

Frances Alderson



Gallatin History Museum



## **W.W. Alderson**

born 1831 in England  
died 1906

## **Frances W. Alderson**

born 1834 in England  
died 1916

**William (W.W.) worked in the lead mines of Yorkshire, England at the age of 13. At 17 he emigrated with his family to the U.S. In 1864, at the age of 33, he left his wife and four children in Wisconsin and with his brother, John, headed for the gold mines of Virginia City. When they came to the Gallatin Valley, they decided to become farmers. They were two of Bozeman's very earliest pioneers. When they arrived in what was to become Bozeman, the entire population of the town was W. J. Beall in a small tent waiting for Daniel Rouse to return with supplies. In 1866, William's family joined him. He continued farming and was able to prosper and buy out many less successful farmers. He went into the dairy business and was also successful. In 1837, he was named the agent of the Fort Peck Reservation. In 1877, he returned to Bozeman and took over the *Avant Courier*, the newspaper, as its editor. His son Matt was the head of the business and production departments. Alderson and his family never abandoned their farming activities in the Gallatin Valley.**

**The first church services were held in homes by Alderson. During the winter of 1866 and the spring of 1867, a church was built by the Methodists with the help of Alderson. This was the first church and the first frame building built in Bozeman and the Gallatin Valley. It was located on the corner of Main Street and Tracy.**

**Frances gave birth to 5 more children in Bozeman. She was well known for her cooking and flowers. The local millers had her test their wheat by sending her flour for baking samples. She kept flowers blooming all winter so that W.W. was able to wear one in his buttonhole every day of the year. Francis taught her 9 sons and daughters to cook and sew. She was active in getting women the right to vote.**



# MRS. W. W. ALDERSON PASSES AWAY

*Republican Courier Jan 20, 1910*

Came to Bozeman in 1866 and Her Influence for Good in the Community was Marked From Then Until Her Death.--Held in High Esteem.

Bozeman: ~~May 30, 1854~~  
May 5, 1834

Death removed one of Bozeman's pioneer women and one held in high esteem by the entire community when Mrs. W. W. Alderson died at her home in this city Monday morning, December 19, aged 76 years, 7 months and 14 days.

Frances, eldest daughter of Edward and Mary A. Weatherby, was born at Helton-le-hole, county of Durham, Eng., May 5, 1834. She was married to William W. Alderson at Shullsburg, Wisconsin, May 30, 1854. Her husband came to Montana in 1864 and two years later, with the four children, she came up the Missouri river from St. Louis to Fort Benton to join her husband, thence overland to Boze-

sistent member of that denomination and actively in sympathy with its work until her death. These speak of the serious side of her nature, which was always leavened by a keen sense of humor—an appreciation of the incongruous and ludicrous.

### Woman of Courage

Mrs. Alderson was a woman of rare presence of mind and remarkable fortitude. No matter how trying the situation no one ever knew her other than equal to the emergency. She met it with a cool, clear head and steady hands. As an instance of her courage it is related that when she was coming up the Missouri river on the Steamboat Luella, in 1866, when



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man where she made her home until her death which was some four years subsequent to that of her husband who died October 15, 1906. She was thus one of the pioneer women of the state and as such she was one of the first to make a pronounced success in growing house plants and flowers out of doors in this newly settled section of the country; and nothing afforded her more pleasure than to part with the blossoms she had developed with much care when she thought they might be a source of cheer to any one else.

#### Splendid Mother

First and foremost Mrs. Alderson was a homebody. Her whole soul was wrapped up in her home and its members. So much was this the case that it always required a great amount of effort to get her to make even a brief visit elsewhere. Notwithstanding she was exceptionally affectionate in disposition she never allowed her feelings to override her judgment and she managed her household with tact and perfect discipline. She was that type of woman of whom it was said in olden times: "She looketh well to the ways of her household, and eateth not the bread of idleness. Her children arise up and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her."

While not at all obtrusive or dogmatic, she was nevertheless, very pronounced and set in some of her ways and opinions, exhibiting a stability of character which caused all who knew her to feel that they knew "just where to find her."

Early in life she joined the Methodist Episcopal church and was a con-

the passengers were all more or less apprehensive of trouble with the Indians and, after the clerk of the boat had become so panic stricken that he had taken advantage of the first opportunity to return to the settlements, she would allow her boys to accompany hunting parties to the wooded points and hills adjoining the river when the boat stopped to wood up and passengers went out after game. She was admirably adapted to "life in the wilderness" and enjoyed making it "blossom as the rose." As her growing family came to require less and less of her care she gave more of her time to her garden and though becoming quite feeble at times in late years she generally mustered up strength to do a great amount of work in her garden, even this past summer. Her final illness was of brief duration. She took to her bed Friday last, after which she experienced a gradual decline.

