

# William Henry Bassett and Marette Cook

William Henry, known as Will, was the son of Mary Knight, second wife to Charles Henry. He was born in Salt Lake City on Mar. 14, 1858. At age eighteen he was sent to Cedar Fort, Ut. to manage the Z.C.M.I. store. It was there that he met the twin daughters of Bishop Cook (Henry Freeman Cook) and married one of them, Marette, on Oct. 2, 1876. They remained in Cedar Fort for the next four years, giving birth to four children, Lutie Marette, William Grantly, Harry Freeman and James Clarence.



William Henry Bassett



Marette Cook

Somewhere in that time period Will spent time as a mail carrier in the Virginia City Yellowstone area. He wrote a letter to his father that was published in the Salt lake Herald in January 1881. It reads:

## THRILLING EXPERIENCES

"Alone on a Montana Prairie three days and two nights"  
 "without food or water – snow three feet on the level"  
 "The life of a mail carrier in a houseless country"

The following is the greater part of a letter received by Mr. Charles H. Bassett from his son William H., who is in the mail service in Northern [actually southern], Montana. The young man is but 22 years of age, and the simple non-effected manner in which he relates his thrilling experiences shows that he not only possesses a great deal of courage, but also a great deal of genuine manliness:

*"Virginia City, Mont., Jan 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1881.*

*Dear Father:*

*In answer to your questions, I will endeavor to give you some particulars. At the time I wrote to Mother (December 1<sup>st</sup>) I was snowed in at Fire Hole Basin and was there about ten or twelve days. Two of us succeeded in getting over the mountain with three horses and snowshoes, and we arrived at River Side Station that day. On the day following, Marshall, the boss, came in from Henry Lake with two men and fifteen horses. They had been six days on the road, a distance of thirty miles. He then ordered me to start out the following morning on horseback for the lake. I objected and told him I thought it impossible for a horse to get through, and asked for a pair of snowshoes. He then became very angry and said he would not send me if he did not know I could get to the lake safely. I started out on the morning of the 16<sup>th</sup> with the best horse but I had traveled not ten miles before the animal was unable to carry me, and I had five miles further to go before I could reach some haystacks on the prairie. By considerable hard work I led the horse to the haystacks after dark. I was entirely worn out, so I took my saddle blankets and crawled into one of the haystacks for warmth and to rest, but fell*

asleep and did not awaken until daylight. I started again, but only succeeded in traveling one mile that day, as the snow was so deep (about three feet on the level) that it was impossible for the horse to travel. I was then in a canyon and found wood, so I built a fire, and was so tired that I slept all night again and froze my feet still more (but I forgot to say that I froze my feet the first night at the haystacks). I dare not take off my boots to inspect my feet, for fear that I could not get them on again. I had discovered by this time that my horse was good for nothing, so I started him back to the hay, and started out on foot, calculating to make the lake by night, which was fifteen miles further on. The lake was frozen so I started across it to shorten the distance, but I soon found my mistake, for when I started on it I broke through, and I got out only by hard scrambling, and was then on the ice wet and freezing. There was about two feet of soft snow and I could hardly walk. The station was on the other side of the lake, and by swinging my hat I attracted the stock tender's attention, but not too soon for I fell down exhausted, unable to take another step. He dragged and pushed me on my snowshoes, and took good care of me.

I had spent all this time, three days and nights without a mouthful of food or water. I had eaten snow until my throat was so raw I was unable to eat a full meal for a number of days. I used arnica on my feet but the boys thought I would lose my toes, if not my whole feet, if I did not get down here (Virginia City) to get medical advice. Hearing that the company team was eighteen miles this side of there with supplies for here, I concluded to start for it in company with two mail carriers. This eighteen miles to be made on snowshoes, but I mustered up courage enough to start out. No one can imagine what I endured on that trip. My feet were so sore and raw that I could hardly lift them; but we made the trip at last some time after dark. The following morning I was unable to walk a step, and was carried around and started for this place

