

William Henry Davis



William Henry Davis and family, ca. 1880s-90s. The men standing in the back row are: Walter Davis and Lester Davis. Mary Githens Davis, Laura Davis Corbly and William Henry Davis (left to right) are seated in front.

DAVIS, William H

Stone — House —

Born in Iowa 1850

1863 came to Ogeman with mother & stepfather

Stepfather, John Thomas, planted first wheat in Hall Co. He had brought a bushel of wheat from Utah and planted it in spring of 1864 12 miles no of Ogeman. He reaped 50 bushels, trucking it by leading horses over it. Did not sell any of this crop but the next year sold seed wheat for \$10 a bushel

A self educated man

1898 elected to as County Treasurer Hall Co.

Farmed north of Ogeman but lived in Town



Standing: Walter D., Lester D.; Seated:
Mary Githens D., Laura Davis Corbly, Wm. Henry Davis

PIONEER

William Henry Davis

William Henry Davis was born in Council Bluffs, Iowa, October 15, 1850. He was two years old when he and his parents left their Iowa home in 1852 and started for Oregon. They traveled in two covered wagons with one ox team of cows in company with a train of about fifty wagons. Mr. Davis, Sr. died on the way from cholera. An older brother, Harry, also died on the way. Mrs. Davis, two sons, Dave and Henry, and one daughter, Elizabeth, continued with the outfit to the west. John Thomas, a member of the party, assisted Mrs. Davis, driving one of the teams through to Brigham, Utah, where they located, and where another son, Joseph, was born to Mrs. Davis. Later in the same year, Mr. Thomas and Mrs. Davis were married and made their home on a farm

for eleven years before moving to Montana in 1863. They located at Bannack, remaining there until 1864 when they moved to the Gallatin Valley, taking up land about four miles north of where Belgrade is now located.

William Henry Davis grew to young manhood on the family ranch and was married in 1871 to Miss Mary Githens, born in Chillicothe, Missouri, October 13, 1856, at the farm home of her parents, near the present site of Gallatin Gateway. They lived in a newly erected home on the East Gallatin River. Three children were born on the ranch -- Walter, William Lester, and Laura.

Walter was born October 2, 1873, married Mary Virginia Spain on February 19, 1901. They lived for two years on a ranch south of Belgrade and had two children, William Harold, born on the old ranch on the East Gallatin June 24, 1903; and Helen Virginia, born in Belgrade, March 25, 1908. They later moved to Bozeman where Walter worked at the court house as assessor and later worked as City Financier at the City office until his death.

William Lester was born on the ranch home on the East Gallatin River, February 6, 1878. He married Chestna Hamilton and they had four children, Everett, Merrill, Lyle and Loi, who died at age 10 in Oregon. Lyle married Deloras Williams (Virginia City) and had two children, Billy Evan and Leadell Davis Nielson.

Laura Davis Corbly was born at the ranch home on the East Gallatin River, April 6, 1894. She married Clyde Corbly and lived in Bozeman. The children were Vivian (male), Alverd, Mrs. Fay (Low) Pace (P.W.), Mrs. Mary Lynn Fitzstephens.



