

THE WHALEY FAMILY: A BRIEF HISTORY



Thomas Whaley came to California during the Gold Rush. He left New York City, the place of his birth, on January 1, 1849, on the ship Sutton and arrived 204 days later in San Francisco. He set up a store with business partner George Wardle where he sold hardware and woodwork from his family's New York business, Whaley & Pye. They offered mining equipment and utensils on consignment. This young entrepreneur, born on October 5, 1823, came from a Scots-Irish family, which immigrated to Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1722. His grandfather, Alexander Whaley, a gunsmith, participated in the Boston Tea Party and the Revolutionary War where he provided flintlock muskets to soldiers and the use of his house on Long Island to General George Washington. Thomas' father, Thomas Whaley, carried on the family gunsmith business, and served in the New York Militia during the War of 1812. He married Rachel Pye, whose father, William, manufactured locks in Brooklyn.

Whaley's business acumen, acquired in part from his education at the Washington Institute, proved beneficial in San Francisco. He was so successful that he was able to establish his own store on Montgomery

Street, erect a two-story residence near the bay, and rent out Wardle's edifice. After an arson-set fire destroyed his buildings in May 1851, he relocated to Old Town San Diego upon the advice of Lewis Franklin, a fellow merchant. Whaley set up various businesses and amassed enough money to return to New York to marry his sweetheart, Anna Eloise DeLaunay, the daughter of French-born parents, on August 14, 1853.

Upon the couple's return to San Diego, Whaley entered various general store business partnerships, most of which lasted less than a year. He purchased this property in September 1855. He first built a single-story granary in May 1856, with bricks manufactured in his own brickyard on Conde Street. The adjacent two-story Greek Revival style brick building, designed by Whaley, commenced construction in September 1856 and was finished in 1857. The building was acclaimed as the "finest new brick block in Southern California" by the San Diego Herald, and cost \$10,000, an impressive sum in the 1850's.

In August 1857, Whaley established his general store here, and solicited cash customers only. The location proved too far from the center of the then small community, so he relocated his business to a wood-frame building on the Plaza.

By 1858, Thomas and Anna Whaley had produced three children: Francis Hinton, Thomas Jr. (who died at 18 months), and Anna Amelia. In August 1858, once again arson-set fire destroyed Whaley's business. Rebuilding in a time of economic downturn was problematic, so Whaley moved his family to San Francisco.

There, Whaley worked as an U.S. Army Commissary Storekeeper for a short while. Three more children, George Hays Ringgold (named for a business partner), Violet Eloise, and Corinne Lillian, were born. In 1867, Thomas Whaley took charge of three government transports with stores at Sitka, Alaska Territory, before the American takeover on October 18. Whaley, in company of others, assisted in raising the American flag on the island of Japonski opposite Sitka. He was then elected councilman of Sitka by unanimous vote. Anna and the family remained in San Francisco.

After a major earthquake in October 1868, the Whaley Family returned to their home in San Diego. There Thomas partnered with Philip Crosthwaite to open the Whaley and Crosthwaite General Store. San Diego pioneer Crosthwaite was the Deputy County Clerk and later San Diego's Chief of Police. In 1868, Thomas rented the upstairs Western portion of the house to a Mr. Thomas Tanner, who transformed the living quarters into San Diego's first commercial theater. Just three months after the Tanner Troupe's October 1868 opening, Mr. Tanner died suddenly and the troupe disbanded. Later in 1869, the County of San Diego rented the theater space and the former granary for use as meeting rooms for the Board of Supervisors and one of San Diego's earliest courthouses,

respectively. After the establishment of New Town San Diego by Alonzo Horton in 1868, the seat of government moved there. Residents of Old Town resisted the change, even refusing to hand over the court records. On the evening of March 31, 1871, County Clerk Chalmers Scott gathered a group of New Towners, rode out to the Whaley House in express wagons, and forcibly removed the records. Although Whaley wrote a series of letters to the Board of Supervisors noting that their lease had not expired and demanding rent and repairs to the building, his demands were ultimately ignored.

In 1873 Thomas returned to New York to settle his father's estate. Then, during a downturn in his fortunes, he journeyed once again to San Francisco seeking employment, which eluded him. Anna and the children remained in San Diego.