That day, on the prairie, a terrific snow-storm came up, the wind being in our faces. We had to make eight miles before dark, and it was then sundown. We knew that unless we did make the station by dark, the chances were that we would never get there. The sleighing was bad on account of there being so many rocks: but I took the whip and away we went at breakneck speed. We struck a rock and broke one runner in a number of pieces. Fortunately, we happened to have 60 feet of rope with us, with which we tied up the runner, and away we went again, and arrived at the station at dark. I froze again on that trip my hands, feet and chin. My eyes were frozen shut most all the time during our fast driving against the blinding snow. We had a hard time coming the balance of the way, but not so hard as that which I have mentioned. I was in bed in the wagon the last 35 miles.

The doctor does not know yet but that I will lose my big toe on the right foot, but pronounces the rest of my toes and fingers safe. The place where I was on foot is 100 miles from here, and no persons live there except the men at mail stations, which are 15 miles apart, except at that one place, and it is a 30-mile station.

Another letter from Will's brother Ernest to his father Charles Henry at about this same time has survived. It reads:

Virginia City, Montana  
February 22, 1881

Dear Father,

The first letter I received from you was dated Dec. 9 and I received it Feb 3<sup>rd</sup>, and then wrote you a card but was not able to get it mailed until I got here, and then I did not post it but write you this. I have not been able to answer Mother's written so long ago. I [had] not even a card or a stamp. Your

*second letter written or dated 19<sup>th</sup> I received last night, and I was very glad to hear from you and home again and thank you much for the card you sent me.*

*Will says he received another letter from you to me, which he sent to Fire Hole, which I missed, and will probably get in a few days. How many letters did you write me?*

*Your health worries me very much as it has done for a long time before I came here. As I wrote you, I was going to the Springs, a distance of 55 miles. We started – me and Mr. Furgenson – with 3 horses, one pace horse and 2 saddle horses in about 2 ½ ft of snow. By night after a hard struggle we made Gibbon Station, a distance of 25 miles. When we got there it snowed 1 ½ feet more, and we realized in a moment that we could never get the horses out of there in winter. So, as our stock of provisions were low, we had to get out of there or starve. Frank, the man that was with me, had a pair of web shoes, very good ones which I was not able to get at the time. So we took two pine saplings and bent them around and tied them with string and so I got me a heavy and clumsy pair of web shoes. We started with the mail sack and a sack of biscuits, which was all we had to eat. The snow was so soft that we sank to our knees with our shoes on. I forgot to say that we started to the Springs again a distance of 80 miles with no station or place to sleep on the road. After working all day and nearly killing ourselves we got a distance of 8 miles when we dropped down with fatigue. The wind was blowing a perfect hurricane and we would freeze to death if did not do something.*

*(pages 4 and 5 of the original letter are missing).*

*. . . unable to speak above a whisper, as soon as my feet got warm, they began to pain me, so taking off my boots my feet were frozen badly. I suffered terribly that night with them several days and they came back [?], where I suffered a good deal. I have got here at last and am not well yet. My neck is swelled some on the outside. Rheumatism bothers so that I cannot walk very well sometimes. The mail company owes about \$200.00 at present. I have worked for them nearly 8 months. There is some trouble with the government – Not with the government but with Mr. Z\_\_\_\_\_, and do not know when I can collect my money. I shall take a station near the road as soon as I get well so as not to remain idle while I am waiting for my pay. I must close for this time. Love to Mother, Ruby and Lois and the rest of the folks.*

*Your Aff. Son,*

*Ernest*

*(From Leah Bassett, wife of Gerald Goodwin Basset, grandson of Ernest Bassett)*

The family oral history is that WH and his brothers were in Virginia City at the time a robber gang was operating and witnessed some of the vigilante activity to eliminate them: something about one of the gang being caught and as he was about to be hung his lover came riding on a horse to save him. She was too late. It sounds a little melodramatic, but who knows. The story goes that travelers could not leave the town safely on the main road because of the danger of being robbed and killed. The Bassett's left their horses and gear tied at the rail and walked out of town into the wilderness, avoiding the road, to escape.