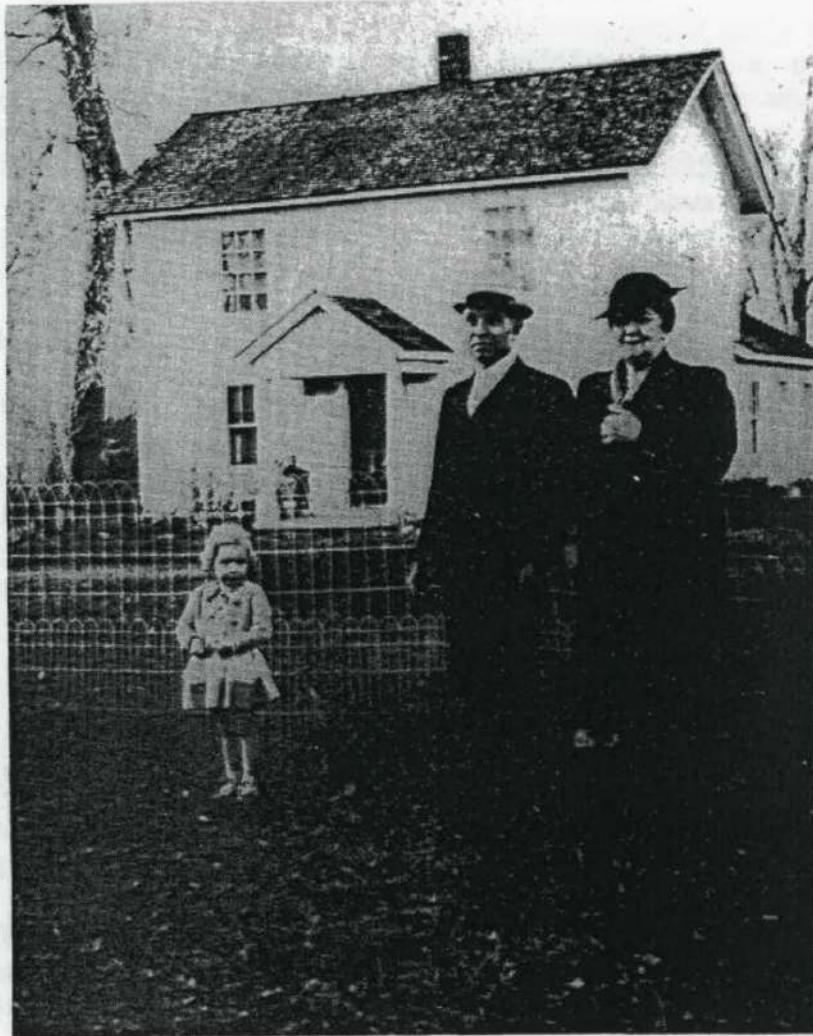
Davis Family

Left to right: Pioneer Wm. Henry Davis, Virginia Spain Davis, Dick Pace, Walter Davis, Fay Davis Pace, Virginia Davis, and Low Pace.

William Henry and Mary remained on the farm until Mr. Davis was elected County Treasurer, when they moved to Bozeman making their home on West Lamme (and Willson). Mrs. Davis passed away February 21, 1905.

During his many years in the Gallatin, William Henry Davis was a keen observer of the passing scene, and his memories of the past were vivid and accurate. Fortunately for posterity, in the summer of 1932, Martha Henry Belle Palfy had the foresight to interview Mr. Davis and write down his recollections of the early pioneer days in his own colorful words. The following accounts of day by day life in the early days give us a glimpse of that life.

The equipment brought across the plains included trunks, some chairs, iron bottles, Dutch ovens, big copper and brass kettles,



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Walter and Virginia Davis with granddaughter Eileen Browning Kuhl

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The equipment brought across the plains included trunks, some chairs, iron kettles, dutch ovens, big copper and brass kettles,

earthen kettle and bake ovens, beds, bedding, and a plow. But no stoves and no tables. The first thing mother sent for when navigation opened up was a stove. It came up the river. It was a step stove -- four hole, that cost \$140 (1865). It cost about \$25 or \$30 to ship it up. We had the plow which we had brought from Iowa and Utah, but we had forgotten the harrow teeth. So Dave and I cut thorn bushes for harrow teeth.

"Get all straight pieces now," the Old Man told us.

We pointed them a little and charred the ends of the pieces. They were as hard as an ox horn. Then we cut beams eight feet long to form the back of the "A", spread them ten or twelve feet apart, and put in a crossbar to hold the two main beams together, and put a weight on what was now our "A" harrow. We weighted the harrow down to make it take ahold. It was pulled by three yoke of oxen with a chair hitched right to the top of the "A". It tore that ground up in good shape!

* * *

In 1865, Dr. Lamme and L. M. Howell (cousins, I think) came into the valley. They had ten teams, ten yoke to the team, three wagons to the team, twenty thousand pounds to the team. (That made two hundred oxen and thirty wagons). They were loaded with goods, wet and every other kind. It was the first store in Gallatin Valley. They wanted a location. They got acquainted with Thomas and he helped them look around. Finally, they gave Cooper \$5,000 in gold for his location. Coshaw and Doughty were two of three bull-whackers.

* * *

We built a corral to keep the cattle off of the grain and garden; and then Lizzie, Dave, and the Old Man went back to the Ruby for the rest of the family. (This was in April of 1864).

They didn't fence anything until they came back, but left me (13 years old) to herd and keep the stock cattle off the garden and the crop. I had a pony to ride. We had about seventy-five head of cattle. The valley abounded in animals -- coyotes, wolves, antelope, and deer as well as geese and ducks.

I was all alone until I struck up an agreement with Bill Jones who was breaking ground for Penwell. I got Bill to stay with me of a night. (Bill Jones was a Missourian). Bill had a contract to break one hundred acres of ground for Penwells. Every morning I had to milk the cows. Bill Jones had three yoke of oxen and was using Thomas' plow. He proposed to me, "We'll corral these cattle at night -- had to do that anyway. In the morning I'll get breakfast while you milk.

Then we'll take the cattle up above (about one-half mile) where I work. You can drive the oxen and earn \$2 a day. I'll hold the plow down, and we'll both keep an eye on the cattle."

