

## **The Creightons: Builders of the West**

May 10, 1869 was an electrifying date in the history of a young United States of America. The transcontinental railroad was completed. Hammering of the Golden Spike was relayed to a waiting world via telegraph lines strung under the direction of Edward Creighton.

The importance of the moment was not lost upon the crowd of 600 that gathered at Promontory Point. With completion of rapid, reliable transportation between the oceans, the nation could look forward to unprecedented prosperity.

Edward Creighton had provided the inspiration that hastened construction of the Union Pacific rails across the rugged west. The route of the Union Pacific was nearly identical with the transcontinental telegraph mapped out by Creighton a decade before.

There had been ceremonies when the telegraph was linked, too. On October 24, 1861 the mayor of San Francisco told the mayor of New York City: "The Pacific to the Atlantic sends greetings. And may both oceans be dry before a foot of all the land that lies between them belongs to any other than our united country."

The construction of the telegraph, like the building of the Union Pacific, represented a contest between two companies. The race was between the Pacific Telegraphy Company backed by Western Union and the Overland Telegraph Company from San Francisco. The finish line was Fort Bridger near Salt Lake City, Utah. Creighton's Pacific Telegraphy team won by a full week, so it was a more meaningful message that Creighton sent across his half of the line to Omaha and his wife on October 17: "This being the first message over the new line since its completion to Salt Lake, allow e to greet you. In a few days two oceans will be united. Edward Creighton."

### **Age 41**

Edward Creighton was 41 when he spanned the continent by wire. His wife, Mary Lucretia, was 27. They had a son Charles David, age 2.

It was natural for Edward to think of his family first in his moment of triumph. His western adventure had always included as many family members as possible.

Edward was the fifth child of immigrant parents. His grandmother, Bridget Creighton, had arrived in America in 1805 with a daughter and four sons. She had been evicted from her County Monaghan, Ireland, home by her landlord.

One of her sons, James, married Bridget Hughes, a native of County Armagh, Ireland, six years after his arrival in America. Following their marriage in Philadelphia, they moved to Pittsburgh for a year and then in 1813, to Belmont, County, Ohio where James took up farming. Bridget was to bear nine children. The oldest was Alice who married Thomas McShane and raised seven children on their Ohio farm. One son, Edward McShane, was to become Edward Creighton's secretary for a number of years. Another, Thomas, became partner in the Wyoming cattle-raising firm of Edward Creighton & Company, and John A. McShane also moved to Wyoming and owned a small interest in Edward Creighton & Company.

## **Invalid**

The second Creighton child, Henry, became a carpenter but suffered an accident in Louisville, Ky., and spent the next 14 years of his life an invalid in the family home. He played a major role in the practical education of his younger sisters and brothers.

Francis, the third child, lived with his family in Springfield, Ohio, until Edward urged him to move to Omaha to share in the family's success. He died in 1873.

James was the first member of the family to arrive in Omaha. He had been sent with his brother Joseph by Edward whose business interests were pointing toward the frontier river city. James was to become Edward's business agent in Omaha for several years. However he was not physically strong and the frontier climate proved too rugged. He died in 1866.

Joseph, sixth child, married the settled in Omaha. His contribution to the Creighton family story was minimal. Creighton family story was minimal. He has been described as goodhearted, lacking in concern for the opinions of others, and "absolutely devoid of vigor of mind or body."

The seventh child, Mary, was married to John McCreary of Omaha and raised seven children. The eighth, Catherine, died as a child.

Youngest of the family was John Andrew. He was 11 years younger than Edward and shared his zest for life. Before John was born, the family moved to Licking County, Ohio. Farming continued to be the family's first occupation but other laboring jobs were sought in an effort to increase family income.

In the struggle, schooling was largely forgotten. It was customary for the children to work in the fields. Edward did go to the local school, but it offered little more than the bare essentials needed to manage a frontier farm.

John's life took a slightly different course. John's father died when he was 10 and his mother decided to move from the farm into Springfield. A religious woman, Bridget had influenced the purchase of the family's second farm toward Licking County because of its proximity to a Dominican mission. Now she was determined that the younger children, especially John, would have a Catholic college education.

Edward executor of his father's estate, contributed 600 toward John's education. When the youngest Creighton reached age 20, he enrolled in St. Joseph's College, a Dominican institution near Somerset, Ohio. He wanted to be a civil engineer, so took up the study of mathematics. Two years later, in 1854, Bridget died and the lure of Edward's growing success on the frontier was too great for John to resist. He left college to join Edward.