William Henry Bassett and his half brother Charles Henry Bassett II filed land claims on the Trout Creek area. WH and Met had three children there: Sophronia, Roscoe (Ross), and Adelia Dubois. It appears the house was built somewhere around 1885.

The William Henry and Met family spent their summers in Yellowstone Park in Fire Hole Basin, and their winters in Cedar Fort, Utah until the homestead in the Trout Creek area was developed. My stepmother, Lutie, who was my mother's oldest sister, would tell me about the summers spent in Yellowstone. She would curl her hair with a curling iron heated in the chimney of a coal oil lamp sitting on the kitchen table in front of the window and tell stories of that time. They lived in a cabin in Fire Hole Basin. They washed clothes and bathed in the hot springs. Indians would come and press their faces against the window to peer inside. The children would be frightened. But their mother, Met, would just sit in her chair, rocking and sewing and paying no attention. (See "Life of Lutie Marette Bassett Swensen Hansen" for more about this time). Fire Hole Basin was the destination point for passengers arriving from Beaver Canyon via the Bassett Bros. Stage Line (see the Bassett Bro. Stage Line history).



William Henry built a small general merchandise store in 1880 as shown in the picture and then a larger store in 1900 as shown below. The store was a place of gathering and story telling. It was located in Lago on the old Pioneer Road that went from Thatcher to Bench (see History - Trout Creek (Lago)). CHH built a large house on the other side of the road and offered it as a hotel for travelers. WH succeeded a Mr. Lusher as postmaster. There were a lot of Sego Lilies growing on the surrounding hills and Sego was the name applied for as the post office name. But the government officials misread the handwriting and the name became Lago instead. It is located about 12 miles south of Grace, Id. The granaries and machine sheds are shown behind the truck in the picture. Adelia Bassett is the passenger. She never learned to drive. I played in these buildings as a child.

Their three sons, Harry, Clarence and Roscoe worked in the store and probably the farm for some period, but all moved to cities where they spent their lives and raised their families. Some stories persist that WH was simply too difficult to be around. Perhaps there were economic considerations also as the valley became more populated and land less available. And probably the store was unable to support them all. The three girls, Lutie, Sophronia and Adelia married locally and lived out their lives in Lago.



The following is from Clarence (Bud) Hansen's memories March 2008:

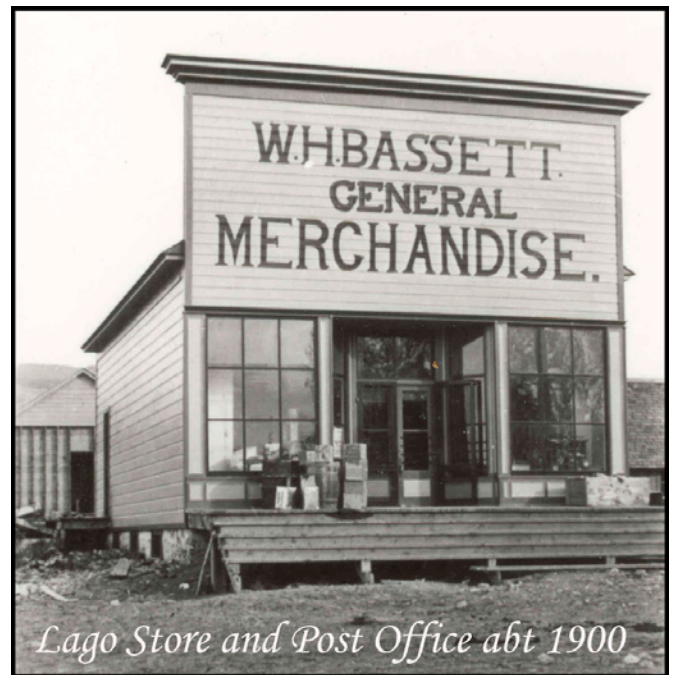
*"The WH Bassett store sold farm implements and parts, leather, yard goods, shoes, socks, Levis, coveralls, jackets, shirts and gloves, canned goods and candies, but nothing fresh. It also sold garden supplies, gasoline, coal oil and bullets, no guns, but they could be ordered. People would bring in wheat and oats and Grandpa would weigh them and give store credit. Our clothing was bought from the store. We had coveralls when young then Levis, a good coat and one for chores. Unlike many others we had shoes. We had an aviator cap which we would line with a woman's stocking to keep us warm.*



