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Centennial Biographies

Charles A. Broadwater and the Main Chance in Montana

by William L. Lang

At Helena's Montana National Bank, the business day began with a heavy mood on May 25, 1892. As Robert McCulloch and his staff prepared the cashier cages and unlocked the doors, men on ladders had just finished draping yards of black cloth on the face of the building and over the familiar granite buffalo head that jutted out above the bank's entrance. Pedestrians on Main Street slowed their gait, then stopped as they heard: "Broad is dead." In the commercial center of Montana's capital city, where he had strolled with confidence, people stood shocked at the news that Charles A. Broadwater had died in the early morning hours only a few months before his fifty-second birthday.

During the next few days, as businessmen and public officials trimmed their buildings in black and admirers telegraphed their condolences, Helena's citizens reflected on their loss. One of their premier town-builders had been stricken down in his prime. "I have never known a death to touch a whole community as deeply as this has," Governor Joseph K. Toole said on hearing the news. "Everybody seems to realize that a potent if not dominant factor in social, commercial and political life is gone."

Over five thousand people attended Broadwater's funeral and heard eulogies from friends and adversaries alike. Although he was worth one and a half million dollars at his death, Broadwater seems not to have generated antagonisms as other frontier barons had. "There was something wonderfully human about him," the *Helena Independent* editori-

alized, "there was something undefinably magnetic about him." But more than that, his life stood as a testimonial to the attraction that had brought men and women to the frontier in the first place—the pursuit of that elusive "main chance." Broadwater's life, the *Independent* concluded, "illustrates in every way the results that may come to a boy possessed of brains, energy, pluck and perseverance and honest purpose."

The text is classic rags-to-riches lore, the stuff that ran through American success stories from Benjamin Franklin to Horatio Alger. Especially for Montanans living on the apex of the great boom that had catapulted their declining mining frontier into statehood, Broadwater's life was an attractive description of the "path to riches." As the personification of the self-made man in America, Broadwater stood as a true representative of the hope that those who play the game by the rules and better their communities surely will garner rich rewards and be justified. That is one of our prevailing myths, and we have long been encouraged to draw lessons from the lives of men like Broadwater; but his biography is not quite as simple as an example of how to succeed through "pluck and perseverance and honest purpose."

To begin with, Charles Broadwater was a member of Montana's pioneer generation, the men and women who claimed and settled the country for whites and who drew lessons for themselves from their own accomplishments. Not unlike his contem-



When Charles A. Broadwater died on May 25, 1892, James J. Hill and Northern Pacific officials chartered special trains to bring mourners to Helena from all over the country.

MHS Photograph Archives

poraries, entrepreneurs Samuel T. Hauser, William A. Clark, and T. C. Power, Broadwater grew and his successes multiplied as Montana grew, so it is unclear just what lessons we should take from his biography. Are we celebrating an individualist's accomplishments, or are we applauding the success of an exploitative frontier culture? This question raises a larger set of questions—questions that have captivated western historians for decades. Was the West more conducive to individual or cooperative action? Was the West truly a colony of eastern interests, despite its distinctiveness and grandeur? Was the individualism, so much vaunted by western men and women, fundamentally compromised? Broadwater's biography does not provide the answers, but his career can give us some insights.

Born in St. Charles, Missouri, in 1840, Charles Arthur Broadwater joined a migration of youth west to the beckoning goldfields of Colorado in 1861. While some fled the likely event of war or the certainty of prosecution, others like Broadwater set on the trail with gain on their minds. The son of a modest farmer, twenty-one-year-old

Broadwater went west with no trade or special skills, save some experience in a St. Louis mercantile house, where he had learned rudimentary accounting principles and something about business practices. Evidently, he found few opportunities to hold him, because the vortex of another gold rush—this time the Stuart brothers' strike at Benetsee Creek in Idaho—quickly pulled him farther west.

By July 1862, Broadwater had migrated to the Deer Lodge Valley in the eastern district of Idaho Territory. He arrived too late for the best of what small pay came from the gold diggings, but he was not idle. Within a few weeks he had teamed up with John Pemberton to lay out the settlement of Cottonwood, the precursor of Deer Lodge, Montana, and to begin a horse-trading business. Not as risky as gold mining but tough for the slow of thought, buying and selling horses on the frontier was the equivalent of twentieth century used car dealing: it demanded shrewd judgment, a winning and convincing personality, and the instincts of a medicine show pitchman. Broadwater caught on quickly.