On January 5, 1882, sisters Violet and Anna Amelia had a double wedding, Anna Amelia marrying her first cousin, John T. Whaley, and Violet wedding George T. Bertolacci. Violet's marriage ended sadly, and she divorced Bertolacci shortly after in 1883. Succumbing to depression, she took her own life on August 19, 1885. Her suicide profoundly affected her family, and they moved to New Town, where Thomas built a lovely single-story frame home for them at 933 State Street. Hoping to capitalize on the San Diego boom, he opened a real estate office at 5th and G in the First National Bank Building with various partners including Ephraim Morse. He retired in 1888 after a long career of entrepreneurial enterprises, and passed away at the State Street home on December 14, 1890 at the age of 67.

The Whaley Home in Old Town was rented out for many years and eventually fell into disrepair until late 1909 when Whaley's oldest son Francis returned to the old brick house and undertook the restoration of the building. Rehabilitated at the same time as the establishment of the Los Angeles & San Diego Beach Railway down San Diego Avenue, which coincided with the great turn of the century tourist movement, Francis utilized the family home as a residence and a tourist attraction where he posted signs outside promoting its historicity and entertained visitors with his guitar.

On February 24, 1913, Anna died in the house, followed by Francis on November 19, 1914. Lillian continued residency in her family home, writing her memoirs, and passed away in 1953.

In 1956, the house was up for sale and plans to demolish it to make way for a gas station were curtailed by June and Jim Reading who, with a concerned group of citizens, convinced the County of San Diego to buy, restore, and open the home once again to the public.



Anna Whaley with baby Anna, Frank and Thomas Whaley

The World Famous Whaley House

The Whaley House Museum is owned by the County of San Diego, and operated by Save Our Heritage Organisation (SOHO). The house was started in 1856 with the construction of a granary, and the two-story house and store addition was added in 1857, built in the Greek Revival style; it was the first two-story brick house in San Diego, built from bricks made in Thomas Whaley's own brickyard. It is now in the process of a period restoration. Our interpretive period is from 1868 to 1871, when the building was not only the Whaley family home, but also a theater, the county courthouse, and the Whaley and Crosthwaite General Store.

PLEASE BEGIN YOUR TOUR IN THE COURTROOM

COURTROOM Originally built as a granary, this room was expected to be rat proof because of its brick construction; it wasn't. Over the years, this room was used as a school, a billiard hall, a ballroom, and a church, and from 1869-1871, Mr. Whaley rented this space to the County of San Diego for use as its Courthouse. Ask to see our book containing copies of original search warrants, arrest warrants, trial transcripts and jury verdicts from some of the cases held here. On the northeast wall is a photograph of the Whaley House in 1874; the other photographs are circa 1890's, showing the Whaley House and its surroundings.

WHALEY & CROSTHWAITE GENERAL STORE Whaley was foremost a businessman, and originally designed the house with the store in mind. An early advertisement listed buckwheat, macaroni, leaf lard, clear pork, codfish, preserved fruits, oysters, lobsters, pickles, and tomatoe catsup. Merchandise included other household products as well such as woodenware, tin ware, hardware and stationery, and all manner of clothing including boots and shoes. Notice the liquor bottles on the shelves; these are period bottles with a reproduction of the original Whaley & Crosthwaite label. Other spirits sold were champagne, ale, porter, hock wine and schnapps. On the wall is a copy of the license granting permission to buy and sell liquor in the courthouse building. Patrons coming to the store would enter through double doors where the front windows are today. Whaley's partner, Philip Crosthwaite, was once San Diego's deputy sheriff and was the executioner of the notorious Yankee Jim Robinson.

DISPLAY CASES Whaley family items including Thomas's vest (circa 1845-55), Anna Whaley's shoes and jacket, the family's engraved silverware, china, and other belongings can be seen, as well as a display of ephemera from the 47 years the Whaley House has been a museum and Old Town artifacts found on the Whaley House property and at the nearby site of the cobblestone jail. The bottle collection is housed in the actual window from Chase's Drugstore, originally located in Downtown San Diego. The bottles range from circa 1872 to the 1920's, and represent businesses, residences, and civic buildings, each with its own story to tell of the history of San Diego.

DINING ROOM The circa-1860's chairs are walnut and covered in actual horsehair, a very durable and popular upholstery throughout the Victorian period. The silver plate and glass serving pieces displayed on the walnut sideboard are examples of everyday items. The floor cloth is a replica 19th century oil cloth, painted canvas covered with many layers of varnish; this was the precursor to linoleum. The landscape painting on the west wall is by Lydia Knapp, a customer of Whaley & Crosthwaite who later became wife of San Diego founder Alonzo E. Horton.

