

Whittell was the Floyd Mayweather of yesteryear

By AutoWeek

George Whittell Jr. was the scion of an immense gilded age fortune, amassed by his grandfathers through banking, transportation, real estate and utility ownership in San Francisco, then consolidated by the marriage of his parents in 1879. He grew up in a mansion on Nob Hill, the toniest address in the city at the time. His father was a member of the most prestigious clubs and social circles. Whittell never sought to follow in his family's ambitious, entrepreneurial footsteps, though. His goal was to live a sybaritic life, one founded on adventure, unconventionality and, most of all, speed.

"George Whittell liked all things fast," says Brad Carter, operations director at Whittell's Thunderbird Lodge, the private estate the playboy built on Lake Tahoe. "Cars, planes, boats and women."

Whittell began his oppositional antics at quite an early age, running away with the Barnum & Bailey circus after high school rather than attending college, eloping with a chorus girl rather than marrying the society bride his parents had selected for him and buying himself a position in the Italian Army rather than waiting for the U.S. to join World War I.

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