An only brother, George E. Weatherby, and an only sister, Miss Elizabeth M. Weatherby, survive her at the old home town of Shullsburg, Wisconsin.

Her children left behind are Matt W. Alderson, of Marysville, Mont., Edward C. Alderson and Mrs. E. Lina Houston, of Bozeman; Mrs. William Cool, of Chicago; Mrs. James S. Hammond, of Billings, Mrs. Stephen A. Ulmer, of Belgrade, Charles R. and Frank Alderson, of Bozeman. All of these were at the bedside of the mother in the last hours, except the daughter in Chicago.

The funeral will take place from the family residence, 702 Central avenue, south, Wednesday afternoon at 2 o'clock.



## ... History of the W. W. Alderson Family



W. W. Alderson  
(Montana Pioneer)

By SKIPPY REESE

The family of William W. Alderson, an early pioneer of Gallatin County, was honored during the 80th annual reunion of the Sons and Daughters of Pioneers when they gathered at the Baxter Hotel.

The life of Alderson, who was first engaged in farming and then in the newspaper work for 28 years and who was prominent in the educational, religious and civic life in Bozeman for 42 years, was beautifully narrated by his granddaughter, Myrtle Griswold of Belgrade.

"There were no inviting fields ready for the harvest, no flocks and herds on either one of a thousand hills, no quiet homes for either safety, convenience or comfort to greet the eye or cheer the heart of the first visitors to Gallatin Valley," Alderson wrote in an 1904 editorial at the time of the

reunion of the Pioneers of Gallatin County Pioneers. "It was a land of fair promise, of course, with its extensive acreage of nutritious pasturage, but even that was only available at the risk of encountering at any day or hour, a band of hostile Indians to dispute the white man's right of possession."

Concluding his editorial, Alderson wrote of the early pioneers, of their patience through sacrifices and suffering, pushed out from the crowded centers in the east to claim the vast and fertile domain of the wild and boundless west.

Alderson was born in England in 1831, the eighth child in a family of 12, he went to work in the lead mines with his father. In 1848, the family came to the United States, landing in New Orleans and traveling on to Galena, Ill. He joined his brother, Simon, who had come

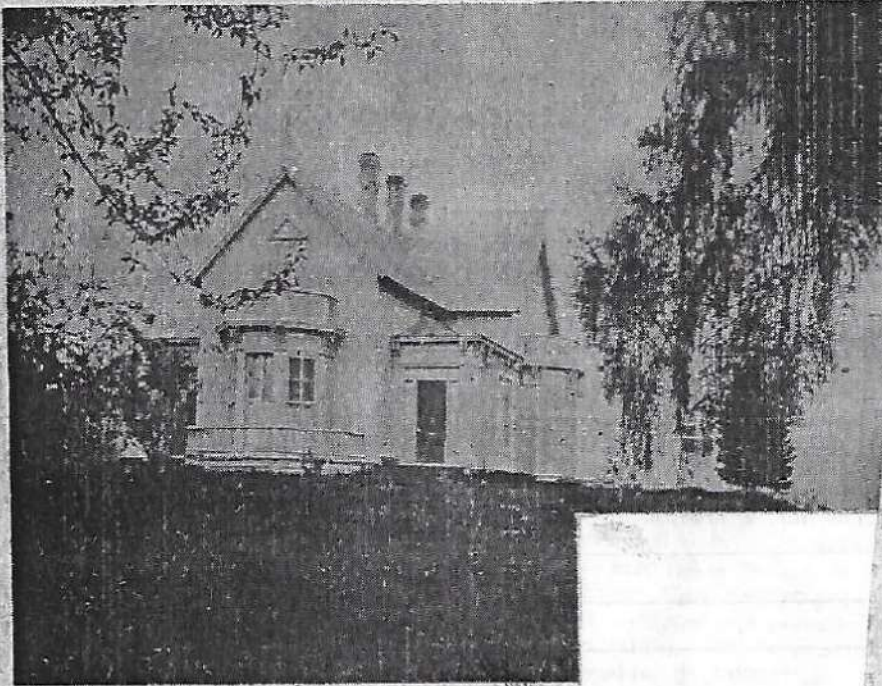
to the states earlier and clerked in Simon's store. In May 1854, he married Frances Weatherby, who was born in England in 1834, and left the mercantile business and engaged in farming until 1864.

That year, having had a good crop and clearing about \$2,000, he and his brother decided to travel west in search of gold. They traveled by four horse team from Illinois to the Gallatin Valley, accompanied most of the way by two Scotsmen, John Brown and his son, Peter. Alderson's wife and four children stayed with their parents. They departed April 20, arriving in the valley June 14.

