

FIRST DRAFT

Tales of corsets and cattle rustling

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

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

When Patty Vaughn Miller was 17, she and her then-husband had unusual visitors at their cow camp on Blue Mountain, northwest of Rangely. Frank Willis arrived with his wife, Ann — better known as Ann Bassett, "Queen Ann of Brown's Park" and sometimes "The Queen of the Cattle Rustlers."

It was summer 1948, and Ann was 70 years old. Frank was prospecting for uranium in the area, but Ann was content to spend the day on a bench next to a cabin "telling us stories," Miller recalled.

Queen Ann didn't discuss her rustling career, but she told many stories from her days as a ranch youngster, then a cattlemaster.

In one, Bassett and a young girl found a wolf den in a tight rock formation, and Ann decided to crawl in to remove any pups she found. Because she was wearing a fancy riding skirt, she removed it and hung it on nearby brush.

She crawled in and saw several pups, then began to crawl back out. But when she tried to reverse, she found the stays of her corset hung up on the rock. She could neither back out nor free the corset.

Ann hollered at the girl to ride for help, and she reluctantly did so. Then Ann spent several hours waiting, worrying that the girl had gotten lost and anxious the wolf mother would return.

Finally, the girl returned with a man who chipped away at the rock until Ann was freed, but not until Ann convinced them it was all right for the man to see her partially undressed.

The same wolf story Ann told Miller — with only a few minor differences — is recounted in the book, "The Bassett Women." Author Grace McClure said she heard it from descendants of the girl who was with Ann Bassett on the wolf hunt. McClure said the event occurred in 1908, and Ann never wore a corset again.

Ann Bassett was born in 1878 in Brown's Park, on the Colorado-Utah border. She was the first non-Indian born there, and when Ann's mother could not nurse the infant, a Ute woman served as Ann's wet nurse.

She and her sister and brothers grew up spending much of their time on horseback and with the rough-talking cowboys, miners and others of Brown's Park.

Worried they were becoming too coarse, their father, Herb Bassett, sent both of his daughters to a Catholic school in Salt Lake City.

Later, Ann attended a women's school near Boston, where



BOB SILBERNAGEL/Special to the Sentinel

Patty Vaughn Miller of Clifton holds the book, "Blue Mountain Folks," for which she was a collaborator. It includes stories she heard from Ann Bassett Willis in 1948.

she scandalized the riding instructor by riding a horse astride instead of sidesaddle, and getting it to buck like a bronco.

The Bassetts met Brown's Park visitors like Butch Cassidy, his good friend, Elza Lay, and Harry Longabaugh, aka the Sundance Kid. Ann and her sister, Josie, were both rumored to be romantically involved with members of the Wild Bunch.

"Ann told me she didn't care much about Butch Cassidy, but she liked Elza Lay," Miller said.

But it wasn't the Cassidy gang that pushed Ann toward cattle rustling. It was a rancher from outside Brown's Park named Ora Haley, and the notorious hired gun for cattle barons, Tom Horn.

In 1900, Horn reportedly killed Ann's first love, a young rancher named Matt Rash, as well as a black cowboy and friend of the Bassetts named Isom Dart. Horn was believed to be working for Haley and other ranchers who wanted access to Brown's Park's rich grasslands.

After that, Ann went on a one-woman rampage, shooting any of Haley's cattle that crossed the divide into Brown's Park or running them into deep waters of the Green River to drown them.

There was no claim that she stole any cattle until 1911, when



Ann Bassett as a young woman.

Haley's foreman filed a complaint against Ann after he found a steer hide with the brand cut out near her home and a freshly butchered beef in her storehouse.

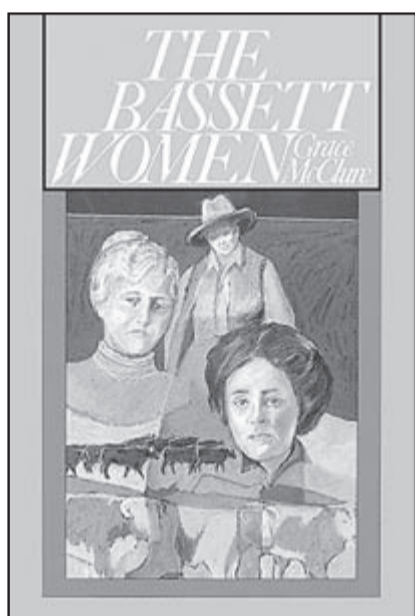
The case went to trial in Craig but ended in a hung jury. A new trial was held in 1913. This time, Ann Bassett was acquitted, much to the delight of local citizens.