When he was 14, Edward had begun working as a cartboy on the turnpike roads. He divided his time between the farm and construction jobs, mostly freight hauling.

## **Contracts**

By 18 he was a driver and spent increasingly longer intervals away from home. But he knew his future wasn't in working as a salaried laborer. Before his father died in 1842, he had won a contract in Springfield to build part of the National Stage Road linking Springfield and Wheeling, West Virginia. After his success as a builder, Creighton had little trouble winning more construction contracts. It was in 1847 that Edward first encountered the telegraph. He saw workmen digging holes, setting poles, and stringing wire. Edward thought there might be profit from hauling poles. He first obtained contracts for

hauling materials, but before long his leadership talents were recognized and he became superintendent for construction for two sections of a telegraph kingdom controlled by Henry O'Reilly.

O'Reilly furnished plenty of construction contracts to keep Creighton busy for a time but the telegraph industry was still in its infancy and it eventually became clear that Edward had cast his lot with the losing side in the struggle for dominance of the trade.

As O'Reilly's telegraphy empire became increasingly shaky, Edward Creighton's need for financial stability increased. He was now the primary source of income for his widowed mother and the children still at home.

Despite the financial setbacks of the telegraph's promoters, Creighton continued to believe in the young industry's future. He shifted his business loyalties to the team of Judge Samuel L. Selden and banker and real estate broker Hiram Sibley. Sibley, a tough persuasive and relentless businessman, was able to keep Creighton busy building new lines from 1851 to 1854. By 1853, Sibley and friends controlled the patents to two of the three competing telegraph systems. In 1856 the financiers had brought several competing telegraph systems. In 1856 into the new telegraph system. They then reincorporated their acquisitions and their own lines under the name Western Union Telegraph Company.

As the various small companies were merged into a giant system, Edward Creighton was assigned the task of assessing the quality of what the company had purchased and of finding more companies to bring into the Western Union fold.

On one occasion Edward conducted psychological warfare for Western Union. He was sent to look over the New Orleans & Ohio Telegraph lines recently rebuilt by Louisville, Ky., investors and connecting exclusively with one of the dwindling number of Western Union competitors in the East. While making his review, he telegraphed information about construction of a new Western Union line on his competitor's wires. A staged visit by the head of Western Union to Creighton in Louisville panicked the competing firm into canceling its exclusive arrangements and joining the Western Union system.

While such activities endeared Creighton to Western Union, the firm couldn't keep him busy. In 1855 he returned to road building in addition to his Western Union duties. First he assembled street-building crews in Toledo, Ohio; then he agreed to build a railroad bed in Mexico, Missouri.

## **Streets**

From Missouri he moved his 40 teams and equipment to Keokuk, Iowa, where he was to grade the city's streets.

In the mid-1850s, perhaps sensing the inevitability of the Civil War, several major decisions were made by the Creightons. The death of Bridget Creighton in 1854 released the family from their Ohio roots. John quickly abandoned college in favor of a junior partnership with Edward. James and Joseph were dispatched by Edward to Omaha to begin setting up a base of operations for the Creighton family; Edward's road building contract in Keokuk was terminated in 1855 by a change in city administration. He immediately left for Omaha, leaving his 24-year-old brother John to sell all of the construction business and follow. Cousins Harry and James Creighton were in Omaha by May of 1856, John Creighton, last and youngest of the family members to make the move, arrived in Omaha.

## **Wedding**

But Edward wasn't through reordering the Creighton family. With \$25,000 in the bank, he returned to Ohio to ask David A. Wareham for the hand of his 22-year-old daughter, Mary Lucretia. One of eight children, Mary Lucretia married Edward in Dayton, on October 7, 1856.

David Wareham was a carpenter and contractor of Pennsylvania Dutch heritage and was considered "one of the substantial men" of early Dayton. He was a convert to Catholicism, and his wife, Mary Emily, was a Washington, D.C., native of old Maryland Catholic stock.

Edward didn't take his new bride to Omaha in the dead of winter when the frontier town was a sea of mud. Instead they traveled to Pittsburgh where he arranged to have construction materials -- especially lumber -- shipped by steamer up the Missouri River. When spring arrived, he brought his bride west and they began planning their new home, a modest structure between 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> streets on the north side of Chicago Street.