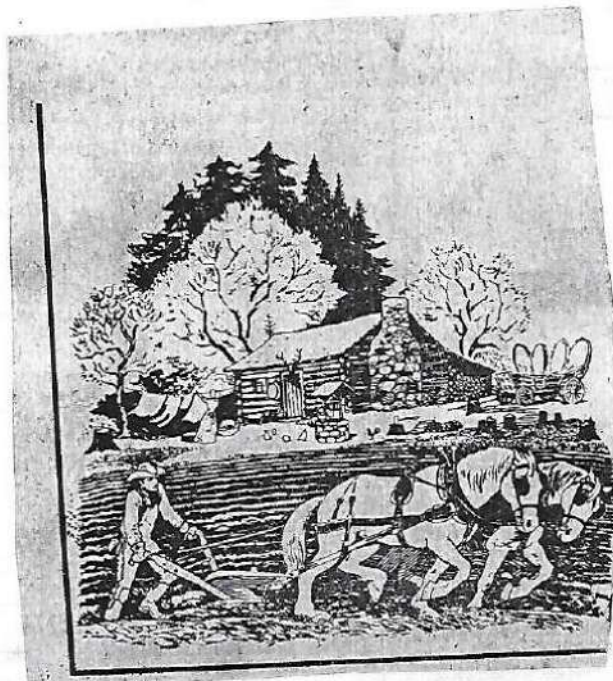
A diary, which was kept during this trip, noted they only traveled once on Sunday and that was because of short grass.

They had intended to to Virginia City to mine for gold but they fell in love with the valley and on July 18, they took





The Mansion on the Hill



out homestead claims a mile from Main Street. They unloaded their wagon, set up their tent, clothing and provisions which included a good stock of clothing, 525 pounds of flour, 50 pounds of cornmeal, 100 pounds of bacon, one third barrel of crackers and 13 pounds of sugar.

They traveled to Virginia City for mail and supplies, which took about a day and a half in good weather. They sent to Salt Lake City, Utah, for seed, machinery and later to Helena where they sold potatoes, butter and cheese.

In 1865, Alderson started a story and a half log house and shingled it in April 1866. The house had an outside stairway and the boys used to climb down the stairs to help their father put up the team when he returned home at night.

#### FIRST CHURCH SERVICE

As he had received a license to preach by the Methodist Church in Illinois, Alderson held the first church service in Gallatin County June 4, 1865 at the M.W. Penwell's home. In 1866, a Sunday School and a church was organized by the Rev. A.M. Hough. Two years later Alderson built the first church which was the first frame structure in Bozeman. Plans were made for a brick church in 1873 and the money raised. This building is still in use.

The same year, he met his family who arrived in Fort Benton and they returned crossing the Missouri River at Canyon Ferry and they reached Bozeman and settled in their log house where they lived for eight years.



### MANSION ON THE HILL

A new home which Alderson started before leaving for Fort Peck was completed in time to receive visitors on Jan. 1, 1875. He had laid out Willson Avenue and this new home, located a mile from the center of town and known as the "Mansion on the Hill," overlooked the "Grandest and most fertile valley in the world."

As Mrs. Griswold reminisced of the old home on the hill one could almost sniff the mouth watering breads and delectable foods wafting through the clear mountain air from the kitchen of Mrs. Alderson, who was famed for her cooking. The millers would often send her a small sack of flour from a new kind of wheat or after sharpening the stones, for her opinion on the quality of the wheat. She would reply by sending them some loaves of bread and biscuits.

Later he bought 74 head of stock for \$2120, went into the dairy business, and in one year sold enough butter and cheese to realize the entire purchase price. He shipped in a cheese vat, with the freight costing more than the original price of the vat. At the first territorial fair held near Helena in 1870, he took first premium and a diploma for the best cheese and best five pounds of butter. At the time he was milking 22 cows.

Receiving his commission at Fort Peck, as a United States Indian agent in 1873, Alderson served three years there and acquired the title of Major. During his time at Fort Peck, there were several attacks of Indian war parties and trouble with traders selling arms or liquor to the Indians.

Alderson, Gen. L.S. Willson and A. Lamme assisted Joe Wright in securing the money necessary to purchase a printing press to start the Avant Courier. Wright died in 1876 and Alderson took over the paper, buying out Willson and Lamme. Alderson's son Matt, who had learned to set type, went to town after the day's work was done and became a partner in the newspaper business. Matt purchased the first power press and first mailing machine used between Helena and Bismarck. Soon Major Alderson was the editor and Matt became the head of the business and mechanical department.