We had no trouble at all about driving them above where we worked, and they stayed in grass halfway up their sides. I took good care of the cattle, and didn't let them get on the crops; and before the family got back, I had earned fifty dollars helping Bill Jones plow. (\$50 gold dust and two or three big pieces worth \$10 or \$15). Bill warned me not to tell Thomas, but mother saw it sticking out in my buckskin pants pocket and the Old Man Thomas took it away from me.

Bill Jones fulfilled his contract for breaking the prairie (at \$8 an acre which was the common price). Penwells bought two ox teams and sent to Utah in 1864 to get seed wheat, oats, and barley; and in 1865, they raised three thousand bushels of wheat, but they wouldn't take it. The Penwells, with others, were building the Union Mill at Springhill -- I guess this must have been finished in 1866 -- and they wanted the wheat to use in the mill. Then wheat started to go down and was only worth \$4 a bushel. They both went broke over this mill.

The McAdow Mill started in 1865, and George D. Thomas started a mill in 1867 down in Gallatin City.

Jake Mendenhall built the first building, and had the first saloon in Bozeman early in 1864.

Henry Monforton and L. W. Howell built a distillery at Springhill and made whiskey in the fall of 1865.

Thomas came back to the Gallatin Valley early in June of 1864 with the whole family. The West Gallatin was way up high. They tied the wagon bed solid to the gears so they wouldn't float off. The water was so high the oxen had to swim. They picked out the stillest place they could find so that they would not be carried down the river by the current.

* * *

For a time, I freighted from Gallatin to Benton -- 250 miles. It took twenty days to make the trip over and back -- four days to Helena, six to Benton.

I made one trip on December 6, 1878, with a team of horses. The morning I left Helena, on the way back, it was forty degrees below zero. I had a six-mule team and a four-horse team, and a man with me to drive one of them. For sixty miles between Sun River and Benton, it stormed continually from the north. The man with me walked all the way

to keep warm. There were no stops (Great Falls was not there then). I took flour over and brought sugar back. The stage stations were thirty miles apart, and we made a station a day. The stations charged a dollar a span for the night, but I carried my own grain.

We got to Benton, unloaded, loaded, and got all ready to go in the morning. When we rose at five o'clock, there was a foot and a half of snow. I bet the man with me that I would ride and keep warmer than he, even though he walked. I rode all of the way home and was warm. The reason I didn't want to walk was that I had on a brand new pair of wool socks under my overshoes and I didn't want to get them wet!

Charlie Blakely, Jack Smith, and B. M. Dawes were going to have a town named Farmington above Central Park on the river in 1865. There was plenty of water there, but they voted in 1867 (after the Fort Ellis soldiers had come) and the soldiers at Fort Ellis voted with the Bozeman settlers and Gallatin City against Farmington, and swung the vote to Bozeman for a County Seat.

* * *

The Blood and Piegan Indians were the ones who stole most of our horses. Nixon had a ranch down below Manhattan right on the road. He was standing in the door one day when these Indians went past on the road to Flathead Pass with a large band of horses that they had stolen. As they went by, they just shot him down. Marsh Nelson was standing beyond in a slew a little way further on cutting hay with a mower and they couldn't cross the slew. That was all that saved him from being killed.

Above Hamilton, Shepherd was walking along the road and they shot him, too. None of the white men had made so much as a gesture of hostility. The Indians shot them just for meanness. (Henry Davis said this happened in 1866 or 1867, but Doc Nelson says it was in 1872, and since he was not born until 1867, it would have had to be later for him to remember it -- if he did remember it!)

In 1868, all but one of the fifteen stealing Bloods afoot were killed by the sixty soldiers and twenty or more citizens at Battle Ridge.

* * *

Mr. Davis built the first frame house in the valley, on the East Gallatin River across from the Penwell ranch. He recalled how he drove a team of horses all the way to Helena to haul the lumber. The trip took two weeks each way.

Mr. Davis was reported to have raised the first wheat in the Gallatin Valley!

History submitted by:

Virginia Browning & Carolyn Manley

Granddaughter & Great-granddaughter
Relationship to Pioneer

Standing: Walter D., Lester D., Bostick,
Mary Catharine D., Louisa Davis Corby, Wm. Henry Davis

PIONEER

William Henry Davis

William Henry Davis was born in Council Bluffs, Iowa, October 15, 1810. He was two years old when he and his parents left their Iowa home in 1812 and started for Oregon. They traveled in two covered wagons with one or two ox teams in company with a train of about fifty wagons. Mr. Davis, Sr. died on the way from cholera. An older brother of Henry, also died on the way. Mrs. Davis, her sons, David and Henry, and one daughter, Elizabeth, continued with the outfit to the west. John Thomas, a member of the party, assisted Mrs. Davis, driving one of the teams through to Brigham, Utah, where they located, and where another son, Joseph, was born to Mrs. Davis. Later in the same year, Mr. Thomas and Mrs. Davis were married and made their home on a farm