

FIRST DRAFT

Debate still surrounds Ann Bassett

Editor's note: This is the second of two columns on Ann Bassett Willis.

"Newspapers produce the first rough draft of history." — Philip Graham

In the early 1990s, Utah author Doris Burton created a controversy when she penned a booklet that claimed Ann Bassett — Queen Ann of Brown's Park — and Ethel (Etta) Place — the girlfriend of the Sundance Kid — were one and the same. The idea lives on on the Internet.

Ann Bassett Willis and her sister, Josie Bassett Morris, were larger-than-life figures in their own right. Their stories are memorable, even without

the confusion over Ethel Place. Burton based her claims

in part on the fact that the women in the two photos on this page look similar. She even had a photography expert examine the photos and conclude they were likely the same person.

The photo of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Place was taken in New York in early 1901, just before they boarded a ship for South America with Butch Cassidy on Feb. 20, 1901. Place used Ethel as her first name, but a newspaper reporter inadvertently changed it to Etta, and the name stuck. Place was the maiden name of the mother of Harry Longabaugh, aka the Sundance Kid.

According to accounts from several newspapers, Ann Bassett was in northwestern Colorado in early 1901. In mid-February she was in the hospital in Grand Junction, suffering from pneumonia.

Additionally, Bassett married Hi Bernard in April 1904, when Place and Sundance were in South America.

Daniel Buck and Anne Meadows, who have conducted extensive research on Butch, Sundance and Ethel Place in South America, are adamant that Bassett and Place were different people.

Meadows is the author of the book, "Digging Up Butch and Sundance," and she and Buck have written numerous articles about the outlaws and Ethel Place.

Buck noted that no contemporary sources — not Ann nor Josie, not any of their friends and family and not the Pinkerton Detective Agency, which spent years tracking the trio in the United States and South America — ever conflated the two women.

"In spite of all the attention paid over the years to Place's real identity, origins, etc., we do not know much more today than the Pinkertons did in the early 1900s, when they reported that



SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL/Patty Vaughn Miller

Ann Bassett Willis' cabin in Brown's Park as it appeared about 10 years ago.



SPECIAL TO THE SENTINEL

Harry Longabaugh, aka the Sundance Kid, left, and Ethel (Etta) Place, posed for this famous photo taken in New York in early 1901, shortly before they boarded a ship for Argentina with Butch Cassidy. In the early 1990s, author Doris Burton claimed in a controversial booklet that Place and Ann Bassett were the same woman.

she was from Texas," Buck said in an email to me. "We do know, however, who she was not — not Ann Bassett."

A few of Ann Bassett's exploits were reported in my last column. But there is much more about the sisters.

Both were frequently at odds with the Victorian-era ethics that reigned, even in Brown's Park at the time.

Josie married Jim McKnight in 1893 when she was five months pregnant. She and McKnight had a second son before divorcing seven years later. Their domestic and legal battles warranted extensive local newspaper coverage, especially when Jim was shot and wounded by a deputy sheriff attempting to serve papers.

Ann's marriage to Hi Bernard in 1904 was mostly a matter of convenience. He was 46 and she was 26. He was ranch foreman for her hated enemy, Ora Haley. But he was known as the best cattleman in the region and she needed someone to help run her ranch. Their marriage lasted six years.

Josie married twice more between 1902 and 1908 and divorced both men. She also operated boarding houses in Colorado in Craig, and in Wyoming in Baggs and Rock Springs during that time.

In 1911, Josie married her fourth husband, Emerson Wells, who was a well-liked and competent man, except when he was drinking.

Wells drank heavily on New Year's Eve 1912 when he and Josie attended a dance in Lincoln, Wyoming. By the morning

of Jan. 3, Wells was violently ill. Josie tried to give him coffee and then whiskey, but he grew worse. "Finally he just straightened right back and died," she



Ann Bassett as a young woman.

said in a taped interview.

Josie contacted the local constable, but no autopsy was conducted and no coroner's inquest held. Wells was buried in Brown's Park a few days later.

Some local gossips maintained for years afterward that Josie had poisoned Wells. But no charges were brought against her.

Josie married Ben Morris in 1913 and divorced him two years later. By that time, she had homesteaded on Cub Creek outside Jensen, Utah. The cabin she built there remained her home for 50 years. She hunted deer there, raised livestock, was accused of poaching, maintained a garden and occasionally entertained family members, friends and interviewers. She died in Salt Lake City in 1964, at the age of 90.