According to The Denver Post, businesses in Craig closed, bands blared and "the Town of Craig Goes Wild With Joy."

The Post also referred to Ann as "The Queen of the Cattle Rustlers," and thus was the legend of Queen Ann spread far beyond the confines of Brown's Park.

Ann Bassett Willis remained a regal presence throughout her life, Miller said.

"She was the kind of woman



The cover of the book, "The Bassett Women."

who could talk to anyone. She was refined. She truly was a queen."

Thanks to Patty Vaughn Miller for her assistance on this article. Other information came from the book, "The Bassett Women," and from the 1952-53 Colorado Magazine articles, "Queen Ann of Brown's Park, the autobiography of Ann Bassett Willis."

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Sheriff nixes unused drug disposal

By SENTINEL STAFF

The Mesa County Sheriff's Office said Friday that it will no longer accept unwanted prescription drugs because it can't afford the costs of disposal.

Through last fall, the Drug Enforcement Administration had been disposing of unused drugs, some of which were collected through a drop box at the Sheriff's Office. DEA no longer disposes of the unwanted drugs.

"We deliver over 100 pounds of the material to our local hazardous waste facility, thus there

is a cost, which is prohibitive to us," sheriff's spokeswoman Heather Benjamin said. "Funding is the primary obstacle for us, as well as our geographic location limits on our disposal sites."

The Mesa County Hazardous Waste Collection Facility, 3071 U.S. Highway 50, located at the county's landfill, accepts over-the-counter medications and syringes for free. Collection hours are 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Thursday through Saturday.

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We're wearing jeans for charity of The Daily Sentinel. Ask me how you can help!
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The employees of The Daily Sentinel have joined together to adopt a local non-profit organization/charity of the month. We want to help raise awareness and badly needed funds for these organizations that are dedicated to helping people in our community.
April JEANS FOR CHARITY ORGANIZATION:
The House
At any given time, nearly 160 teenagers are homeless in Mesa County. They sleep in cars, tents and are at serious risk for many forms of abuse. Karis, Inc., with the support of the Western Slope community, operates The House. The only licensed shelter for homeless youth on the western slope, The House provides teens with warm meals, safe shelter, medical and mental health support, education, and a host of other services, supplied by caring adults.
Please join with us and send your tax deductible contribution to
The House, P.O. Box 2837, Grand Junction, CO 81502.

BLOTTER COMPILED BY SENTINEL STAFF

Police seek feedback

The Grand Junction Police Department started circulating a survey Friday which it says is designed to gauge community feelings about police services in the city.

Information from the survey will be used to determine possible changes in operations, the agency said in a release.

The survey is being conducted by Colorado Mesa University business students, who will be at various places and events with a paper version. It also can be completed online: https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1rK54izMDpeAHcbIFD_4NC0Qy-ITXOC-uou7ZNk1l274k/viewform.

According to the Grand Junction Police Department:

■ Nicholas Chadd, 31, was cited Friday on suspicion of reckless driving, after his vehicle allegedly damaged a window on another vehicle by kicking up gravel in the

2000 block of Aspen Street. Chadd's vehicle was allegedly doing "donuts," the summons said.

■ David Dawson, 43, was cited on suspicion of possession of drug paraphernalia and obstructing a peace officer on Saturday at 1800 Main St.

■ Travis Cunningham, 43, was cited Friday on suspicion of driving under revocation at 29 Road and Unaweep Avenue.

■ Tyler Gerou, 20, was arrested Friday on suspicion of possession of a schedule I or II controlled substance, possession of drug paraphernalia and a bicycle equipment violation, after being contacted in the 800 block of Hall Avenue.

■ Conner Milton, 24, was cited Friday on suspicion of shoplifting at 2545 Rimrock Ave.

■ William Trader, 74, was arrested Friday at 1949 N. 21st St. on suspicion of violating a restraining order.

■ Rodney Oberbroeckling, 48, and Michael Garcia, 45, were ticketed Friday on

suspicion of disorderly conduct at 546 Spurn St.

■ Bret Burke, 23, was cited Thursday on suspicion of shoplifting at 2545 Rimrock Ave.

■ Property valued at less than \$5,000 was reported stolen Wednesday from 1306 N. 25th St.

■ Chris Clarke, 31, was arrested Tuesday on suspicion of driving with a suspended license and possessing a schedule II controlled substance, when contacted in a traffic stop at 30 Road and Interstate 70 Business Loop.

■ Vernon Biebinge, 38, and Anna Kay, 36, were arrested April 18 on suspicion of possession with intent to distribute heroin, during a traffic stop at 28 1/4 Road and Orchard Ave.

The Mesa County Sheriff's Office on Sunday did not release jail booking or activity reports.

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