Although Alderson was devoted to his home and family he traveled extensively and when ever he could he took one of his nine children with him. The children were Matt, Ed. Lina Charlie, Frank, Margaret Anna, Mamie and Willie, who died at age 15. Both Matt and Ed were with him part of the time at Fort Peck, working with him on the farm and shared in everything. Matt worked with his father at the Courier and Charlie and Frank were both linotype operators.

One of the first, to make a success of growing houseplants and flowers out-of-doors, Mrs. Alderson had rows upon rows of old fashioned flowers in her yard. Included also were evergreens, split leaf birch, mountain ash, and crab apple trees. The large bay window of the dining room was filled with a large flower stand full of pots of blooming flowers all winter. Nothing gave her more pleasure than sharing the flowers with her friends and her husband always had a flower in his lapel.

The couple celebrated their Golden Wedding Anniversary on May 30, 1904 with the house filled with friends to wish them well.

Alderson died Oct. 15, 1906 from cancer and the funeral was conducted at the Mansion on the hill. During the funeral services all of the business houses in Bozeman were closed and the flags on the city hall and those on the schoolhouses were at half mast.

This is just a portion of the Alderson story, the story of a pioneer family that, like many other Gallatin County Pioneers, had a vision of the opportunities in a new country and the faith and courage to follow through and built a community of homes, schools and churches.

Mrs. Arthur Koch was reelected president of the organization Saturday; Willis Griswold, vice-president and Mrs. Fred Browning, secretary-treasurer, an office she has held for 25 years.

Mr. and Mrs. Wes Davis were honored during the meeting as they have attended every annual meetings for the past fifty years.

Other Sons and Daughters of Pioneers honored were Mrs. Elva White, 95, Manhattan, Mrs. J.D. Cooper, Mrs. Effie Atkins, Mrs. Marie Shedd Flaherty, Mrs. Elsie Allinson, Delmar White, Mrs. Myrtle Griswold, Bertha Carlson and Lester Crouse, Sr.



## A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE ALDERSONS, PART 1



by **B. DEREK STRAHN**

Seeking to understand the past, historians of the American West commonly celebrate rugged individualism while downplaying cooperation. Consequently, the social importance of families — as both the means of and the inspiration for historical change — is seldom recognized. Yet, both within the household and the broader community, families worked together to transform their local living environments in lasting and meaningful ways.

In the case of Bozeman's early history, one extended family had an especially significant impact on the character of our town, and ultimately, Montana as a whole — the Aldersons.

William White Alderson and his brother, John, pocketed \$2,000 in savings, said goodbye to their families in Wisconsin, and headed west toward Montana Territory on April 21, 1864. At Red Buttes on the Platte River, they left the Oregon Trail and followed Bridger's Trail and Jacob's cut-off into Montana Territory. Of his fellow travelers, the deeply religious William grumbled distastefully in his diary that "the drunkenness and profanity was very prevalent."

On Thursday, July 14, 1864, the Alderson brothers camped in "one of the most beautiful

While his earliest days in the Gallatin Valley were filled with hope, the challenges of his new life in Montana soon troubled William Alderson. By April of 1865, he mused, "It is now twelve months since I left my dear pets at Shullsburg ..."

He went on to complain bitterly of Montana's less-than-cooperative weather. "It is becoming really discouraging to a person expecting to make money farming here," he wrote. "Instead of being a mild climate as it appeared ... it is, in fact, nearly a perpetual winter."

Although for a time he debated "making a permanent home here," Alderson's circumstances eventually changed, and in 1866 he sent for his wife and children to join him on his rough-hewn, but promising dairy farm. Alderson had married Frances Weatherby at Shullsburg, Wis., on May 30, 1854, and there his wife and four children resided while he traveled westward. Upon receiving word from her husband, Frances packed up her family and boarded a train to St. Louis. There, she and her kids traveled on the steamboat *Luella*, up the Missouri River to Fort Benton, Mont. En route, many of her fellow passengers were "more or less apprehensive of trouble with the Indians," and "the clerk of the boat had become so panic stricken that he had taken advantage of the first opportunity to return to the settlements."

Nonetheless, Frances demonstrated that she was "admirably adapted to 'life in the wilderness,'" allowing her antsy boys "to accompany hunting parties to the wooded points and hills adjoining the river when the boat stopped to wood up." Upon reaching Fort Benton, the Alderson family finally reunited and traveled together to their new home in Bozeman.

The arrival of William Alderson's family caused a shift in his priorities. Alderson "realized the necessity of schools and churches for the community," and soon devoted "much valuable time to those interests," according to the 1901 publication *Progressive Men of Montana*.

Licensed to preach back in the States, Alderson soon held the first church and Sunday school services in Gallatin County.