While waiting for Edward to return to business in Omaha. John became clerk to the register of deeds, Thomas O'Connor. Before the end of the year he had purchased portions of at least two lots in Omaha. He spent his first four years in Omaha farming along the river as well as clerking and selling. John was a popular merchant. Even in his 20's, John had earned the reputation as a champion storyteller.

In 1857, when Edward returned with his bride, Omaha and much of the nation was in with a financial panic that saw fortunes built on speculation wiped out.

While others were pulling out of shaky investments and counting their losses, Edward had money to loan. In 1858 Omaha snapped out of the brief but devastating panic. Gold had been discovered in what would become Colorado territory and Omaha became a boomtown as wagon trains formed for the westward trek.

Cousins Harry and James were quick to head for the Cherry Creek gold strike. John A. Creighton teamed with his former employer, J.J. Brown in forming two wagon trains of supplies for the Denver boom area. Edward stayed in Omaha, forming a partnership with two brothers, Herman and Augustus Kountze. While the Kountze's were to become major land developers in Omaha, Edward's partnership was built on their banking interests that they quickly extended into the gold rush territory.

## **Civic**

Omaha was exploding with activity and the Creighton family was deeply involved in many civic endeavors. Law and order hadn't been established in the new territory so the Creighton brothers joined others in forming the "Near-Vigilance Committee" which, among other things, tried to make citizens pay their debts. A Catholic priest arrived and all of the Creighton brothers contributed money and lumber to build him a house. Politics became important in the new territory and Edward served as a delegate to the Democratic County Convention. Cousin James Creighton was appointed a city councilman by the mayor, an arrangement that complemented Edward's civic activities. But it was still frontier, Edward sent his wife back to Dayton to give birth to their son, Charles David, in 1859.

Meanwhile the westward development of the telegraph was stalled. Western Union President Hiram Sibley wanted to build to the West Coast. His board of directors refused in 1857. But Sibley's dream wasn't ended by the word from his directors. He immediately began the maneuvering that would bring about the dream of a transcontinental telegraph – a dream shared by Edward Creighton, Sibley's representative in the new West.

By 1859, Sibley was ready to make a move. First, he called Edward Creighton and requested that he determine whether a telegraph line would be practical between Fort Smith, Arkansas and California by

the “Southern Route” approximating the route of the Butterfield Stage line. Creighton’s early assessment that the line would be too long to maintain pleased Sibley since most of Western Union’s lines were in the north.

## **Search**

Then Creighton set about finding a northern route beginning in Memphis, Tenn., and moving northwesterly through the uncharted west. By the time he reached Colorado territory, Creighton knew it was the wrong route, too.

By process of elimination, Edward Creighton had dictated a central route and at the same time enlarged Nebraska territory’s role in the development of the West. But not everyone was happy with Creighton’s findings. Among the early detractors was Charles M. Stebbins who had controlled telegraph building west of St. Louis, Mo., for seven years. While Creighton was still surveying, Stebbins was beginning to build the southern route.

## **Speculation**

Both Sibley and Stebbins knew that the Mormon wars and other activities in the West had increased interest in a transcontinental telegraph. They both speculated that government subsidies would be granted to the first line completed. The California Legislature decided in 1859 to grant a \$6,000 a year subsidy to the first company to connect with California. Sibley headed for Washington to try to get a bill through Congress granting government subsidies for the telegraph.

The six companies of the North American Telegraph Association of which Western Union was a member also sent representatives. They were there as much to watch Sibley as to lobby themselves. Company infighting was fierce along the line being drawn for the Civil War. June 16, 1860 congress gave Sibley the law he needed. It was a \$40,000 a year subsidy for 10 years.

Congress also gave land for the lines and extra land for the substations. But the lines had to be in operation by July 31, 1862 to qualify for the money. The contract was to be determined by bids.

None of the six North American Telegraph Association confederates thought the subsidy large enough. They didn’t want to bid. Sibley had a friend put through a routine resolution that any single

company in the group could put in a bid. It was explained that that action might be necessary to keep a competitor from winning the contract even though North American didn't want it. No one questioned the explanation and it passed easily.

Almost before the gavel fell adjourning the Association meeting, Sibley had filed a \$40,000 bid. That makes it the highest bid and, because three other bidders never filed their bonds, also the low bid.