KITCHEN The lean-to board and batten kitchen, originally demolished in the late nineteenth century, has been designed from Thomas Whaley's original hand drawn plans, written descriptions, historic photos and physical evidence found in, on and around the Whaley House. Reconstructed with period materials and using period techniques, the wood-burning stove still works, making this a functional 1860's kitchen. A replica oil cloth with period checked design covers the floor, washing tubs and wash board are custom replicas and other furnishings to be added as funds allow will include a dry sink, dozens of kitchen tools and a cot for the servant. Food was passed from the kitchen to the dining room through the window.

PLEASE EXIT THE DINING ROOM TO THE REAR AND PROCEED UP THE STAIRCASE. WATCH YOUR STEP!

FIRST COMMERCIAL THEATER IN SAN DIEGO From October 1868 through January 1869 these rooms were leased to Mr. Thomas Tanner and his group of actors, billed as the Tanner Troupe. The advertisement for opening night hanging on the back wall boasts their diverse repertoire, which included dramas and comedies. Notice the price for tickets! Although there is seating for just 42 today, the *San Diego Union* claimed 150 people attended this first performance. As was common then the backdrop and wings are painted in a scenic design, and the stage is raked to allow the audience a full view of actors performing. Mr. Tanner died shortly after the theater opened and it was closed some months later. In 1869, this room and the courtroom were leased to the County for meetings of the Board of Supervisors and storage of county records. Feel free to have a seat and enjoy this rare glimpse of a 19th century theater.

THOMAS & ANNA'S MASTER BEDROOM, on the left as you leave the Theater. The walnut bedroom set is in the Renaissance Revival style popular from the 1860's to the 1880's. The hand-woven coverlet is c.1850's. A lap desk rests on a side table. Paintings show San Diego Mission ruins and San Diego Bay.

CHILDREN'S BEDROOM, across the hall. The bedroom suite is in the 1850's 'cottage style'. Note the grained wood, it is all original paint! The toys you see are typical of the period. The tiny china tea set on the dresser belonged to the Whaley children.

REAR BEDROOM The larger bed and dresser, although not original to the family, was shipped to California in the 1860's. It was typical for bedrooms to be shared, and this room would have slept up to four children, more if family were visiting. The washbowl and pitcher were used for bathing, the kerosene lamp was pulled down to fill with oil or to light, and the painting of roses was executed by a member of the family.

PLEASE BE CAREFUL AS YOU MAKE YOUR WAY DOWNSTAIRS

GUEST CHAMBER A guestroom for friends and relatives, as well as prominent visitors and important people of the day. General Thomas Sedgewick stayed here during his campaign to attract a transcontinental railroad to locate its Pacific coast terminus in San Diego. It is believed that some of the Whaley children were born in this room, as were cousins and other family members. Oral history states that this was the bedroom that Lillian Whaley used as she got older and her health declined. The bedroom set originally belonged to George A. Pendleton, the first county clerk and recorder, and is on loan from the San Diego Historical Society. Pendleton's home and office was the Derby-Pendleton House, which was moved onto the Whaley House property in 1962 to save it from demolition.

STUDY Thomas Whaley was at various times a merchant, city clerk, notary public, realtor and real estate investor, and railroad secretary. He did much of his paperwork and correspondence in this room. The desk belonged to him; the letters on it are copies of a love letter from Thomas to his wife Anna and a letter of his resignation as secretary from the San Diego Gila and Southern Pacific Railroad. Store ledgers dating from his first days in San Diego and later are displayed in his bookcase. Notice his cane leaning on the desk; the top hat and globe were also his. The rocker is a family piece that was sold by Lillian Whaley in the 1950's and recently donated back to the Whaley House. The picture nails you see in the study and parlor are identical to original nails used here that have been found through archeological work. You can see an original picture nail in the display case in the General Store.

HALLWAY The woodwork has been returned to its original finish which is a 'false grain', a painted finish worked to simulate the grain of a particular wood. Through forensic analysis we found that the Whaley's chose an Oak grain. The faux-marble paint design is known as an Ashlar block pattern. Although it may appear unusual to our eyes today, it is supposed to look "faux." Ashlar patterns were fashionable for nineteenth century stair halls, and can be found in many other historic homes of the period. The 1857 map on the wall shows the three small settlements on San Diego bay at the time the house was built. These were La Playa, Old Town and New Town. San Diego had approximately 300 residents in these three settlements combined. The watercolor of Old Town is the oldest known color view painted in 1852. Flanking the 1870s hall tree is a collection of nineteenth century calling cards.