By 1867, he constructed Bozeman's first church, which also happened to be the first frame structure in town. In the years that followed, the

### PRESERVATION



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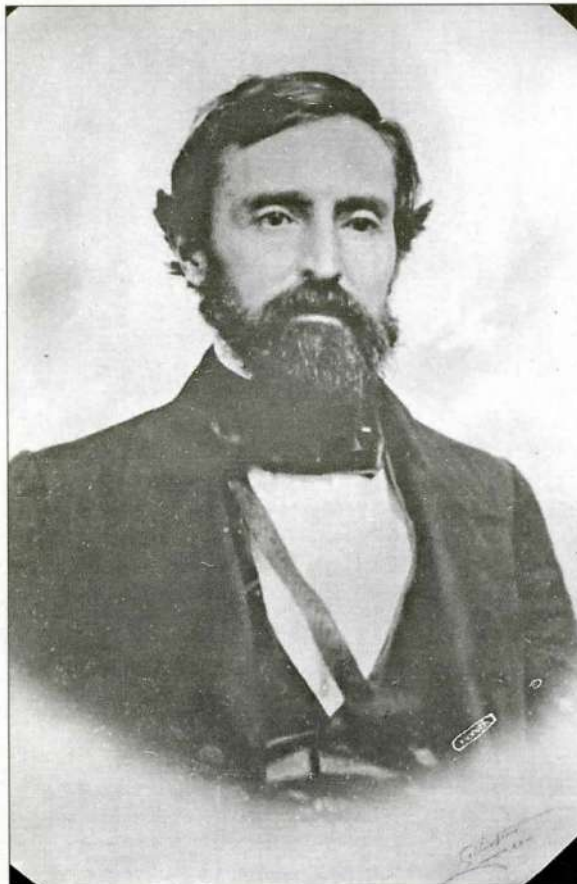
On Thursday, July 14, 1864, the Alderson brothers camped in “one of the most beautiful and picturesque valleys the eye ever beheld, abounding in springs of clear water, flowers and grass in abundance.” In the days that followed, the pioneers staked out homestead claims one-mile south of what is now Main Street in Bozeman, and set up residence there. In early August, when a few settlers decided to locate a town on the west prong of the East Gallatin River, Alderson’s motioned, and the participants resolved, that the town district be called “Bozeman.”

school services in Gallatin County.

By 1867, he constructed Bozeman’s first church, which also happened to be the first frame structure in town. In the years that followed, the devout lay minister “solemnized marriages and buried the dead,” according to his obituary. Alderson donated land and considerable funding for the construction of Bozeman’s Methodist-Episcopal Church (now the United Methodist Church at 121 South Willson) in 1872. In the field of education, Alderson also served as a school board member for 12 years.

While William worked diligently to promote a civilized and nurturing public environment for his family, Frances successfully

March 23, 2004 at home | 11



**William W. Alderson platted many important buildings in Bozeman's early days.** Photo courtesy Museum of the Rockies.

did the same at home.

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In 1873, the Alderson Family initiated construction of a beautiful home in the Italianate Style, near the top of the hill where Alderson Street now t-bones into South Willson Avenue. Half a mile from the nearest residence, and nearly a full mile from what was then the center of town, the Aldersons "mansion on the hill" commanded a most beautiful view of

what they considered to be "the grandest and most fertile valley in the world." Sadly, the house was demolished by the T.B. Story family in the 1940s to make room for a new residence, which still stands at 624 South Willson

Following Custer's defeat in 1876, the Alderson family left its greatest imprint on the community of Bozeman. In 1877, William acquired a local newspaper known as the Pick and Plow and changed its name to the Avant Courier.

He started an ambitious campaign to promote Bozeman, both as a stopping point for the Northern Pacific Railroad, and as a desirable place for permanent settlement. Alderson's eldest son, Matt, soon joined him in the successful enterprise. By 1881, the Aldersons completed a two-story masonry headquarters for the Avant Courier, which still stands on East Main Street.

William Alderson's confidence in Bozeman's future also inspired him to subdivide the northern portion of his homestead into the Alderson and Fairview Additions, *continued*

## Strahn

which extended north from College Street. In one of his crowning achievements, Alderson platted South Central (now Willson) Avenue, which traversed his lands. When Alderson laid out the street, he made it 20 feet wider than usual, in hopes that it would attract the most fashionable homes in Bozeman. In the optimism that surrounded the arrival of the Northern Pacific, dozens of fine residences were constructed on Alderson's lands, where he prospered as "an extensive dealer in real estate."

Although William Alderson died in 1906 and Frances followed him four years later, the family's impact on Bozeman, and Montana generally, had not ended. Indeed, the greatest legacy of the Aldersons was their many descendants, who not only furthered Bozeman's growth and development, but went on to have a significant impact in Montana's history as well.