While he sharpened his trading skills and built and sold buildings in Cottonwood, a new gold strike south of the Deer Lodge Valley caused another

stampede. The town of Bannack grew up around the new diggings at Grasshopper Creek, and soon the camp's burgeoning population demanded expanded services. Broadwater adapted and became an entrepreneur, purchasing cattle in the Deer Lodge Valley and driving them to Bannack, where he sold them at considerable profit. He briefly entered into another partnership, this time in a butchering business; but just as he was having some success, economic conditions changed. In July, 1863, an even larger strike than Bannack's drew thousands to nearby Alder Gulch and its new camp, Virginia City.

At this juncture, Broadwater did what other nascent entrepreneurs in Montana did: he changed occupations to capitalize on new opportunities. Isolated mining camps were dependent on overland freighting companies to bring them supplies. Attracted by the potentially high profits in the freighting business—even with the risks involved—in the fall of 1863 Broadwater took charge of a pack string owned by King & Gillette, Virginia City merchants who brought in supplies from Salt Lake City. Broadwater knew stock and how to handle it, but he also understood that with efficiency came profits. He got the most out of his teamsters and soon had charge of a wagon train. By spring of the next year, Broadwater was working for the St. Louis-based Diamond R freight company, which hauled tons of supplies by wagon from Missouri River levees to the goldfields. He worked easily with the bullwackers and teamsters, and within a year—at age twenty-five—he had become superintendent of the Diamond R.

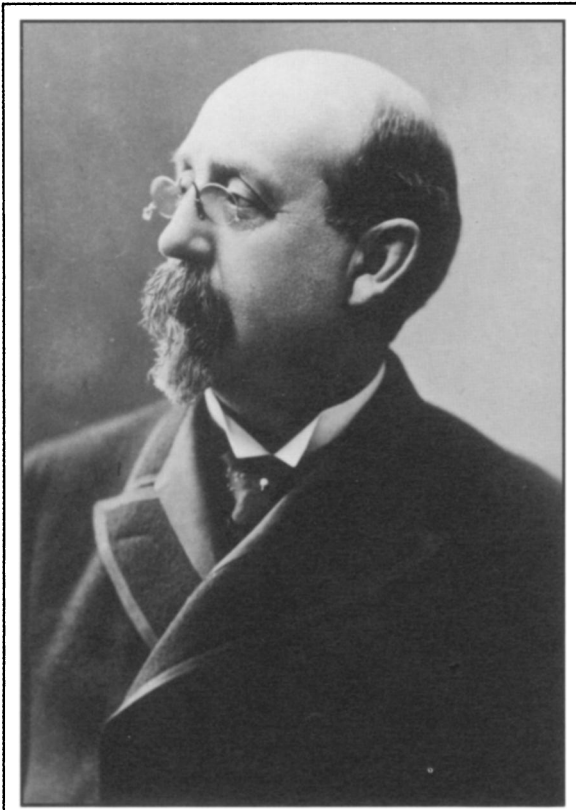
The discovery of gold at Last Chance Gulch in July 1864, the rapid growth of Helena, and the city's location made it a natural warehouse and transportation center. By 1866, Broadwater had moved his Diamond R office to Bridge Street in Helena, where he shared a house with fellow Diamond R employee E. G. Maclay. The two aggressive businessmen socialized with other ambitious types in Helena, including fellow Democrat Martin Maginnis, who soon became the publisher and editor of the *Helena Gazette* and who later won election as territorial delegate, holding that office longer than anyone in western territorial history. Broadwater, Maclay, Maginnis, and Samuel T. Hauser—the plucky Missourian who became Montana's most successful entrepreneur during the 1870s and 1880s, a kingpin among territorial Democrats, and territorial governor—mixed politics and business easily, serving each other's interests as they pursued their own opportunities. Although they regularly competed for economic and political advantage, they understood that cooperative effort would develop the territory quickest and protect their investments. Broadwater probably played the game better than any of them. He kept clear of factionalism

and learned well the benefits of friendships on the frontier.