Her cabin is now within Dinosaur National Monument.

In between marriages, Ann went to forestry school and tried to get hired by the U.S. Forest

Service. She was rejected, she said, only because she was a woman.

Ann married Frank Willis in 1928. They lived in various places around the West before returning to Utah.

In 1944, Ann acquired title to part of the original Bassett homestead in Brown's Park and built a small cabin there. She often spent her summers there, either with Frank or by herself while he was out working. She died in 1956 in Leeds, Utah, at the age of 77.

The last confirmed sighting of Ethel Place was in 1906.

Thanks to Daniel Buck and Patty Vaughn Miller for information they provided for this article. Other information came from Grace McClure's book, "The Bassett Women," and from Ann Bassett Willis' autobiography, "Queen Ann of Brown's Park."

Email Bob Silbernagel at bob-silbernagel@gmail.com.

Infant discovered in hot tub dies

By THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

VERNAL, Utah — A Vernal infant has died 11 days after being found unresponsive in his family's hot tub.

Sixteen-month-old Bronx Young died Saturday at Primary Children's Hospital in Salt Lake City.

Family members phoned 911 after finding the child in the hot tub on April 28.

Utah County sheriff's deputies say the infant somehow got into the tub after a family member partially removed its cover to check the water and walked away.

Investigators say the child appeared to have been in the tub for a short period of time, and the death was a tragic accident.

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REQUEST FOR PROPOSAL: RENOVATION PROJECT

The Meeker School District is seeking sealed bids for the Barone Middle School Main Office relocation and remodel. Timeline for this project is starting no earlier than June 1, 2015 and completion no later than August 5, 2015. Prospective bidders may pick up bid specifications and drawings, or have them emailed beginning May 12, 2015.

Please contact:

Meeker School District Educational Center
555 Garfield Street
Meeker, CO 8164
970-878-9040

OR

janelle.urista@meeker.k12.co.us
jessica.browning@meeker.k12.co.us

Mandatory walk-through at 6:30 pm. on Tuesday, May 19, 2015.
Bid opening Thursday, May 21, 2015 at 2:00 p.m.

ATTENTION ADVERTISERS

The Daily Sentinel's advertising deadlines will be moving up to accommodate the **Memorial Day Holiday!**

This early deadline schedule is designed to help you plan your advertising around the holiday.

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5/27, Wednesday	5/22, Friday	12 Noon
5/27, Sentinel Weekly	5/20, Tuesday	12 Noon
5/28, Thursday	5/22, Friday	5 PM
5/29, Out & About	5/22, Friday	3 PM
5/31, Real Estate Weekly	5/22, Friday	12 Noon
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5/24, Sunday	5/19, Tuesday	12 Noon
5/25, Monday	5/19, Tuesday	12 Noon
5/26, Tuesday	5/19, Tuesday	3 PM
5/27, Wednesday	5/19, Tuesday	4 PM

MEMORIAL DAY ADVERTISING DEADLINES

BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Two arrested with meth

Dale Alan Lucerne, 59, and Ron Silva, 48, were arrested April 29 in the area of Lark Drive and Goldfinch Court on suspicion of possession of methamphetamine with intent to distribute it and possession of drug paraphernalia, according to the Grand Junction Police Department.

Grand Junction police officers stopped Lucerne, who was driving a truck in which Silva was a passenger, at about 5:15 p.m. April 29. One officer searched Silva and found suspected meth in his right lower pants pocket and baggies consistent with

drug distribution in his right front upper pants pocket, according to an arrest affidavit. Two other officers searched the truck and found more than one ounce of suspected meth and a digital scale in a storage compartment in the driver's side door, according to the affidavit.

Both men were booked into the Mesa County Jail. Lucerne also was arrested on suspicion of failure to signal a turn and driving while his license is suspended.

According to the Grand Junction Police Department:

- Brooke Blea, 19, was arrested and

booked into the Mesa County Jail on Friday on suspicion of knowingly injuring another person at 950 Northern Way.

- Bryan Nuncio, 24, was arrested and booked into the Mesa County Jail on Saturday on suspicion of assault in the western part of the city.

- Casey Tefertiller, 29, was arrested May 4 on suspicion of second degree burglary at 200 Rood Avenue.

- David Seriani, 20, was issued a summons Thursday at North Avenue and 10th Street on suspicion of possession of marijuana by an underage person and possession of drug paraphernalia.

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