

= Wellington R. Burt =

Wellington R. Burt (August 26 , 1831 ? March 2 , 1919) was a wealthy lumber baron from Saginaw , Michigan . At the time of his death , his wealth was estimated to be between \$ 40 and \$ 90 million . For a time in the early 1900s , Burt ranked as one of the eight wealthiest men in America . He was best known for his lumber mills and timber holdings , but was also involved in iron mining , railroads , salt mines and finances . Burt was a politician , holding the offices of Mayor of East Saginaw (1867 ? 68) and member of the Michigan Senate (1893 ? 94) . In his final years , he lived alone in a mansion with his servants . Estranged from friends and family and nicknamed " The Lone Pine of Michigan " , he officially died of " senility " at age 87 .

Burt had an unusual will , " as bizarre but as finely @-@ wrought as any in U.S. court annals " . It contained a " spite clause " conceived by Burt to avenge a family feud . It specified to wait 21 years after his children and grandchildren were dead before the bulk of the fortune could go to any descendants , in effect alienating his children and grandchildren from the estate , beyond some small annuities . The conditions of the will were met in 2010 after the 1989 death of his last grandchild . In May 2011 , twelve of Burt 's descendants finally received the estate , worth about \$ 100 million .

Burt 's legacy today is mixed , seen as a vindictive old man , a generous benefactor of the city of Saginaw and a famously wealthy American entrepreneur .

= = Biography = =

Burt was born on August 26 , 1831 in the town of Pike , near Rochester , New York , the ninth of thirteen siblings and the eldest son . His father was Luther Burt and his mother Florinda Horton Burt . The Burts were poor farmers who came from an old New England line , tracing back to Henry Burt , who had settled from Scotland in 1640 . The Burt lineage included William Austin Burt (1792 ? 1858) , who was a notable Michigan surveyor described as " the father of the typewriter " .

At the age of seven , he moved with his parents to Jackson County , Michigan , where he worked on the family farm . Michigan was then only a few years old and Burt 's subsequent life and career as a first generation Michigander was often identified with the growth and progress of the new state . In 1843 , when Wellington was 12 , his father Luther died . Under the guidance of his mother , he became the farm 's manager and " entered into the struggle incident to pioneer life " . He attended two years of college one at Albion College and one at Michigan Central College (now Hillsdale College) . At the age of 22 , he decided to see the world and obtained work as a sailor abroad on freighters in Australia , Central and South America , and New Zealand . He would recall Australia as his favorite foreign country .

When he returned home in 1857 at age 26 , he found a burgeoning timber industry in Michigan , the " Green Gold Rush " . He took a job earning \$ 13 a month at the Pine River lumber camp near St. Louis , Michigan and within a month was promoted to camp foreman with double wages . He was " tall , strong and knew how to give orders " . Using savings , he started his own lumber company in 1858 , buying 300 acres in Gratiot County . In 1867 , he founded the community of Melbourne on the Saginaw River near Zilwaukee , Michigan , named after his favorite city in Australia . By 1870 , Melbourne was among the largest and most complete mills in the world , but in 1876 , it was destroyed by a fire of unknown origin . Many at the time thought this would be the end of Burt 's fortunes , but he also owned timber land elsewhere , including in St. Louis County , Minnesota , which turned out to be favourable for him , as it was in the heart of the immensely valuable Mesabi iron range . In addition to his various timber and iron mine holdings , Burt made his fortune in the salt industry , in railroads and in foreign bonds and banking investments . He invested in the former CS & M Railroad (running between Durand and Bay City) and for a time , owned most of the Ann Arbor Railroad system . He also bought railways in Russia and China . He had plans to build a sugar beet factory in Owosso , Michigan , but the idea failed to come to fruition .

Burt 's political career included time as mayor of East Saginaw in 1867 and 1868 , and as unsuccessful Fusion candidate for the position of Governor of Michigan in 1888 . He was elected

member of the Michigan State Senate 22nd District for 1893 ? 94 again under the Fusion ticket , and as Democratic candidate for U.S. Representative from Michigan 8th District in 1900 . " In the capitol at Lansing " , one Saginaw News account read , " Sen. Burt was more conspicuous for his political naiveté than for any distinguished act of statesmanship . They said he tried hard , but to him , politics were strange shenanigans . You smiled and joked when you meant to kick a man ? s shins . "

Later in his life , Burt lived alone in a 3 @-@ story brick mansion at Cherry St. and E. Genessee Ave . (it was demolished in 1959 and today is a parking lot) . With failing eyesight and hearing he was taken care of by servants . Due to his isolation from his family and social circles in later years , he was known as " The Lone Pine of Michigan " . He had radical stomach surgery at the age of 80 . His death certificate lists his cause of death as " senility " . He is buried in Forest Lawn Cemetery , Saginaw County Michigan , USA ? Plot : Section 8 , Plot 1 .