Creighton began preparing for the moment when building would begin. In the most impressive physical triumph of his life, Edward Creighton in the winter of 1860 surveyed the central route for the telegraph. Lines now extended to Fort Kearney, Nebraska. He began his journey from Omaha to that point on November 18, 1860. By December 15 he had surveyed the lay of the land through the future Julesburg, Colorado, through Laramie, South Pass and Fort Bridger at Salt Lake City.

## **Mormons**

Creighton paused long enough to strike up a lasting friendship with Brigham Young, leader of the Mormons. Young was an important ally. His people would help Creighton's crews if they knew Young favored the project.

Creighton did win Young's support and at some point in the relationship Creighton loaned \$100,000 to the head of the Mormons at 10 percent interest.

Before Creighton began his survey, he had become General Agent of the St. Louis & Missouri River Telegraph Company. Jephtha Wae of Western Union needed to control that Stebbins Company as a final link between Western Union and the uncharted west. He won control by a series of promises and treats, thus securing the jumping off point for Western Union.

Now Wade was in California trying to unite the four companies in that state to work eastward on the transcontinental line.

Creighton was working his way toward a meeting with Wade. He left Salt Lake City on muleback in mid-winter. For the next 12 days he pushed through the valley of the Humboldt to Carson City. The glare of sun and sand blinded him, the raw winter winds driving sand and alkali beat his face raw. Still, the Sierra Nevadas lay ahead.

He rested a few days in Carson City and then headed west across the mountains and down through the Sacramento Valley to an anxious Jephtha Wade in San Francisco. The line had been drawn across the rugged landscape. Now Wade and Creighton headed back east by way of Panama. They left California on March 27 having won the support of the California companies. They arrived in New York on April 12 and Edward Creighton was back in Omaha by May 23. He held the contract to build the telegraph line from Julesburg, Colo. To Salt Lake City.

## **Planning**

The Pacific Telegraphy Company was incorporated in Nebraska to build Creighton's end of the line. Creighton, Sibley, Wade and Stebbins were four on the 15 incorporators. Creighton owned 10 percent or \$10,000 worth of the new company.

Charles Stebbins, now a Western Union ally, had his crews take on the section of line from Brownville, Nebraska to Omaha and then west to Julesburg.

Edward Creighton meanwhile began building his construction teams. He hired a college graduate, Charles Brown, 27, to be bookkeeper, pay clerk, secretary and right arm. Brown's diary chronicles much of what is known about the building of the telegraph. Brown was the younger brother of James and R.A. Brown who were employers and partners of John A. Creighton.

Brown's first assignment from Edward was to meet the boatloads of wire, insulators, battery chemicals, nails and chopping and digging tools.

Edward, meanwhile, was building a 98-wagon train, hiring wagon masters, construction crews, and drivers. Finally, he divided his men into seven crews and ordered them to roll west.

Edward's cousin, "Long Jim" or James Creighton headed the largest crew. John Creighton worked with W.B. Hibbard, who had been Stebbin's chief builder, to form the major construction unit. Joseph Creighton had a small train, too.

On July 2, 1861, Edward Creighton dug the first of 25,000 pole holes for the Pacific Telegraphy Company's portion of the first transcontinental telegraph line. He then invited his secretary, Brown, to join him in hoisting the first pole into the hole next to the company office in the stage station, one of six buildings in town. On July 4 he addressed his workers in Julesburg and then began the task of trying to be

everywhere at once. By July 10<sup>th</sup> he had all of his crews assigned their task and a minimum of eight miles a day established for each crew. Finding enough trees quickly became a problem but “Long Jim” found a supply west of Laramie and construction hit high speed.

Meanwhile Joseph Creighton’s team sat in camp. Good natured, he didn’t send his crew to work. Finally, in August, Edward sent Brown to take on the task of replacing his boss’s brother but Joseph didn’t care.

While Creighton’s crews strung wire west over 1,100 miles. James Gamble was building the line east for 450 miles for the Overland Telegraph Company. The Pony Express passed messages between the crews and spurred on the race toward Salt Lake City.

The two companies agreed that, until the entire line was constructed, the full tariff for messages between Omaha and San Francisco would go to the company completing its line to Salt Lake City first. But Gamble and Creighton had a personal wager on the race as well.

