

Who is John H. Whitaker?



John H. Whitaker was a successful 19th century businessman and distinguished resident of Penacook. He was born in Hopkinton on June 9, 1835, and attended school in Hopkinton until the age of 16, when he moved to Penacook to work at the livery stable and delivery business owned by Seth Hoyt.

In 1858, at the age of 23, Whitaker established a livery stable and delivery business of his own, and two years later, on February 6, 1860, he married Frances E. Caldwell. The newlyweds established their home at 42 Washington Street the following year, and over the next four decades the lawns, shrubbery, and flower gardens surrounding the house were celebrated for their beauty.

Whitaker's delivery business prospered, and in 1864 he started a new business venture with George F. Sanborn, a fellow businessman who had built a lucrative company hauling granite from the quarries in West Concord to Penacook. This partnership was dissolved after one year, and Whitaker subsequently signed a new partnership agreement with Caldwell, Amsden & Company — a large cabinetmaking firm that occupied a large mill building along the river. The John H. Whitaker Company supplied lumber to Caldwell, Amsden & Company for many years. In 1890, Whitaker retired from involvement in the day-to-day operation of his company, and pursued other interests, most notably his interest in the steamboat.

In his retirement, Whitaker became well known throughout the area for the steamboats he operated along the Contoocook River. Locals fondly referred to him as the "Commodore" — a moniker it is said that he greatly enjoyed.

Whitaker was active in local and state politics, and he identified as a Democrat. He served as Assessor of Ward One (1859) and on the Penacook Board of Aldermen (1871 and 1876). He also served in the NH State Legislature as a Representative (1862) and Senator (1893-94).

Whitaker was described by his biographers in *The History of Penacook New Hampshire* as "enjoying the distinction of being the largest man in the village, his height being six feet three inches and his weight 300 pounds, and when on parade with the Knights Templar his commanding form is always seen at the right of the line."

He died peacefully in his Washington Street home on December 3, 1903 and was buried in Woodlawn Cemetery.