Burt was married twice and had seven children , 3 daughters from the first wife and 1 daughter and 3 younger sons from the second wife . His first wife was Sarah Torrance (1833 ? 1867) , whom he married May 22 , 1860 ; his second was Armine Mary Richardson (1839 ? 1904) , whom he married February 10 , 1869 .

= = Will = =

Burt had one of the more bizarre wills in American legal history . It contained a " spite clause " which specified to wait until his children and grandchildren were dead before the estate could be dispersed to any descendants yet unborn in Burt 's lifetime . However , his children did receive relatively small annuities of \$ 1 @,@ 000 to \$ 5 @,@ 000 each , except for one favorite son who received \$ 30 @,@ 000 annually , and one unfavored daughter who got nothing . His secretary received \$ 4 @,@ 000 annually , more than most of his children , while a cook , housekeeper , coachman and chauffeur each received \$ 1 @,@ 000 annually .

Burt 's will stipulated the majority of the estate to be held in a trust until " 21 years after [the death of] my last surviving grandchild [who was alive] at the time of my death . " This condition was met in 2010 , 21 years after the November 1989 death of Burt 's last grandchild , Marion Lansill . In May 2011 , after time for legal negotiations , the fortune was finally distributed to his descendants . The estate was estimated in total at \$ 100 million to \$ 110 million . It was split between twelve descendants , weighted based on age seniority . They included three great @-@ grandchildren ; seven great @-@ great grandchildren ; and two great @-@ great @-@ great grandchildren ? the youngest beneficiary was 19 and the oldest 94 . The biggest beneficiary received between \$ 14 @.@ 5 to \$ 16 million , with the smallest beneficiary between \$ 2 @.@ 6 to \$ 2 @.@ 9 million . In the end thirty of Burt 's descendants , including children and grandchildren , missed out on the inheritance because they were ineligible or died before the will 's conditions were met .

It is not entirely clear why Burt made such an unusual will , but newspaper records suggest family feuds were likely at the core of his decision . The will was challenged by his children after he died . A legal hole was found in 1920 because part of the estate was composed of iron leases in Minnesota , and Minnesota had a law against trusts of such long standing . This portion of the estate , amounting to \$ 5 million , was distributed to Burt 's children and grandchildren (a son , three daughters and four granddaughters) . In 1961 , an additional \$ 720 @,@ 000 was taken from the trust in settlement of a suit filed by nine heirs and the estates of three other descendants .

= = Legacy = =

Burt 's legacy is mixed . On the one hand he was once a famous and successful business man who contributed to the community in many ways , and was generally well regarded in his lifetime . On the other hand he is best known today for his bizarre will , giving him the reputation of a vindictive old man . Saginaw historian Thomas B. Mudd said " For awhile [sic] , I took Wellington R. Burt as a selfish rich guy , but the picture that emerges is of someone who also threw himself into the community " .

Burt could be tough , and not just with his children . Burt had originally devised millions in his will to the city , but retracted it when Saginaw officials increased his South Jefferson property assessment from \$ 400 @, @ 000 to \$ 1 million four years before he died in 1919 . One well known story recounts how Burt ordered some horses at the lumber mill to be starved and worked to death , " Mr. Callam , the horses are too fat " , Burt reportedly said . " Trim them down , sir , and when the logs are out , dispose of them . " Mr. Callam refused to starve and kill the horses so Burt fired him , and found someone who would carry it out .

Burt was generous in life and honored after death . His charitable giving to Saginaw during his lifetime was extensive , including funding the City Auditorium , the Burt Manual Training School , a women ? s hospital , a Salvation Army and a YWCA that later became Jacobson ? s . The town of Burt , Michigan is named for him , as is Burt Street in Saginaw , which borders the same block as his former home . The Burt Opera House in Taymouth Township carries his name and is still in use today as a community center . Trips on the paddle steamer Wellington R. Burt were once a popular day excursion along the Saginaw River (1876 ? 1891) . Burt was inducted into the Saginaw Hall of Fame in 1967 .