

William Alderson



Gallatin History Museum



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.

TRIBUTES

THE FUNERAL OF THE LATE W. W. ALDERSON WAS VERY LARGELY ATTENDED. MANY FLORAL TRIBUTES.

The funeral of the late W. W. Alderson took place from the family residence, on Central avenue, Thursday afternoon at one o'clock, and was attended by most of the relatives residing in the state and a large number of friends of the family, among whom were those who had been close friends of Mr. Alderson since he arrived in Gallatin valley, as well as friends of later years.

The services were conducted by Rev. George D. King, pastor of the Livingston M. E. church, but who was formerly presiding elder of this district. He had known Mr. Alderson for about 23 years, and knew much of his work in connection with the early history of Bozeman from researches recently made for the state historical society. Rev. King was assisted by Rev. F. B. Lewis, rector of St. James' Episcopal church, who has been a close friend of the Alderson family for twenty-five years. Both spoke in highest praise of the strong character of the deceased and of the good he had done in the city. Rev. King said in part:

There are numerous facts concerned with the history of Mr. Alderson, as a pioneer and a public-spirited citizen who served his generation with very unusual energy and courage, which it is our duty to recall at this time, because such deeds deserve such tributes, and because the memory of them fades all too quickly from our minds, amid the hurrying scenes of the present, as each year glides by, "Like a leaf on the current east, as one by one we watch them go into the beautiful past."

Coming to the Gallatin valley in July, 1864, at the age of 33, Mr. Alderson entered at once, and vigorously, into the civic, social, educational and religious life of the community.

Mr. Alderson was the moving spirit in starting a day school and Sunday school, and especially in the trying and difficult undertaking of securing subscriptions and pushing to completion a small church—the first frame building in the village.

In his diary under date of August 14, 1866, are these words: "Down town getting subscriptions toward a church." The original subscription paper, with the autographs of John Bozeman, W. H. Tracy and other pioneer settlers, but mostly in Mr. Alderson's handwriting, is still preserved. We have great reason to be grateful for the instincts and painstaking methods and excellent memory of Mr. Alderson, to whom more than any other person we are indebted for trustworthy records of those early days.

Mr. Alderson's interest in the religious life of this isolated frontier community was very great, and his labors surprising, both in amount and in results. He was a local preacher in the Methodist Episcopal church. He preached often in town and valley, solemnized marriages and buried the dead, and was superintendent of a successful Sunday school. For a time, Rev. Matthew Bird, another local preacher, living on a farm south of town, preached alternate Sundays. But upon Mr. Alderson fell the financial burden and the pastoral care of this society and Sunday school, and he had ready for his successor, Rev. T. C. Iliff, in 1873, about \$6,000 toward the erection of the brick M. E. church, which still stands.

Let us be grateful that he had opportunity to review the past and to get ready for the departure into the unseen and eternal. When he went east and submitted to an operation, he was not afraid. He felt ready to go if his time had come.

At the funeral services at the house a quartet composed of Mrs. D. D. Smith, Miss Josie Miles, Mr. Clyde Corbly and Mr. Lewis Warren sang "How Firm a Foundation" and "Abide With Me," the accompaniment being played by Mrs. Clyde Corbly. The first hymn was a special favorite of Mr. Alderson, and one evening during his last illness he had it played and sung to him. At the cemetery, the quartet sang "Rock of Ages."

The floral tributes were numerous and most beautiful, coming not only from relatives and friends in Bozeman, but from various parts of the state. Among them was a most beautiful pillow sent by the Montana Press association. Many telegrams and letters came from members of the press and other friends of Mr. Alderson and his family, expressing their heart-felt sympathy.

