cases before Supreme Courts of at least two states and the United States.