On October 17, 1861 the race was over, won by Edward Creighton. Gamble’s crews arrived in Salt Lake City on October 24 and the continent was linked by wire.

## **War**

Edward Creighton had hauled poles for, or surveyed, or built, or rebuilt, or raised money for a good portion of the telegraph lines from Buffalo, New York to San Francisco.

For the next four years, as the Civil War raged, Edward Creighton both extended the lines to such boom towns as Denver and Central City, Colo., and worked to avoid hostile Indians while maintaining the lines he had already completed.

At first Creighton had been able to convince the Indians that the wire held magical properties – as well as a stiff electrical shock. But Indians, their home threatened, eventually overcame their fear and tore down large sections of line while shooting the telegraph operators in the lonely relay stations. Most of the soldiers were fighting the Civil War, not protecting the western settlers.

John Creighton, meanwhile, was 30 years old and ready to take on his own adventures. In 1862 Mary Lucretia Creighton’s 21-year-old sister Sarah Emily Wareham visited Omaha and met John. John

told the soft-spoken, convent-educated girl that if she would wait for him, he might marry her some day. She waited five years for John's return.

John, meanwhile, turned from telegraph construction to the lure of gold mines in Montana. In the Spring of 1862 he headed for the Salmon River mines in the area of present day Idaho with a train of 35 wagons of flour and 500 head of cattle. Floods and hostile Indians stood in the way of delivering his goods so he turned back to Salt Lake City and sold the entire train to Brigham Young for \$20,000. He spent the next winter in Iowa rounding up another herd of cattle and train of supplies, this time for Montana's gold fields.

In the fall of 1862 gold was discovered in Alder Gulch in southeast Montana. That was the destination of John and cousin "Long Jim" in the spring of 1863. Edward owned the 35 wagon train they headed for a four-month trek. At Virginia City they were rewarded with \$33,000 in gold. Next year "Long Jim" brought a train of 40-mule teams to Montana for \$52,000 in gold.

While James had returned to lead a second train, John had remained on the frontier to establish Creighton & Company wholesale and retail grocery store in Virginia City. By the time Creighton had lived in Virginia City two years, the population had reached 10,000 and the town stretched for 3 ½ miles along the gulch and had seven hotels.

John invested his funds freely and either wisely or luckily, for his investments made in the Virginia City area were to provide handsome rewards for the rest of his life.

There is ample evidence that John Creighton was not only a successful merchant but a leading citizen in the attempts to establish law, schools and churches.

## **Guard**

Creighton for example, provided the guard of 100 men that protected the prosecutor in the first real murder trial in Montana. The convicted man was, however, lynched within 45 minutes of the guilty verdict.

When one of the lynched man's friends ominously visited Creighton's store the night of the hanging, John personally collared the intruder and ushered him to the door while making the point that terror by sixshooter had been ended that day. The Vigilantes were formed within days of the incident.

Their main target was the sheriff who also headed a band of cutthroats. The prosecutor that John Creighton protected became their “prosecutor” and in the winter of 1864 the cutthroat sheriff was dangling from a rope and wagon trains could again safely travel to Virginia City.

John Creighton joined other merchants in reaping high profits from the miners. On one occasion the miners rebelled by taking all the flour from the merchants—including Creighton—and deciding their own fair price to be paid.

Despite the residents’ disagreements with John Creighton’s prices, they looked up to him as a community leader. When he broke his leg in a stagecoach accident, the newspaper of Virginia City chronicled his recovery. What they made less clear was whether the accident occurred when the stagecoach overturned on rough ground or, as one account told it, whether his leg was broken because he tripped while stepping from the stagecoach.

In any event, he sealed his position as a citizen of the first rank in 1866 when he extended the telegraph from Salt Lake City to Virginia City. In gratitude the citizens presented an inscribed chronometer watch made to order by Tiffany & Company, New York City.

While John was a community leader heading a bank in Virginia City for a time, his loyalties still remained with Omaha. In 1867 when the gold fields began to decline, he returned to the city where Sarah Emily Wareham still waited.

In the cathedral recently completed with a considerable financial assist by the Creightons, Bishop O’Gorman married John and Sarah Emily at 6 a.m. on June 9, 1868. At 10 a.m. they took the stagecoach east for their honeymoon. He was 36; she was 27.