*(Editors note: Next month, Part II of this column will examine the historical significance of Matt and Mary Long Alderson, and others.)*

*Derek Strahn is a historic preservation consultant and social studies teacher at Bozeman High. He can be reached at [DerekStrahn@msn.com](mailto:DerekStrahn@msn.com).*



By 1881, the Aldersons completed a two-story masonry headquarters for the Avant Courier, which still stands on East Main Street. Photo courtesy Museum of the Rockies.



## A FAMILY AFFAIR: THE ALDERSONS, PART II



by **B. DEREK STRAHN**

As noted in last month's column, the Alderson family left a considerable impact on Bozeman's growth and development. Like other notable pioneers, William and Frances Alderson shaped the town's early character and appearance. What is more unusual, however, is that the Alderson's descendants also had a significant influence on Montana's history. Surprisingly, Montana's historians have largely overlooked their story.

Of the children of William and Frances Alderson, none had a greater influence on Montana's history than their eldest son, Matt.

Matt Alderson was born in Shullsburg, Wis., on April 15, 1855. At the age of 11 — just one year after the Civil War — he traveled with his mother and three siblings by steamboat from St. Louis to Fort Benton, Mont. The 60-day journey was undoubtedly a memorable adventure for the family. A giant herd of buffalo crossing the Missouri waylaid the steamboat and, despite reports of hostile Sioux in the area, the Alderson boys periodically went ashore to explore and cut wood for the Luella's engines.

Finally arriving in Bozeman, Matt worked on his father's successful dairy farm just south of town in the summer months and attended school during the winters. Family members recall that he had "a keen sense of humor" and, like his literary father, wrote poetry. In later years, friends labeled him "the poet laureate of Eastern Montana."

In 1873, Ulysses S. Grant appointed William Alderson Indian agent for the Sioux and Assiniboiné Indians residing at Fort Peck, Milk River Agency. Matt traveled with his father and served for two years as post

month. By 1875, Grant selected Matt to serve as a federal messenger for Montana, carrying valuable mail and telegrams throughout the settled portion of the Territory.

The nearest post office was Fort Benton, some 350 miles away, and the nearest telegraph station was Helena, another 140 beyond. On one difficult journey, the young Alderson became lost for six days in a severe blizzard before reaching safety.

After attending colleges in New York City and Dubuque, Iowa, Matt again joined his father, who had recently purchased Bozeman's only newspaper — the *Avant Courier* — in 1877. Having previous experience in the printing office of the *Courier's* predecessor — the *Pick and Plow* — the younger Alderson purchased an interest in the enterprise, becoming business manager and part-time editor when his father was away.

In 1883, as the Northern Pacific Railroad steamed ever closer to Bozeman, Matt Alderson acquired three and a half lots in his father's south side residential addition and constructed a fine two-story brick home in the Italianate Style at 319 South Central (now Willson) Avenue. Now the location of Bozeman's Voss Inn, the well-preserved Alderson home features a quasi-mansard roof, wide eaves supported by carved wooden brackets, and a projecting bay window with decorative stained glass ion the southern elevation.

That same year, the younger Alderson wrote and published an interesting promotional pamphlet entitled, "Bozeman: A Guide to its Places of Recreation and a Synopsis of its Superior Natural Advantages, Industries, and Opportunities."

Aimed at attracting new growth and development, Alderson's publication highlighted the fact that Bozeman was then, "after leaving the villages in the neighborhood of St. Paul ... the first place reached by the great Northern Pacific Railroad where there was an old settled community with any of the advantages of civilization." The most interesting aspect of the publication is a tour of Bozeman in which Alderson drove the streets of Bozeman and described virtually every building and feature in order of their appearance on the city's streets.

Although Alderson's first wife, Martha Rice Alderson, died during childbirth in 1885, he soon remarried Mary Long Alderson of Massachusetts. Born in 1860, Mary Long Alderson was one of the most notable women

**PRESERVATION**





In 1883, Matt Alderson acquired land on what is now Willson Avenue and built a two-story brick home that is now the wonderfully decorated Voss Inn. *At Home file photo*

## Strahn

Unlike most women of her day, Alderson obtained active employment outside of the household, while also raising three daughters — Myrtle, Dorothy and Priscilla. Given that her father-in-law and husband were active in the newspaper business, Alderson quickly established herself as a highly respected journalist, becoming one of the few female members of the Montana Press Association.