*Dallas and I gathered eggs to sell to the store. We bought groceries and sometimes a candy. In the winter the store sold oats for the horses. Mostly I remember that the top shelves held rows of hats, straw and Stetson's. Grandpa would use a hook to pull the boxes down. The gas pump sat to the side of the store and they would hand pump gas to the cars from a buried tank. The lights in the old store were also gas. Grandpa would light the end of a long stick and reach up to light them.*

*Dad (Alfred) would take the model T Ford truck to Grace once a week to pick up supplies for Grandpa Bassett's store. I remember Harry Bassett building egg crates. The crates held about 12 dozen eggs and they would be sent to Grace and shipped out.*

*The first store sat south across the road [driveway] from the new store. It was wood construction and had a canvas ceiling. WH ran this store until the new one was built. The new one was about 25 feet by 60 feet. It sat on a rock foundation and had a basement with a dirt floor. Dad traded the old building to Don Clegg in return for Don (who had a new caterpillar tractor and plow) breaking up and plowing a piece in the north end. Don moved the building to his place upon the Bench.*



*Lago Store and Post Office abt 1900*

*WH never farmed. Charlie Bassett's boys did or the Sorenson's and later Dad [Alfred Hansen]. WH was a champion pool player and won the finals held in McGammon, Idaho. He was also a champion marble player and took part in the competition in SLC when he was a boy. WH, Charlie, and Julius, were the Bassett Brothers that ran the stagecoach company in Yellowstone. To get there from Lago they had to travel through Grey's Lake. The Snake River was too difficult to cross and there were Indians to worry about. For a while WH and Charlie had shares in the Gem Valley Cattle Assoc. and sent their cattle north of Soda to summer, but they sold their shares."*

WH and Met would go riding, her in sidesaddle, loping across the fields of their homestead in Lago. The house that Will and Met built is shown in about 1950. It was constructed of logs in the one story part on the right with lapboard on the outside and lath and plaster on the inside. The two story on the left and some rooms in the back were added. Electricity came to the valley in 1929. Pumped water, sink, hot water heater, bathtub and a toilet were installed in the house in about 1934-5. CH II's large home still stands today, well maintained, owned by a retired couple. He died in 1940.



WH Bassett and CH Bassett II lived out their lives in Lago, farming and ranching. My father, Alfred Hansen, rented then bought the WH farm. WH Bassett passed away on Dec. 29, 1929 following an automobile accident on the way to Pocatello, Id. to dictate his memoirs.

The Pocatello Tribune published a tribute to his life entitled "BASSETT – Lived Long in Idaho – a Tribute to Memory of Widely Known Citizen". It reads:

*"Friends Pay Tribute to Memory of Widely Known Citizen. (This personal sketch and resume of the long residence and career of William H. Bassett was written by Theodore Turner of Pocatello, a close friend of many years standing, and one whose familiarity with the traits of the deceased are well indicated herewith).*

*William Henry Bassett of Lago passed away at the General Hospital in this city at 9:30 p.m. Friday, Dec. 27, 1929.*