The pall bearers were Gen. E. S. Willson, Hon. Walter Cooper, W. H. Tracy, M. W. Penwell, Senator Hoffman and B. T. Stanton. In memory of the deceased, each pall bearer wore a white carnation, which he dropped onto the casket as the body was consigned to the grave. All the relatives wore or carried carnations, Mr. Alderson's favorite flower, and at the conclusion of the burial service, they showered the casket with seventy-five blossoms, representing the age of the deceased, who was thus laid to rest beneath the flowers he loved so well.

During the funeral services the business houses of the city were all closed, the flag on the city hall and those on the school houses were at half mast.

It is a source of great satisfaction to Mrs. Alderson in her bereavement that all of the eight children, except the daughter living in Chicago, visited their father at times during the last two weeks of his illness and were present at the funeral. Seven of the grandchildren also visited at the Alderson home during the past two weeks, and four of these were present at the funeral services yesterday.

Among the relatives present from other parts of the state yesterday were: Mrs. George Alderson, of Livingston; Mrs. Minnie Hickox and son George, of Butte; Walter Alderson, editor of the Red Lodge Picket, and his wife; Adjutant General A. M. Alderson, of Livingston; Mr. J. S. Hammond and Mr. S. A. Uimer and daughter Alice, of Billings.

WILLIAM W. ALDERSON, Bozeman, was born in Arkendale, North Riding of Yorkshire, England, February 28, 1831, being the eighth of a family of twelve children. Here he attended the parish school about five years, receiving the rudiments of an English education; but as soon as he was able he was compelled to do his share toward supporting the large family, and at the age of thirteen he went to work in the lead mines. Here he remained until seventeen years old, when he emigrated to America with his parents in 1848. They settled in the lead mining districts of Illinois, near Galena, and until 1854 William was in the employ of his oldest brother, S. Alderson, who was extensively engaged in merchandising and smelting at and in the vicinity of Council Hill, Jo Daviess Co., Ill. In 1854 he married Frances, daughter of Edward W. Weatherly, a prosperous miner of Shullsburg, La Fayette Co., Wis., where he located, and engaged in merchandising on his own account. In 1858 he moved to Winona Co., Minn., remaining about eighteen months, when he returned to Illinois and again took charge of his brother's business at Council Hill. Later he engaged in farming until the spring of 1864, when, with his younger brother John, he started across the plains for what is now Montana, then Idaho. Heretofore all immigration into Montana had been through South Pass and across the Snake River plains; but this year two much shorter roads were opened by Bridger and Bozeman by way of the Yellowstone. Mr. Alderson came over the Bridger road *via* Wind River, Grey Bull, Clarke's Fork, and the Yellowstone, into the Gallatin valley, arriving early in July, 1864, on the present site of Bozeman. He settled down at once on a claim one mile south of that town and engaged in farming. That year the first grain was raised in Gallatin valley, and farming was a paying business. In 1865 a small patch of winter wheat, the first in Montana, was grown near Bozeman and sold at twenty-five dollars per bushel. But it required capital to get a start. Mr. A. sent a team to Cache valley, Utah, to get seed wheat, oats, etc., which cost him on his ranch twenty cents per pound. His plow, transported by team from Galena, Ill., was bought at Virginia City for \$150; harrow teeth, forged from old wagon tires, cost forty cents per pound; seed potatoes thirty-five cents per pound, flour fifty cents to \$1 per pound, etc., so that the outlay was great before even a small crop could be raised. In 1865 he made a trip to Fort Benton and Cow Island to receive a Wood's self-raking harvester which had been shipped up the Missouri river at a cost of twelve and one-half cents to \$1 per pound, the wagon haul costing an equal amount. This was the first machine of the kind used in Gallatin valley, if not indeed in Montana. He combined the dairy business with farming, and took the first premiums for butter and cheese at the first territorial fair in 1868. That year his family, consisting of his wife and four children, joined him on his ranch *via* Missouri river. Although Mr. Alderson had never had the advantage of any schooling, except the few years in the old English parish school, he had by constant study qualified himself to take a leading part in the young community with which he had cast his lot. Bozeman was gradually growing into a thrifty town; but most of her citizens were too busy with money-getting to spare time for anything else. Mr. Alderson saw farther than most of them and realized that this settlement was not a temporary affair, but was destined to grow into a prosperous, permanent community, in which it was high time that moral and religious interests were looked after. He gave, therefore, much valuable time to school and church interests, and if Bozeman is to-day noted for its excellent schools and live, prosperous churches, much of it is due to the early labors of Mr. Alderson. He held the first religious services in the valley, organized