In addition to her hectic professional career, Mary Long Alderson found time to take an active role in a variety of civic and social activities, especially as they related to the progressive concerns of women. It was through the efforts of Mrs. Alderson, for example, that the Bitterroot was selected as the state flower of Montana.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, she was also active in Montana's Chapter of the Women's Christian Temperance Union, which, under the leadership of Frances Willard, became "a powerful national force for temperance, moral purity, and the rights of women." The well-educated Alderson served as editor of Montana's WCTU Journal for more than three decades, and secretary of that organization for 18 years. Between 1913 and 1917 she served as president of the organization.

Alderson was also one of the charter members of the Bozeman Housekeepers Club. Organized in April of 1894 with the motto "Our Kingdom is our Home,"

the group vowed to "encourage and stimulate interest in more scientific methods of housekeeping," as well as the academic pursuit of history and literature.

Comprised largely of businesswomen and wives, the group focused on a variety of local issues, including community improvement, public park development, improving schools and encouraging public health. Through these "acceptable" means, early feminists furthered their political educations and exerted increasing amounts of influence in public life of their male-dominated society.

In the 1890s, Matt Alderson became fascinated by the cyanide process of extracting gold from mining tailings, an interest that would take the Aldersons from Bozeman. While working at the Penobscot Mine near Marysville,

Alderson continued to contribute articles of interest to newspapers and mining journals. In 1914, he returned to the newspaper business. For seven years he was editor of the Northwest Stockman and Farmer in Helena. He also served as the business manager of the Butte Miner and made a notable success as a manager of the Goldsmith Mine in Montana's mining city.

Meanwhile, Mary Long Alderson's growing political experience and deep commitment to women's causes led to her emergence as a leader in the campaign for women's suffrage in Montana.

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Montana's "foremost women lobbyist at the state capital," becoming "a leader in the campaign for women's suffrage in Montana ..." Together with a handful of others, Alderson was instrumental in helping Montana women gain the right to vote in 1914 — a full six years before the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

"We asked for the ballot," she once commented, "that we might speak more effectively and help our good men to secure a better civilization for our children.

The Aldersons continued to lead interesting and influential lives up until their deaths. In later years, Matt Alderson traveled to South and Central America on business for various American mining companies. At the time of his death in 1924, he was president of the Saint Louis Mining and Milling Company at Marysville, which operated the famous Drum Lummon mine. Mary Long Alderson lived until 1940. Both of these significant historical figures are buried in the Alderson Family plot in Bozeman's Sunset Hills Cemetery.

*Derek Strahn is a historic preservation consultant and teaches social studies at Bozeman High. He can be reached at [DerekStrahn@msn.com](mailto:DerekStrahn@msn.com).*



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*Myrtle Griswold*

Bozeman Eyeways

# Alderson's Diary Records History Of Settlement in Gallatin Valley

*Across plains in 1864*

by Roxa Crowe

Pioneering in the Gallatin Valley as a farmer, preacher, educator, publisher and politician, William W. Alderson was one of Bozeman's prominent founders.

He is commemorated by having a street named in his honor.

"It is interesting to note that he never had much formal education, but he was a very fine writer - perhaps because he was a Bible student," says Myrtle Griswold, granddaughter to Alderson. Her father, Matthew, was Alderson's oldest son.

Alderson left his mark as a journalist in the Gallatin Valley after purchasing the *Avant Courier* in 1877. He was editor and publisher, running the newspaper with the help of his sons, until his death in 1906.

"When the *Pick 'N' Plow* went broke, Grandpa purchased it," Mrs. Griswold says, "and the *Courier* was its successor.

"Then the railroad came into Bozeman, advertised in the paper and paid for their advertising with transportation.

"Therefore, both father and grandfather made a lot of trips back east. Mother was from Massachusetts, and I'd been to Massachusetts seven times by the time I was two years old," she adds.

### Kept Early Diary

Also, as a writer, Alderson kept a diary "Across the Great Plains to Montana in 1864 and Settlement in the Gallatin Valley, Montana." This diary was kept up until 1877 when he purchased the newspaper. Mrs. Griswold has

Shullsburg. It is winter here yet.

"Thawing a little during day. Bare spots here and there, much frequent showers of snow and such hard freezing at nights that it is becoming really discouraging to a person expecting to make money by farming here.

"Instead of being a mild climate as it appeared and as it was reported to be when we came here last summer, it is, in fact, nearly a perpetual winter.

"I have given up the idea of making a permanent home here and am debating the questions with myself whether it will even be best to bring my family here at all, for a few years even.

"The season must necessarily be so short that it will be uncertain whether farming can positively be made profitable at any price for produce, but we have gone so far, we must try it one season. Put in seven bushels wheat."

### Joined by Family

Apparently Alderson changed his mind again about farming in the Gallatin Valley and decided to stay. In 1866 his wife, Frances, and their four children joined him on his ranch.