PARLOR The parlor is mainly furnished with items originally belonging to the Whaleys, and the furniture arrangement depicts the style of the 1860's. The pump organ was Anna's and still works today; the round shelves were to rest candlesticks so that music could be read at night. Anna was a musical woman who passed this love of music on to her children. Son George played violin professionally for a time at Horton Hall in San Diego's New Town. The portraits of Thomas and Anna flanking the front window were done in the 1880's. The stereo viewer on the center table was a typical pastime of the day. The wallpaper is a c.1860s reproduction, and the ceilings are painted a shade or two lighter than the walls as was the fashion of the day. Thomas Whaley boasted of having Brussels carpets in this house; the parlor carpet is a reproduction of a pattern first produced in 1854. It is made in long strips that are sewn together. The lace drapes were made on original 19th century looms in Nottingham, England.

EXTERIOR AND GROUNDS The southeast facing exterior wall is covered with plaster and scored to look like stone, which was very common of the time. The entire exterior was to have been plastered but was never completed. In addition to the lean-to kitchen addition, the original wrap-around back porch has been reconstructed. The gardens contain many plants and roses available in the mid-nineteenth century. Anna Whaley planted the California pepper trees around 1870. Next-door is the c.1869 Verna House. It is in the French Mansard style, and now houses the SOHO Museum Shop. Behind it, the New Orleans Creole Café occupies two 1870's false-fronts. Like the Verna, they were moved here in the 1960's to save them from demolition. At the back of the lot stands the historic Derby-Pendleton House, an adobe and wood-frame prefab house, brought by ship from Maine in 1850. Its best-known resident was Lieut. George H. Derby, humorist for the *San Diego Herald* and author of *Phoenixiana* and the *Squibob Papers*. It now houses the offices of SOHO, and is not open to the public.

We hope that you have enjoyed your visit. Do come back again. Please feel free to roam the gardens and enjoy the park.

GHOSTLY LEGENDS OF THE WHALEY HOUSE

There are some human beings who are dimly aware of their own deaths, yet have chosen to stay on in what used to be their homes, to be close to surroundings they once held dear... --HANS HOLZER¹

Few houses in San Diego are as historically important as the Whaley House. In addition to being the Whaley Family home, it housed a granary, the County Courthouse, San Diego's first commercial theater, various businesses including Thomas Whaley's own general store, a ballroom, a billiard hall, school, and polling place. Significant events, such as the seizure of the court documents and records in 1871, and the suicide of Violet Whaley in 1885 profoundly affected Thomas and Anna Whaley. These events, as well as the hangings which occurred on the property before the house was constructed, have suffused the Whaley House with an air of mystery and added to its reputation as something more than just California State Historic Landmark #65.

According to the Travel Channel's *America's Most Haunted*, the house is the number one most haunted house in the United States. The alleged hauntings of the Whaley House have been reported on numerous other television programs and been written up in countless publications and books since the house first opened as a museum in 1960. Although we cannot state positively that the Whaley House is really haunted, the voluminous documentation of paranormal occurrences at the site makes a compelling case. But, if there are ghosts at the Whaley House, who are they and why are they here?

The earliest documented ghost at the Whaley House is "Yankee Jim". James (aka Santiago) Robinson was convicted of attempted grand larceny in San Diego in 1852, and hanged on a gallows off the back of a wagon on the site where the house now stands. The local newspaper reported that he "kept his feet in the wagon as long as possible, but was finally pulled off. He swung back and forth like a pendulum until he strangled to death."² Although Thomas Whaley had been a spectator at the execution, he did not let it dissuade him from buying the property a few years later and building a home for his family there. According to the San Diego Union, "soon after the couple and their children moved in, heavy footsteps were heard moving about the house. Whaley described them as sounding as though they were made by the boots of a large man. Finally he came to the conclusion that these unexplained footfalls were made by Yankee Jim Robinson."³ Another source states that Lillian Whaley, the Whaleys' youngest daughter who lived in the house until 1953, "had been convinced the ghost of "Yankee Jim" haunted the Old House."⁴ A visitor to the museum in 1962 mentioned that "the ghost had driven her family from their visit there more than 60 years [earlier]... her mother was unnerved by the phantom walking noise and the strange way the windows unlatched and flew up."⁵

Many visitors to the house have reported encountering Thomas Whaley himself. The late June Reading, former curator of the museum, said, "We had a little girl perhaps 5 or 6 years old who waved to a man she said was standing in the parlor... We couldn't see him. But often children's sensitivity is greater than an adult's."⁶ However, many adults have reported seeing the apparition of Mr. Whaley, usually on the upper landing. One said he was "clad in frock coat and pantaloons, the face turned away from her, so she could not make it out. Suddenly it faded away."⁷

¹Holzer, Hans. GHOSTS OF THE GOLDEN WEST, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1968.