the first Sunday-school in Bozeman, and built there in 1868 the first church edifice, which was also the first frame building. He was at that time connected with the Methodist Episcopal church, and even then his public discourses and religious efforts were characterized by liberal views. Of late years his views have assumed such a free-thinking tone as to be incompatible with the tenets held by all orthodox churches, and he is not now identified with any religious society. He was twelve years a member of the public school board. In 1873 he was appointed United States Indian Agent of the Milk River Agency, comprising the Yantonnais Sioux, and the Canoe band of the Assiniboinis. While he occupied this post no serious difficulties occurred, except the shooting of the government interpreter, Benoit, by a number of Sitting Bull's band. They were difficult and treacherous Indians to manage; but in spite of all difficulties his efforts to induce them to become dwellers in houses and tillers of the soil were successful to a degree. In 1876 he resigned, and returning to Bozeman gave his attention to his large real estate interests there. His original location, also subsequent purchases of land adjoining, had proved very fortunate, and a good part of the present flourishing city of Bozeman stands on his additions to the town. Looking for a wider field of usefulness, he bought in 1877 a moribund local paper, the *Bozeman Avant Courier*, of which he has since been proprietor and editor. Although without any journalistic or literary training he made at once great improvements in his paper, and succeeded soon in putting it abreast of the very best Montana journals, which means a good deal, as the territory has always been noted for the remarkable excellence of its newspapers. As an editor he was naturally drawn into politics, and has been an active and influential member of the Republican party. He has been a delegate to nearly every county convention, and to a large majority of the territorial conventions. When Bozeman received a city organization in 1883, his fellow citizens showed their appreciation of him as a public spirited citizen, by electing him alderman of his ward, and re-electing him in 1884 for two years. In 1885 he was the Republican candidate for mayor. His family consists of nine children: Matt W., business manager of the *Avant Courier*, married to Martha Rice, of Pittsfield, Mass., resides in Bozeman; Edward C., postmaster at Bozeman, married to Carrie Lafferty, of Bozeman; E. Lina, married to Shaff Houston, and resides in Bozeman; Mary F., married to Milton M. Russell, resides at Thompson's Falls, M. T.; Annie G., Margaret H., Charles R., Willie B., and George F., all born at Bozeman, and now residing there with their parents.

MATT W. ALDERSON, of Bozeman, business manager of the *Avant Courier*, was born in Shullsburg, Wis., April 15, 1855. His early schooling was obtained in that place. He left Wisconsin in company with his mother, brother, and two sisters, in April, 1866, to join his father in Bozeman. The trip was made by rail to St. Louis, by boat to Fort Benton, and from the latter place by wagon. Bozeman was reached July 3, the journey having occupied over two-and-one-half months. Mr. Alderson worked on the farm of his father, attending the schools of Bozeman in the winter months, until 1873, when he removed to Fort Peck to accept the position of Post Commissary, which he held for two years, making in the meantime several trips on horseback and otherwise to neighboring posts. On one of these trips, in company with Gustavus Tyler, he was lost for nearly six days on "Lonesome Prairie," between Forts Benton and Assiniboine, without anything to eat. In the fall of 1875 he went to New York city to attend the American Institute of Phrenology. Completing the course he returned westward to Dubuque, Ia., where he at-

... 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.