## **Benefits**

Through the 1860’s, Edward Creighton continued to build the telegraph system and reaped its benefits. Western Union stock soared in value. In 1864 it declared a 100 percent dividend. One reason for the good fortune of Western Union was that Creighton completed the construction project for an estimated \$147, 000 or far less than half of the \$400, 000 government subsidy promised over 10 years. From his Western Union investments alone, Edward Creighton became a millionaire.

When the Civil War ended, troops were released to protect the western pioneers, including the Creightons. That freed Edward to make use of his funds in the banking business. He joined Augustus and Herman Kountze in forming the First National Bank of Omaha and was its first president in 1863.

Now the wealthiest Nebraskan, Edward Creighton was looked to by Omahans as their protector and leader. In 1862 he began participation in a struggle that was not to be finally settled until his death a dozen years later: Location of the eastern terminus of the Union Pacific Railroad.

In 1862, Congress established the Union Pacific Railroad Company to build the first transcontinental railroad. Edward Creighton might have been one of the railroad directors at another time. But Creighton was an active Democrat and President Lincoln appointed Republicans to the railroad directorship. However Creighton's banking partner, Augustus Kountze, was appointed.

It was vital for the future of Omaha that Union Pacific begin there. President Lincoln designated the eastern terminus of the line in words that were interpreted to place the starting point in Omaha. Ground was broken for the transcontinental line in a grand ceremony on the North Omaha bottoms on December 2, 1863.

## **Gifts**

Then nothing happened. The city fathers agreed to give land to the railroad for both tracks and depots. Still nothing happened. In 1864 the city Council gave the railroad 1,200 acres of Omaha land -- some the personal property of Edward Creighton and others -- and still nothing happened. Later in the year the Congress doubled the subsidy of 33 million acres of land to the railroad and activity in Omaha remained at a standstill.

Word was received that the Union Pacific planned to ignore the President's directive and move the terminus to Bellevue, Nebraska. Omahans quickly lost their trust of the railroad when in 1865 they began construction on an altered route for the rail line without approval of President Andrew Johnson. The railroad applied for the change a month after construction had begun. All the while the Union Pacific officials assured Omahans the route alterations were needed to avoid steep grades, not to reassign the terminus to Bellevue.

## **Ultimatum**

Finally, on June 1, 1865, the president of Union Pacific wrote a letter to Edward Creighton as the leading citizens of Omaha making it clear that Bellevue was to be the eastern terminus at least immediately but that tracks might be built to Omaha later. He added that no depot facilities would be needed in Omaha in any event.

The same day Edward Creighton delivered the ultimatum of the city of Omaha: Omahans would accept a more southerly route to improve the grade of the tracks but there would be terminal buildings in Omaha and the tracks from the east would connect with the Union Pacific only in Omaha or “without this there will be trouble.”

June 16 work began in Omaha. Yet the battle raged at corporate headquarters. General Grenville Dodge who had been the government’s railroad expert resigned to become chief engineer for Union Pacific. He was known to favor a bridge location south of Omaha. Union Pacific let it be known that Omaha might get the bridge if they offered some more land and money for the railroad. \$250,000 in County bonds were issued and Edward Creighton purchased a quarter of them.

By 1868 the crossing was granted to Omaha. However the struggle and worry over how big a debt to saddle Omaha with in order to win the eastern terminus aged Edward Creighton, and the battle wasn’t over. The city of Council Bluffs maintained the President Lincoln meant to designate Council Bluffs as the terminus and legal battles were waged all the way to the Supreme Court. After Edward Creighton died, Omaha lost the battle and Council Bluffs was designated the terminus by the Supreme Court.

## **Support**

Throughout the battle with Union Pacific, Creighton was working with them, too. His workers built 40 miles of roadbed for the railroad in Wyoming. He constructed the Union Pacific telegraph and a new Western Union line from Nebraska to Promontory Point, Utah. He also invested in a railroad tie company that provided material for the Union Pacific.

In the late 1860s John returned to business in Omaha by forming a partnership with Frank C. Morgan in wholesale groceries. The company was first known as J.A. Creighton & Company and, in 1874, renamed Creighton & Morgan.

When John and Sarah returned from their honeymoon in 1868, they moved into the home of their older brother and sister. Edward and Mary were childless now, their son having died at the age of four in 1863. John and Sarah were to become parents of a girl, Lulu, in May of 1869 but eleven months later she died.