²"Hanging 'Yankee Jim,'" THE WEEKLY UNION, Thursday, October 9, 1873.

³"Whaley House Ghosts are friendly—mostly," THE SAN DIEGO UNION, Wednesday, October 26, 1983.

⁴Bardacke, Francis. "The Swinging World of Yankee Jim", San Diego Magazine, 1966.

⁵"Phantom Lacks Spirit For Fans-tasy: Whaley Spook Fades Away," THE SAN DIEGO UNION, Monday, April 23, 1962.

⁶"Whaley House Ghosts are friendly—mostly," THE SAN DIEGO UNION, Wednesday, October 26, 1983.

⁷Holzer, Hans. GHOSTS OF THE GOLDEN WEST, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1968.

The specter of Anna Whaley has also been reported, usually in the downstairs rooms or in the garden. In 1964, “Mrs. Whaley’s floating, drifting spirit appeared to [television personality Regis] Philbin.”⁸ “All of a sudden I noticed something on the wall...” Philbin reported. “There was something filmy white—it looked like an apparition of some kind... I got so excited I couldn’t restrain myself! I flipped on the [flash]light—and nothing was there but a portrait of Anna Whaley, the long-dead mistress of the house.”⁹

Other visitors have described seeing or sensing the presence of a woman in the courtroom. “I see a small figure of a woman,” one visitor said, “who has a swarthy complexion. She is wearing a long full skirt, reaching to the floor. The skirt appears to be a calico or gingham, small print. She has a kind of cap on her head, dark hair and eyes and she is wearing gold hoops in her pierced ears. She seems to stay in this room, lives here, I gather...”¹⁰ None of the Whaleys fit this description, but the house was rented out to numerous tenants over the years. Perhaps the mysterious woman in the courtroom was one of these.

Another presence reported by visitors and docents is that of a young girl, who is usually found in the dining room. Psychic Sybil Leek encountered this spirit during a visit in the 1960s. “It was a long-haired girl,’ Sybil said. ‘She was very quick, you know, in a longish dress. She went to the table in this room and I went to the chair.’”¹¹ Urban legend has it that this is the ghost of a playmate of the Whaley children who accidentally broke her neck on a low-hanging clothesline in the backyard, and whose name was either Annabel or Carrie Washburn. There are no historic records of any child dying this way at the Whaley House; nor is there record of any family named Washburn residing in San Diego at the time. It is believed that the legend was believed to have been started by a one-time employee of the Whaley House, in an effort to add to the house’s mystique.

“Even animals aren’t left out of the singular occurrences. A parapsychologist reported he saw ‘a spotted dog, like a fox terrier, that ran down the hall with his ears flapping and into the dining room.’ The dog, he said, was an apparition.”¹² When they lived in the house, the Whaley’s owned a terrier named Dolly Varden.

The Whaley House stands, silently watching over San Diego Avenue, as it has done for a century and a half. Every day visitors come from around the world to tour the historic museum. It contains so much history within its walls, that even the non-believer will enjoy the tour. For believers and sceptics alike, the house draws them back time and again, in search of those elusive ghosts. As Regis Philbin once said, “You know a lot of people pooh-pooh it because they can’t see it. But there was something going on in that house.”¹³

⁸“Spirits Hang Around Old ‘Haunt’”, ATHAPASCAN, May 7, 1973.

⁹“Regis: I Saw A Ghost With My Own Eyes,” NATIONAL ENQUIRER, 2001.

¹⁰Holzer, Hans. GHOSTS OF THE GOLDEN WEST, The Bobbs-Merrill Company, Inc., 1968.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²“Ghosts at Old Whaley House Are Too Spirited to Play Dead,” EVENING TRIBUNE, April 23, 1970.

¹³“Regis: I Saw A Ghost With My Own Eyes,” NATIONAL ENQUIRER, 2001.