*Mr. Bassett, a brother of Charles H. Bassett, chairman of the board of county commissioners of this county, suffered injury in an automobile accident on Thursday last while on his way to Pocatello from his home in Lago to attend to matters of private business. At the time of his being brought to the hospital his injuries did not cause apprehension as to the probability of his recovery. His health not having been good for sometime, however, the shock which he sustained in the accident proved to be fatal. His passing comes as a great shock to his many relatives and friends in Utah and Idaho where his whole life has been spent.*

*William H. Bassett was born in Salt Lake City, Utah March 14, 1858, the son of Charles H. Bassett, Sr. and Mary Knight Bassett. His boyhood and early manhood were passed in Salt Lake City where he attended the public schools. On October 14, 1876 he married Murette Cook of Cedar Valley, Utah, after which event he remained a resident of Utah for about five years.*

*In 1881 he came to Idaho, establishing a home in Gentile Valley near the present location of the Lago post office and with his brothers Charles Bassett and the late Julius Bassett as partners, founded a stage and freight carrying business in Beaver Canyon (a place on the Utah-Northern railroad about one mile east of where the town of Spencer is now located). From this place stages for carrying mail and passengers and freight outfits were operated to Yellowstone and other places. The brothers continued to operate until about 1889 at which time they disposed of the business, and until the time of his death, Mr. Bassett gave his whole time to his farming and stock raising operations in Gentile Valley which he has established and built up along with the stage and freight business at Beaver Canyon.*

*Some years after closing the business at Beaver Canyon, Mr. Bassett established a general merchandise store at Lago, in Gentile Valley to which he has given most of his time for the past twenty years or more. For about 20 years he had been the postmaster at Lago and his store and the post office have been somewhat of a community center for this rural section and his home a large factor in the community social life.*

*He is survived by his widow Murette Cook Bassett; his five children, P. Bassett of Pocatello, Lutie Swenson and Adelia Hanson of Lago, Ross Bassett of Ogden, Utah and Clarence Bassett of Santa Monica, California. Also by his brothers Charles H. Bassett of Lago, Ernest F. Bassett and Fred Bassett of Utah and other brothers now living in California, and sisters Melva Gines and Ruby Ashworth of Salt lake City.*

*The three Bassett Brothers are well known to all old timers of Southern and Eastern Idaho because of their business and political activities.*

*William H. (Will to his friends) was always counted on and never failed to sit in councils, take part in deliberations and influence the policies of his party; his community will long remember and honor "Will*

*Bassett". His kind heart, his cheery, friendly disposition, neighborliness, and brotherly kindness to his friends and his community at large were such that no tablet will be required to keep fresh his memory in the minds of all who knew him.*

*He will be laid to rest in the Bassett Family plot at Lago."*

(The above article was reprinted in The Caribou County Sun, Soda Springs, Idaho Thursday December 10, 1992 in a piece for "Our History and Our Heritage" written by Grace Bassett Newey of Canon City, Colorado.)

After William Henry's death Hyrum and Lutie Swensen purchased the store and became the postmasters. Murette was very active in church and community affairs. She was an accomplished seamstress. She passed away on May 10, 1931. Hyrum died a short while later and Lutie, Adelia's older sister, closed the store and continued to operate the post office and a small store at the Swenson farm, about a mile away. The November after Adelia died, Alfred married Lutie and the post office was moved to a back room in the Hansen (old Bassett) house. Alfred delivered mail down the valley in the winter as far as Treasurton. The store sat empty for decades: lived in occasionally, used for storage, used as a carpentry shop, and was finally sold and torn down for lumber. The house, abandoned, burned down. The Bassett's were gone.

This history has been compiled, in addition to those noted, from the following:

1. "Gems" of Our Valley
2. Various histories and information by Grace Newey
3. A history of William Henry Bassett by William (Bill) Kay Bassett, a grandson
4. Bassett Bros. Stage Line (a history)
5. Life of Lutie Murette Bassett Swensen Hansen
6. History – Trout Creek (Lago)
7. Memories of family members

Compiled April 2008 by Stanley D. Hansen, grandson