Mary and Sarah Creighton were in a position to be the leading ladies of Omaha society but neither had any interest in social position.

Mary Lucretia was known as an angel of mercy. Edward supplied her with \$25 a day – a large sum in those days – to distribute to the poor. Living in the river bottoms, the poor were familiar with her phaeton pulled by her horse, “Billy”. Often her help took the form of a household item rather than cash.

When Edward and Mary lost their son, she contributed \$5,000 for an altar in memory of her son in St. Philomena’s Cathedral and she attended Mass at the altar almost daily.

On a trip to Dayton, Ohio to visit Mary Creighton’s mother Edward suffered a stroke that incapacitated him completely for a time. It was 1871 and the adventure of building a fortune had turned into a burden as he worried about the problems of the growing West. Although many of Edward Creighton’s accomplishments occurred between 1871 and 1874, he never regained the vigor of earlier years. The financial panic of 1873 put new stress on the banker and worry about the failing health of Mary Lucretia added to his burden.

On November 3, 1874 at about 1 p.m. Edward tried to pick up some papers from the floor of the First National Bank. He found he couldn’t. Herman Kountze helped him and then ushered Edward to a chair. A few minutes later on that Tuesday afternoon John Creighton entered and asked Edward a question. When Edward couldn’t frame a reply, John became alarmed and arranged for Edward to be taken home. He remained conscious but doctors knew immediately that the stroke was massive. So at age 54, Edward Creighton died at 7:10 p.m. November 5, 1874.

Eighty carriages made the slow funeral journey from the packed Cathedral to Holy Sepulchre Cemetery a few miles to the west. Two days earlier prominent Omahans had held a testimonial, A.J. Poppleton, a major contemporary of Edward Creighton said that night: “He as a man who enjoyed the exercise of power in manipulating the vast interests in his hands. To destroy this power was to destroy his life and if you could have looked into his heart in the silent moments when he took account of what his real

desires and wishes were, I have not the least doubt that for the last four years he felt that death would not be a calamity but a welcome rest.”

Although he must have felt his strength waning, Edward Creighton died without a will.

His wife, her own health failing with dropsy, forced herself to deal with the unpleasant matters of finance. She handed the management of the inheritance to John, James and Kountze. John and James counseled her to immediately make provisions for the distribution of the \$1,157,193.05 inventoried in her husband's estate in case she died.

She set about deciding who would best make use of the funds. John received \$150,000 outright; Joseph the least, \$25,000. Item 13 in the will called for establishment of Creighton College as a memorial to her husband. The will bore the date of September 23, 1875.

The same day that she signed the will she left for Chicago to see medical specialists. They were able to help her for a time. She proceeded to Dayton to make what was to be a final visit to her mother. Then she went to Philadelphia for more treatments where she suffered three months, then died on January 23, 1876 at age 41.

Edward Creighton had continued to expand his interests and several projects were bearing fruit even after his death. In real estate he had completed the Creighton Block, a fireproof structure in the heart of the city. In transportation he had incorporated the Omaha & Northwestern Railway intended to run from Omaha to the Niobrara River. It failed, probably because Edward Creighton didn't live to expand it.

## **Food**

In livestock, Creighton had raised mules and oxen – work animals – while awaiting the “Iron Horse.” Then he switched to raising food – cattle and sheep. Despite some isolated disasters he and his partners were the pioneers who demonstrated the practicality of cattle ranching on the plains. Even after his first stroke, Edward Creighton ventured west to watch the EC brand burned onto the hides of his Wyoming livestock. With the West in full development, there was a need for workhorses. Creighton's partners in Wyoming began raising Morgan horses to meet the needs of the pioneers. Omaha's trolleys were pulled by Morgan horses bearing the T brand of Thomas Also, one of the partners Edward Creighton established in ranching.

John, still in his 50's, now drew back from his wholesaling interests and began carrying out the wishes of his late brother and sister in law. Because the cattle interests needed a central sales point, he joined in organizing Omaha's Stock Yards Company and financed the package of land that became the meat-packing center of the world. He held 20 percent of the stock in the First National Bank, was president of the Stock Yards National Bank of South Omaha and of the People's Savings Bank of Butte, Montana.

One relative of the Creightons has said that Edward worked for his money and that John had a Midas touch – everything he invested in prospered.