With two other investors, Broadwater and Maclay bought the Diamond R in 1869 from its St. Louis owners and began an ambitious expansion. Broadwater remained superintendent, overseeing all details and taking advantage of every opportunity. When the Union Pacific completed its transcontinental road, he created a fast freight to the UP at Corinne, Utah; and when the Northern Pacific stalled in Bismarck in 1873, he established another fast line to Carroll on the Missouri. During the 1870s, even while Montana sputtered economically, Broadwater increased the Diamond R's profits and his own capital. But even as he perfected his freighting operation, he realized that railroads would make wagon trains anachronisms, and he schemed with Hauser and Maginnis to lure a major railroad to Montana.

In this scheming, the nexus between politics and business often prevailed, as men like Broadwater naturally equated their interests with the general interests of the territory. At times the line between public policy and private advantage blurred, when politician-entrepreneurs tried to attract investment from eastern capitalists and tie themselves to the financial rewards that accompanied such arrangements. Broadwater moved easily in this arena. Because of his engaging personality, even political adversaries warmed to him, but he was also assiduous in his alliances. In league with Hauser and Maginnis, for example, Broadwater struck agreements with Republican Territorial Governor Benjamin Potts. He remained a loyal Democrat throughout his Montana career, but he also crept into the other camp when he married Julia Chumasero in 1873, daughter of a prominent Republican lawyer. His alliance with the Chumasero family gave him access to Helena's higher social circles and also brought him control of important mining properties during the 1880s, when he was in league with eastern capitalists.

As important as his Montana alliances were, Broadwater benefited most from his connections with eastern businessmen and financiers. Using his influence with Territorial Delegate Maginnis, Broadwater sought government freighting contracts for the Diamond R during the mid-1870s. As a result, he met A. H. Wilder, a St. Paul entrepreneur who had secured army contracts in the West. Wilder introduced Broadwater to James J. Hill, the ambitious railroad man who already had his eye on Montana. Broadwater im-



Charles A. Broadwater in about 1885

Photograph by Taylor, Helena, MHS Photograph Archives

much more power and controlled much more capital. All the while, he continued to invest in mining properties, Helena real estate, and small business ventures. By 1882, when he induced Wilder to back him in establishing the Montana National Bank in Helena, Broadwater had begun to compete with established entrepreneurs, such as his long-time friend Sam Hauser and northern Montana merchant T. C. Power. An informant warned Hauser about Broadwater, saying he “is fast becoming a power in this land,” someone to watch. And a newspaper, which had begun to speculate on Broadwater’s financial strategies and political tactics, suggested that he had the good will of enough employees in northern and central Montana to gain election to any office he sought. Political opponents charged that Broadwater already had plans and was manipulating the votes of soldiers at army forts in the territory.

Along with Maginnis, W. A. Clark, and Marcus Daly, Broadwater controlled the Democratic party in Montana. But he always stayed clear of the dangerous arena of elective politics. He preferred instead to work in anterooms and to “influence” events while he built his business empire. During the early 1880s, he developed his federal contract business, but his great opportunity came with the railroad. Boxed out of an interest in the Northern Pacific by the railroad’s principal business associate, Sam Hauser, Broadwater took his lead from James J. Hill’s fascination with northern Montana. When fellow St. Paul businessman Paris Gibson identified the Great Falls of the Missouri as a potential “New Minneapolis” and tirelessly coaxed Hill to build his railroad to that location, Hill and his investors sought advice from Maginnis and Broadwater. Hill eventually agreed to invest in Gibson’s town on the Missouri, but he put all of his other Montana projects under the general supervision of Broadwater, his corporate point man on the frontier.

In June 1884, after Broadwater had engaged in his own brand of solicitations, Hill came to Montana for a whirlwind tour of mineral properties, potential routes for railroad lines, and discussions with Broadwater’s business associates. It was a classic situation, repeated throughout the American West, with local businessmen panting for recognition from a capitalist potentate and the capitalist dangling the possibility of investment. Hill did not disappoint, as he imperiously replied to questioners, “you can say that I think favorably” about this or that proposal.

After Hill returned to St. Paul, the Montana press buzzed with speculations. At the center was Broad-

pressed both men as knowledgeable, aggressive, and trustworthy, and they later agreed to invest in business ventures that helped Broadwater build up a small empire in Montana.

