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Stephens Hall

Central Washington University

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What is in a Name? Stephens Hall

During his lengthy tenure at Central, Henry J. Whitney served as teacher, administrator, registrar, dean, and head of career services (called teacher placement at the time).

Born in Independence, Iowa, in 1880, Whitney was raised on a small farm. Following graduation from high school, he moved to Chicago to work, then enrolled at Northwestern University. In 1905, he graduated from the university with a BS in chemistry with minors in zoology and mathematics.

He also had a passion for music and sang in a Chicago choir, was a member of an Evanston choir group. And member of the University Chapel Choir.

Shortly after completing his studies at Northwestern, he was hired to teach sciences at the high school in Geneseo, Illinois.

In 1908, William E. Wilson, principal (president) of the Washington State Normal School, hired Whitney to teach science and industrial arts. He taught those classes for several years before being tapped by the institution for more administrative duties.

In the summer of 1911, Whitney took a break to study industrial arts at the University of Wisconsin and in 1917-18, he was on leave to study at the Teacher's College at Columbia University in New York.

During the 1930s and until he retired in 1943, he continued to teach at least one class each year while also working in various positions including vice principal (what we would call the provost today), school registrar, dean of instruction, and head of teacher placement.

In the years following his retirement, Whitney was active with his church and in the community. He served several years on the Ellensburg City Council, including serving as council chair and as mayor of the city.

Whitney died in Ellensburg in September 1979 at the age of 98.

In 1966, Whitney was the guest of honor at the dedication of the Henry J. Whitney Hall, a residence building for men. The hall was one of a pair of matching structures constructed in 1958-59 (along with Stephens Hall, which was named for longtime CWU professor William T. Stephens).

Constructed of brick, concrete, and glass, in a Mid-Century Modern architectural style, both Whitney and Stevens are a mixture of one- and three-story sections. The two halls were designed by prominent local architects James D. Cowen and William Paddock, who also designed the Bank of Yakima, Yakima Valley Junior College (now Yakima Valley College), and Big Bend Community College.