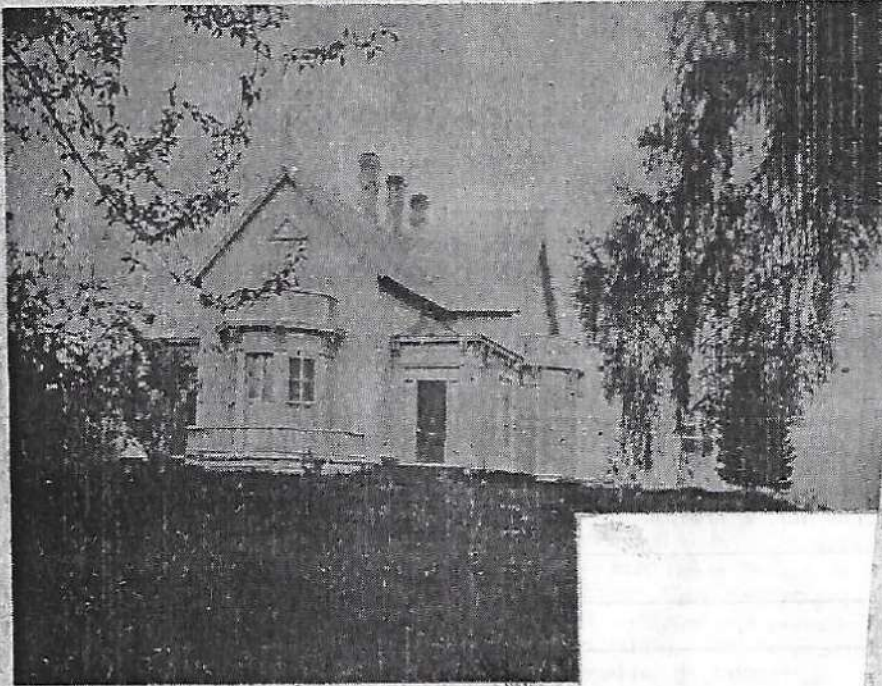
Alderson was born in England in 1831, the eighth child in a family of 12, he went to work in the lead mines with his father. In 1848, the family came to the United States, landing in New Orleans and traveling on to Galena, Ill. He joined his brother, Simon, who had come

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.

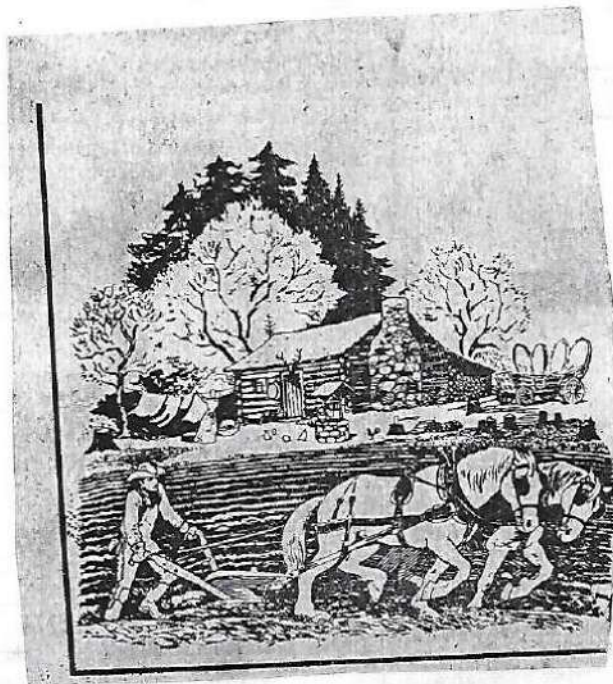
That year, having had a good crop and clearing about \$2,000, he and his brother decided to travel west in search of gold. They traveled by four horse team from Illinois to the Gallatin Valley, accompanied most of the way by two Scotsmen, John Brown and his son, Peter. Alderson's wife and four children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

grumbled distastefully in his diary that “the drunkenness and profanity was very prevalent.”