In 1879, at age thirty-nine, Broadwater could have been satisfied. He had carved out a place for himself on the Montana frontier in politics and business, he had married into a prominent family, and he had established connections with eastern entrepreneurs. He had much more, he could tell himself, than if he had stayed in Missouri working in a dry goods store. But his ambition drove him. This is part of the classic tale of the individualist on the frontier with opportunity everywhere and only his own limitations to stop him. Broadwater’s pursuit of the main chance seems to fit the type perfectly.

Broadwater’s empire building began in 1879-1880 when he garnered construction and sutler contracts for two army posts in Montana, Fort Assiniboine and Fort Maginnis. His friendship with Maginnis and Wilder helped secure the contracts, but Broadwater’s efficient and personal management turned ordinary opportunities into highly profitable businesses. He inspired loyalty, even devotion, from his employees and great confidence from business associates, even those who wielded



Broadwater, photographed in 1880 at his home in Fort Assinniboine, held the construction and sutler contracts for both Fort Assinniboine and Fort Maginnis.

water, who had already investigated coal deposits near Sand Coulee, evaluated Chumasero's mining claims near Helena, and hinted to Fort Benton that Hill might build a railroad line to that town. During the next two years, Broadwater choreographed most of Hill's maneuvers in Montana, including the establishment of a major industrial railroad and the incorporation of several mining companies. He became Helena's most important entrepreneur. Even the Republican *Helena Herald* lauded him. "The more citizens of Broadwater's energy and push we have," the paper editorialized in 1886, "the better for Helena and the better for Montana."

As Hill's handpicked president of the Montana Central Railroad, which would complete a line from Great Falls to Butte by 1888 and break the NP-UP railroad monopoly in Montana, Broadwater played a brilliant game against the entrenched NP interests, especially his old partner Sam Hauser. Broadwater's relationship with Hauser had begun to go sour when he established a competing bank in 1882, but throwing in with Hill and enlisting the powerful aid of Maginnis in developing a new railroad in the territory strained their friendship to the breaking point. "It is a well known fact," Fort Benton's *River Press* reported, "that Governor Hauser is inordinately

jealous of C. A. Broadwater. . . . He stands at the head of one of the greatest railroad enterprises projected in the past decade and as a railroad magnate far outshines our governor."

A public struggle began. The stakes were high—control of Montana's industrial future—and the methods unbecoming. The *Helena Independent* rightly called it "The Battle of the Giants," for it was a contest between eastern corporate mastodons on Montana's turf; but the local battle was more gladiatorial, pitting Hauser against Broadwater. The long-time plea of Montanans for railroads, which had always meant dependency on outside capital, had come down to a local internecine fight that threatened to realign Montana's economic and political life. Formerly allies, the two men fought the corporate war with all of their resources, and they discredited themselves. In response to Hauser's rumor-mongering, Broadwater suggested sabotaging Hauser's credit in New York by leaking embarrassing stories. "While I dislike to make war on anyone," Broadwater wrote Hill in 1886 as the battle heated, "this fellow [Hauser] has put us in such shape that we are compelled to do so in self defence. . . . he is trying to ruin our investment." Both adversaries planted false stories about the other in the newspa-



On May 29, 1892, over five thousand people gathered at the Broadwater Springs Hotel to attend Broadwater's funeral, one of the largest ever held in Montana.

pers, and both enlisted the aid of their compatriots. Between 1885 and 1890, the Broadwater-Hauser struggle divided Helena, contributed to a major split in Montana's Democratic party, and generally added to the debasement of Montana politics.

Broadwater prevailed in the contest; his railroad built through from Great Falls to Butte, and the NP and Hauser lost their advantage. From almost every vantage point, Montanans believed they had gained from the Hill-Broadwater combination and the industrial development they sponsored. In league with Maginnis and Power, the two men had run roughshod over Indian treaty rights in northern Montana and had engaged in a barely disguised theft of Indian lands, but there were few of Broadwater's contemporaries who saw that development for the travesty it was. It had simply been the opening of new lands.

In the glow of bringing the railroad and millions of dollars of investment to Montana and in materially aiding in Montana's petition for statehood, Broadwater could feel satisfied. His accomplishments made him one of the most influential citizens of the new state. He held principal

shares in two railroad companies, three banks, and dozens of mining and livestock companies; and he owned thousands of acres of real estate and the magnificent Broadwater Hotel and Natatorium, claiming the world's largest enclosed swimming pool.

