



Edward L. Bonner (1834-1902)

Pioneer merchant, railroad baron, and lumber magnate; namesake of Bonners Ferry and Bonner County, Idaho; Bonner, Montana; and Bonner Park in Missoula.

- **1834-Birth.** August 18, 1834, in Orwell New York.
- **1865-Marriage.** Carrie Kenyon on January 27, 1865 in Lewiston Idaho Territory.
- **Children.** Five were born to the Bonners. Two died in infancy. Of the three remaining children: Son Charles died at age 34 in Dubuque, Iowa on March 28, 1902, six weeks before his father's death; daughter Lenita (Spottswood) was 25 and daughter Bessie was 14 when Edward died.

- **Boyhood.** Edward grew up in a lumber town in northwestern New York.

He was the son of a lumberman and farmer. At 13 he became a clerk at the original Lord & Taylor in New York City. He later worked at a store in Boston.

- **1857.** He traveled by way of Panama to the Pacific Coast and settled in Walla Walla, Washington Territory. There he farmed, ranched and later acted as agent for the Oregon Steam Navigation Co. in Lewiston Idaho.
- **Dec. 22, 1864.** An act by Idaho Territory authorized Bonner, Richard A. Eddy and John Walton to establish and maintain a ferry across the Kootenai River on the route to gold fields in British Columbia. The town sites that grew up in the area were named Bonners Ferry in 1899.
- **1866.** Bonner, Eddy and Daniel Welch formed a partnership to bring merchandise from Walla Walla Washington to Missoula Montana by 125-animal pack trains; opened a trading post about 100 feet west of the Florence Hotel and called it Bonner & Welch. It later became the Missoula Mercantile Co.
- **Nov 3, 1870.** Bonner was quoted in Missoula as saying that Montana would have rail connections with the east sometime in 1872.
- **1870's.** Welch left the business, which was renamed E.L. Bonner and Co. Branch stores serving mining camps and farming regions began springing up in western Montana. Bonner moved to a busier Deer Lodge Montana in 1872 and established a store there. He opened another branch in Butte in 1873 or 1874. A.B. Hammond was hired to work at the Missoula store in 1873 and became Bonner's business partner in 1876.
- **1880's.** Bonner made his fortune building railroads for the Northern Pacific, usually in partnership with Hammond and Samuel T. Hauser of Helena. They typically supplied all labor and materials except the steel rails to build the mainline through western Montana and branch lines from Butte to Garrison, Drummond to Philipsburg, Rimini to Helena and Missoula to Darby.



Bonner Mansion 1900



- **1882.** He became president of the newly formed Montana Improvement Co. (MIC) The MIC's purposed was to harvest and market timber in western Montana. Bonner, Hammond and the MIC established one of the nation's largest lumber mills on the banks of the Big Blackfoot (Bonner Montana). As the mill neared completion in 1885, the Northern Pacific established a signal stop nearby and named it in Bonner's honor.
- **1890's.** With Hammond, Bonner continued to build a mercantile empire in western Montana that became known as the Missoula Mercantile Co. in 1885. Bonner was President

of the Montana Real Estate Association and a co-owner of the First National Bank in Missoula.

- **July 10, 1902.** While driving one of Missoula's earliest automobiles around the streets of south Missoula, Bonner was struck by a heart attack and fell from the car, dying instantly. He was Montana's representative to the National Republican Committee at the time.
- **1902-Death.** July 10, 1902 in Missoula Montana.

Information researched by Kim Briggeman, news reporter for Missoulian.