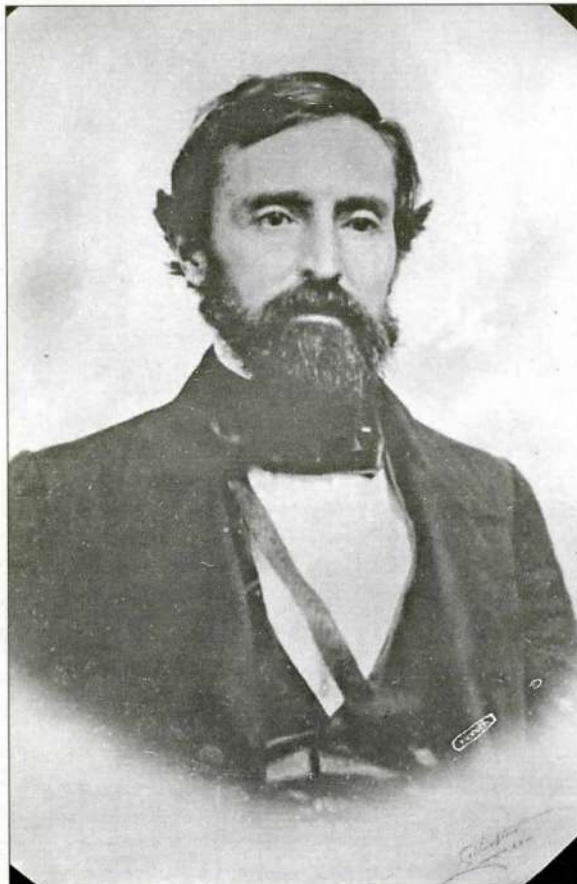
On Thursday, July 14, 1864, the Alderson brothers camped in “one of the most beautiful and picturesque valleys the eye ever beheld, abounding in springs of clear water, flowers and grass in abundance.” In the days that followed, the pioneers staked out homestead claims one-mile south of what is now Main 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.

According to her obituary, Mrs. Alderson was “first and foremost ... a hombody.” In

what they considered to be “the grandest and most fertile valley in the world.” Sadly, the house was demolished by the T.B. Stovr family

did the same at home.

According to her obituary, Mrs. Alderson was “first and foremost ... a homebody.” In typical Victorian fashion, her “whole soul was - wrapped up in her home and its members,” so much so, in fact, “that it always required a great amount of effort to get her to make even a brief visit elsewhere.” She is credited with being one of the first of the pioneer women in the state “to make a pronounced success in growing house plants and flowers out of doors in this newly settled section of the country.” It is remembered that “nothing afforded her more pleasure than to part with the blossoms she had developed with much care,” especially “when she thought they might be a source of cheer to anyone else.”

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.



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.

Corresponding regularly with Susan B. Anthony and other well-known feminists, she worked diligently as

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

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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.



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Bozeman Byways

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.

A TALK TO THE INDIANS IN COUNCIL, AT FORT PECK

January 29, 1874

by

W. W. Alderson, U.S. Indian Agent
Milk River Agency,
Fort Peck, M.T.

My children I live more than 12 sleeps from here, towards the setting Sun. I ^{Passed} past through your country, ^{At} The Powder River and Yellowstone 10 years ago. And my wife and children came up this river to meet me at its head - 8 years ago. The white men have come like leaves upon the trees and have crowded you off your land, have killed your game and taken your country. That has all taken place, and we cannot help it now. You have fought them hard, and some of you have killed many a white man - but they came in thicker and faster as you killed them off, and to day you know you see they are too many for you. Many of the white man have acted very bad with you and then many of you have acted bad with them, ^{until} Until we are all sick, and tired of War & Strife. We are all of the same flesh and blood. The Great God is the Father of us all, and we are all his children, and he wants us as children to live in peace. So the Great Father in Washington Says, "Let us have peace." and the great number of pale faces, so great that you cant number them, in the East and West, and North and South, Say, "let us not fight any more," and they say to day, "we do not want to send thousands upon thousands of our soldiers out to fight and kill the few Indians which remain alive. Can we not persuade them to quit the war path, and live like us." So they are taking a great deal of thier provisions & clothing and sending it out to you every year, so as to help you live, and let you know that they want to be your friends.