Then, according to *Progressive Men of Montana*, (1901), "He combined the dairy business with farming, and took the highest premiums for butter and cheese at the first territorial fair in 1868."

Also this book notes, he "realized the necessity for schools and churches for the community... He gave much valuable time to those interests, and if Bozeman is noted today for its excellent



W. W. Alderson. "Grandpa always wore a flower in his buttonhole," Mrs. Griswold remembers, "his favorite being carnations. Grandmother was a flower lover and brought her flowers into the house during the winter."



Mrs. W. W. (Frances) Alderson. "Grandma and Grandpa had fruit trees by their home," says Mrs. Griswold, "and one of my early recollections is of crab apple jelly and crab apple butter."

minutes of the meeting now in possession of Mrs. E. L. Houston, daughter of the late W. W. Alderson," states *Early*

"When the city was incorporated," says Mrs. Griswold, "a regulation was made that the hillsides were not to be cut down, and that was a long time before they knew about ecology! The founders wanted the surrounding hills kept as is.

"Grandpa laid out Willson Avenue, then known as Central Avenue. And at that time it was the widest street in Bozeman.

"His house used to be in the 700 block of South Willson. There was a plank walk from General Willson's to grandpa's house.

"This house, which was huge with a stove in every room, was later moved to Third and was a rest home for a number of years. Finally, it was torn down and a four-plex put in.

"I can remember going across the fields to his house - then it was all pasture land. Now some of the college is located on part of his homestead."

### Indian Agent

Another career Alderson undertook was that of Indian agent.

In 1873 he was appointed agent of the Milk River agency and served until 1876.

"When he was at Fort Peck as an agent, he acquired the title of major," Mrs. Griswold reports. "My father was his assistant part of the time he was assigned there."

Politics was another field into which Alderson was drawn. Being a member of the Republican party, he was for many years a delegate to the county, territorial and state conventions, besides his work on the early city council.

And so, it can be seen,



She states, "He was really headed for Virginia City to take up mining but fell in love with the Gallatin Valley. He decided to stay here and raise crops for the miners, his most profitable crop at first being potatoes."

Alderson's first impressions of Gallatin Valley as recorded in his diary read:

"Thursday, July 14 (1864). Broke camp at 7:15. Up one of the most beautiful and picturesque valleys the eye ever beheld, abounding in springs of clear water, flowers, and grass in abundance. Fine pine timber on each side. Crossed the divide and then down to Gallatin Valley. Camped at the crossing of East Gallatin. (now Bozeman)

"Friday, July 15. Here the place (valley and stream) looked so pleasing and inviting that we concluded to lay over and look around. Here we concluded to locate or make a claim agreeable to provisions of Homestead Bill. Weather delightful."

#### Staked Homestead Claims

Saturday, July 16, Alderson and his brother, John, each staked out their claims in the Gallatin Valley.

In 1865 a small patch of winter wheat was grown near Bozeman and sold at \$25 a bushel.

However, Alderson recorded some of the hardships of early day farming.

"Thursday, April 20 (1865). It is now 12 months since I left my dear pets at

churches, much of the credit for that fact belongs to the early labors of Alderson in this behalf."

The first church service held in Gallatin County was by W. W. Alderson. Licensed to preach in Illinois and also in Montana, Alderson held this service at the cabin of Merritt W. Penwell and Oscar Penwell on the East Gallatin.

He also organized the first Sunday School.

"When Montana Methodism celebrated its first 100 years, he was included in the printed history," says Mrs. Griswold.

"He donated the land for the Methodist Church. In the deed, he had a stipulation that if the property was ever used for any other purpose than a church, the land was to revert to the family.

"Today this is the site of the First United Methodist Church.

"The very first church building was used as a school house on the week days," she adds.

In the field of education, Alderson was a member of the public school board for 12 years.

#### City Founder

As one of the early settlers, Alderson played a part in officially locating the town of Bozeman.

"At a meeting August 9, 1864, with John M. Bozeman, chairman, and W. W. Alderson, secretary, on motion of Alderson, the town was named Bozeman, according to the official

by Mrs. Houston (1864). "The minutes show that boundaries of the district were defined, and the sum of one dollar was decided as the recording fee for claims."

In 1883, Bozeman was organized as a city under a charter granted by the legislature. In that same year the city council was organized with W. W. Alderson being one of the first aldermen.

versatile pioneer.

Mr. and Mrs. J. H. Griswold, who have celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary, have three children. A daughter, Elizabeth Savano, and one son, Stephen, live in California. Another son, Willis Griswold, lives in Belgrade.

Mrs. Griswold had two sisters, one living in Oregon.