There may well be merit to the view since by the time John Creighton died his fortune was \$3,847,464.26 and he had given a great deal away in anticipation of his death. He didn't trust attorneys and believed the surest way to have his various charitable desires executed was to give the gifts himself.

Both John and his wife, Sara Emily, became well known charitable figures in the dozen years after the elder couple's death.

Sarah Emily didn't travel the streets to give to the poor the way her sister did. She did occasionally venture into Omaha "society" though she was plainly more comfortable in the church choir.

As dropsy had limited the activities of Mary Lucretia, arthritis crippled Sarah Emily. Her friends would gather news of the needs of the poor and relay them to Sarah Emily. She would help when she could. She also took on special projects to fill the lonely days following the death of her loved ones. St. Joseph Hospital became a favorite charity, many of her larger gifts were directed toward Catholic churches.

She took an active interest in Creighton University as well. On a visit to the school she noticed that the Jesuit living quarters were primitive. She met with her husband and the Rev. M.P. Dowling, S.J., president, and together arranged a \$13,000 gift to construct the south wing of the Administration Building.

She also donated, in memory of her parents, two of the altars in St. John's College church.

But Sarah Emily also took a personal hand in works of charity. On some occasions when there was a death or illness in an Omaha household, Mrs. Creighton would quietly appear, express her sympathy and move about the house doing whatever needed to be done to get the house in order.

Although John Creighton brought numerous medical specialists to Omaha, Sarah Emily died of a respiratory ailment linked to her rheumatism on September 30, 1888. She was buried in the recently completed St. John's Church where she had earlier been a member of the choir.

The poor lined the streets and wept when the funeral passed. There were 100 coaches in the funeral procession.

In her will, she left \$50,000 to build a new St. Joseph Hospital. Her husband added another \$150,000 to make it a fitting tribute. It was to become the largest hospital west of the Mississippi.

John was alone now. Still vigorous at age 58 he plunged into charitable activities with new resolve. He built the convent of the Poor Clares and financed the building of St. Joseph hospital. He built the Edward Creighton Institute housing Law, Pharmacy and Dental schools. Before the turn of the century he erected the John A. Creighton Medical College for \$75,000 and spent another \$75,000 improving the buildings and grounds of Creighton College. Cousin "Long Jim" Creighton guaranteed John's investments in charitable causes by supervising construction of all the above benefactions.

## **Honors**

Although John tired of being approached for charitable gifts, his fame as a supporter of Catholic causes in America spread. In 1895 Pope Leo XIII named him a "Count of the Papal Court." He was already a Knight of St. Gregory. In 1900 the University of Notre Dame awarded Count Creighton its Laetare Medal for his dedication to Christian education.

As a later chapter of the series will detail, Count Creighton contributed far more than land and buildings to Creighton University. His total contributions, including bequests, added up to approximately \$2 million.

John Creighton was a close friend of fellow Democrat William Jennings Bryan, one of the nation's most gifted speakers. Yet John was frozen by panic when he had to make public addresses. At Notre Dame he was unable to utter a sentence when awarded the Laetare Medal. Yet he held a wide reputation as a champion storyteller among friends.

On John Creighton's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday he held a party at his home, rebuilt after a devastating fire that occurred while he was out of the city. On the occasion he presented \$400,000 in Omaha real estate to the University. The Creighton band, located on the porch of his home, played a few selections and it was announced that the "Creighton Annex" student residence on the college campus would be renamed St. John's Hall. It was later renamed Wareham Hall and razed in 1975 to make way for Kiewit Center.

## **'One Child'**

"I have one child, and that is Creighton University, and I think that since the early 80's, when it was founded by my brother, Edward, and his wife, it has grown into pretty lusty manhood," Creighton said after the ceremony.

A few months later, on Thursday, February 7, 1906, Creighton died. The funeral from St. John's Church on the Creighton campus, as massive. William Jennings Bryan was one of the pallbearers. Creighton students formed an honor guard and parallel memorial service was held in the Creighton Auditorium next to the church.

More than 120 carriages formed the funeral procession. Three thousand persons filled the street when the hearse arrived.

"Wherever we start out we find ourselves unconsciously drifting towards what they had, rather than to what they were," Father Dowling eulogized. "The mind is dazzled by the vast amounts selfishly retained or generously given in philanthropy, and the human element is, to a great extent, eliminated... If asked what were his principal characteristics, I would say that they are summed up in the statement: He was a man of faith and hear."