They know you are Indians, a people who have always lived by the chase - killing your food on the wild prairie and in the thick woods. and they know that you cant change all at once, and make your food come up every year out of the ground. They know too you will be slow to learn it because you have not been taught anything about it when you were little children, but they expect you will learn by & by. That some

of you will take hold of this work and build yourselves houses to live in, for when you quit living by hunting game - you wont need houses that you can move about all over, where ever you go. ^{do want} ~~And now if you live your own lives,~~ and the lives of your children & the lives of your wives and mothers, ^{will be safe} dont think any more about war, or fighting the whites, or fighting each other, ^{but go} ~~but go~~ to work and make good homes for yourselves and little ones, while the great Father is helping you with food and clothing and axes & tools. I know many of you cant think about labor, you think that is only fit for your women & daughters. But I want to tell you that the greatest men that ever lived have labored. The first - great Father of all peoples labored and so the first great chief of all the whites was not ashamed to work, and the first & best great friend of all the INDIANS, was not afraid or ashamed to work. And the Great Father that some of you saw in Washington worked real hard when he was a boy cutting logs, and hauling them out for fencing farms & building houses. And whenever the whites want anything they go to work and raise it out of the ground or make it out of something already raised.

You will know after a while I am telling you the truth, if you dont know it now. It makes a white man strong, to labor, and it makes him rich. But when an Indian wants any thing he asks the white man for it, and then he ^{does not} ~~dont~~ get every thing he wants, nor always the kind he wants. So he cant be content with this way of living. But when you make yourselves homes it will make your hearts feel good to live in your own houses, to eat your own corn and potatoes and wheat & pork and Beef, and you can give your children as much of it as you please, and eat as much yourselves as you want for you can say "This is Mine" I produced this myself.

There was a man, an Indian who owned two good, nice lick fat Horses, and he started out on a long journey - and he put all his grub & blankets & robes, his lodge poles and all that he had onto one of the Horses and then he piled his children on to the same horse, until ^{it} ~~he~~ ^{it} ~~he~~ nearly broke down under the wieght, his back got sore and his legs were swollen and he began to look old and ugly, but the other horse he led along without any load and he kept fat and fleet and young - by and bye he got tired of the broken down horse and threw it away for ever.

Now I want to tell you I think I have seen you doing the Same thing. You seem to think & act as though your Wives & Sisters and daughters were not as good as you, that they have not the same flesh and blood that the same great Spirit has not made both them and you. Do you go along through life without carrying any load, but you pile everything on the backs of your wives and mothers and daughters. The grub and the wood, and water and the little ones and your lodges and all the work and then I am informed you sometimes sell them like horses, or throw them away when they can no longer work. This is not good. It is all wrong. And the Great Spirit will not give you riches & peace and happiness as long as you do these things. If you want to get along better you must think more of your women and take better care of them and help them carry the load through life. The white^{men} have found out that a nation or a tribe is just as high, or as low as their women are. If their women are Slaves - the people are slaves also. Your wives and daughters are looking old and broken down while many of you are, young and in good condition. The great God made woman to be your equal. A help for you not a slave for you.

Now Then I want to say something to you about your "medicine men" . I hear that some of you run after them when you must know they can't help you. You come to our Physicians and get medicine and get cured without pay, then you go to your own Drs. and he drums and rattles over you and does you no good and charges you a Shirt of a Blanket of a horse, and you act foolish and give away your things and get poor, and cold and naked. Now I want to tell you that if you get medicine here, and then go to your own Drs. They we will not give you medicine when you get sick again.