

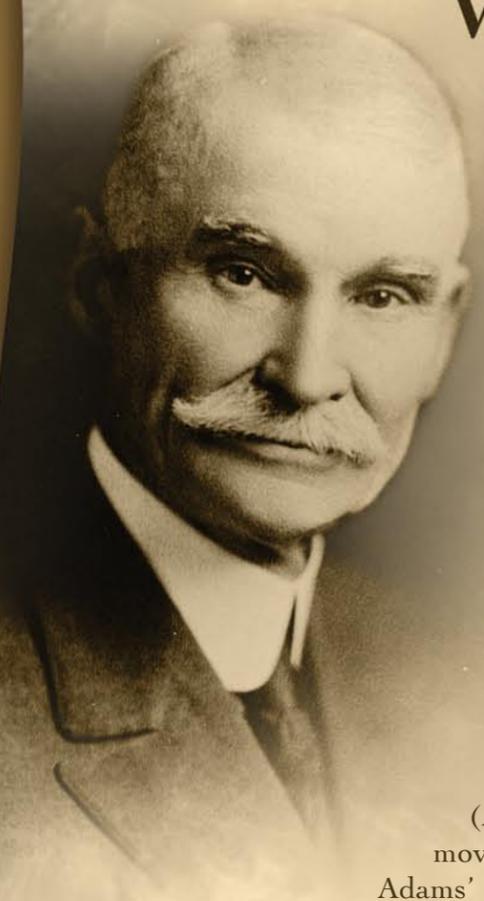
DEADWOOD WALL OF FAME

2008

William E. Adams

Born: May 13, 1854

Died: June 16, 1934



William E. Adams was just 22 years old when he and his brother, James, arrived in Deadwood in 1877. Over the next six decades W.E. Adams served his city as businessman, banker, politician and civic leader. He became one of Deadwood's most important benefactors whose name remains visible in Deadwood today.

Perhaps his most important legacy is the Sherman Street museum that bears his name. He established the Adams Memorial Hall Museum in 1930, and donated it to the city of Deadwood. He wanted a place to preserve the fast-disappearing history of the city's gold rush heritage and serve as a memorial to his wife and daughters. He also established several city parks, erected watering troughs for horses, provided American flags for schools and churches and backed the construction of the Mount Roosevelt Memorial.

"During his residence of more than one half-century in Deadwood, deceased (Adams) had unshakable faith in the future of the city and was a leader in all movements having for their purpose the growth and betterment of the community," Adams' 1934 obituary noted.

Adams was born in Bertrand, Michigan, on May 13, 1854, and grew up in Fairbault, Minnesota. In 1877, he left his job with American Express in Minneapolis and headed West. He and his brother joined the Major Whitehead Expedition to the Black Hills. In Deadwood, W.E. staked a mining claim. James bought a restaurant and built the Banner Grocery Store. Before long, W.E. joined his brother in the grocery business.

They lost their store in the 1879 Deadwood fire, and rebuilt at 629 Main St. They continued as prosperous partners until 1889, when James sold his interest to W.E. and moved to California. Five years later, W.E. Adams built a new Adams Block on Sherman Street. Over the years it grew to a four-story warehouse from 51 to 61 Sherman Street. In 1901, he became a wholesaler, establishing Adams Bros. Wholesale Grocery and the Pioneer Fruit Co.

Adams married Alice May Burnham on December 22, 1880. They had two daughters: Lucile born in 1884, and Helen born in 1892. Lucile died from typhoid fever in Michigan in 1912.

Adams served again as Deadwood mayor from 1920 to 1924, and during that time he and his wife purchased the elegant mansion at 22 Van Buren Street. Today, the restored Adams House is open to the public and remains a popular stop for visitors.

However, in June 1925 W.E. Adams' life took a tragic turn. Alice, who was in California for the birth of their first grandchild, succumbed to cancer on June 6. Daughter Helen, distraught over her mother's death, went into early labor and died the following day. The baby lived only a few hours.

Adams later met and married a young widow named Mary Mastrovich Vicich. W.E. was 73; Mary was 29. During their seven years together, the couple divided their time between homes in Pasadena, Palm Springs, California, and Deadwood. On June 16, 1934, W.E. Adams died at age 80.

After his death, Mary Adams continued to give generously to a number of causes in the Lead-Deadwood area. Before she died in 1993, she created the Adams-Mastrovich Foundation, which continues to donate to arts, education and religious causes in South Dakota and California.



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