In three decades on the Montana frontier, Charles A. Broadwater had seemingly fulfilled the myth of the self-made man. He had pursued the main chance, and by his own industry and devoted work he had succeeded. But he had achieved his success primarily as a corporate man, one who had embraced the combination in finance and used collective wealth and political power to prevail over competitors. And in his triumph he had also played a part in the conquest of the American West by eastern capital and the westerners' concomitant acquiescence to outside control, always thankful that their part of the West had attracted investment.

Broadwater characterized his effort as territorial development, as community building. His community and territory agreed and lauded him: "the better for Helena and the better for Montana," the *Independent* had written. When he died at the height of his achievements, his community grieved for more than the death of a "self-made man." As Sam Hauser

said when he heard the news: "It is difficult indeed to appreciate the loss of such a man in this community, for there are none like him. . . . He made his money and placed it right back in the city; he never lost faith in Helena's future and never ceased working for her prosperity."

Hauser's eulogy held fast to the image of the pioneer individualist that has become part of western mythology. Broadwater's generation, and the generations that have followed, elevated the actions of willful men and women as proof of the exceptional character of the West and its people. Frederick Jackson Turner enshrined the ideal, and our histories have kept it alive. The archtypical Broadwater

fit the mold perfectly as the man of accomplishment whose successes furthered community building on the frontier. Through this haze of myth and stereotype, Broadwater's character is blurred on the edges and the only clear portrait that remains is a man of ability and wit in pursuit of the Main Chance who could smile on his accomplishments and feel justified.

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Robert Yellowtail, the New Warrior

by Constance J. Poten

When the Japanese blew up Pearl Harbor, Barney Old Coyote and his brother drove into Hardin from the Crow Indian Reservation and enlisted. Their uncle, Robert Yellowtail, cheered them on, saying: "You're going on a war party. Don't just kill em, scalp em!" Yellowtail wrote Crow soldiers at the front, promising a heroes' welcome when they returned, reminding them to count coups and to complete the four requirements for chiefs. Yellowtail's nephew, Joe Medicine Crow, actually did: he stole a horse from the enemy camp, touched an enemy in battle, stole an enemy's weapon, and led a successful war party.

Robert Yellowtail was then in his fifties. He was the superintendent of the Crow Indian Reservation, at the height of his power, and his position was nothing short of miraculous. As a small child he had watched the twilight of the Plains Indian culture. His people had just been confined to a reservation, their means of survival, the buffalo, extinguished, and their value system undermined. Their defeat was profound. The changes imposed by the white conquerors meant the loss of self-sufficiency, land, even their names. For record-keeping, the whites labeled them with names in English and ordered the Indians to pass the names down, generation by generation. This cut off the pride of individuality that had always distinguished the Crows among themselves. The traditional warrior society had become irrelevant; the enemy had changed their world forever, and future battles would be on the enemy's terms.

Survival depended on a new warrior, one that could learn a new language, a new culture, and new tactics on a far different battleground than the Crows had ever known. All this was necessary while being dependent on and restricted by an enemy whose goal was to dilute and assimilate the tribe into its own culture.

Robert Yellowtail came into a world that seemed destined for extinction. He filled a vacuum when there was no hope left. Drawing on inherent courage, humor, and an indomitable faith in the rights of his people, he spent a lifetime challenging the most powerful government on earth. And the Crows survived. In 1983, when asked if Robert Yellowtail, then ninety-four years old, had influence on the tribe anymore, the Crow tribal secretary replied: "Robert Yellowtail has everything to do with everything on the Crow Reservation."

Born in 1889 (recently discovered church records suggest the date was two years earlier), Yellowtail was taken when he was four years old, separated from his mother, and incarcerated in a reservation boarding school. He was not allowed to practice his own religion, speak his own language, or live with members of his tribe. The only thing the whites could not take away from him there, he said, were his thoughts. Stubborn and fiercely bright, Yellowtail pleaded to be sent to a better school. Indian Agent Major Samuel Reynolds enrolled him in the Sherman Institute in Riverside, California, where for eight years he escaped the tuberculosis, poverty,