

The First Bassett's

Imagine! It is the summer of 1620 and the ship Speedwell is leaving Delft Haven, Holland to rendezvous with the Mayflower in Southampton, England. Some sympathetic English merchants have financed the voyage with the expectation that they will profit from it. You have lived in Leiden for 12 years, ever since you were forced to leave England because of your association with the Puritan movement and your refusal to conform to the Church of England. Holland has been very tolerant of your religious beliefs and the people of Leiden have warmly accepted your colony. But your Puritan colony is growing older and your children are growing up in a foreign country. The war between Holland and Spain might be settled with Holland the loser. Spain is a Catholic country and as intolerant of your beliefs as England. You want to go someplace where you can have English customs and culture but freely pursue your religious beliefs. And be safe from the politics and intolerance of Europe. You are going to America!

You were born about 1590. You have had two wives, Cecelia Leight and Margaret Oldham. Both have died. You have no children. Your name is William Bassett. You are a gunsmith and metal worker.

The Mayflower and the Speedwell leave Southampton together but the Speedwell leaks badly. After two attempts to sail the Speedwell proves unseaworthy. As many of the colonists as it will hold are squeezed onto the Mayflower and it sails alone in September of 1620 with 102 men, women and children aboard. Only 35 are "saints". The rest are soldiers and craftsman hired to protect the investor's interests. You and 34 others stay behind to wait for another ship. (There are no marine records of the Mayflower. It had been used as a wine freighter and was very old by this time. There were no sanitary facilities and it carried only enough water for drinking and food preparation. They would not become popularly known as "Pilgrims" until a Daniel Webster speech in 1820)

The colonists have promised to settle within the original land grant of the Virginia Company of Plymouth but navigation errors take them to New England and strong winds force them to stay north. After 65 days at sea, on November 21, 1620, they anchor inside the tip of Cape Cod in Massachusetts. The 41 men aboard meet and sign the Mayflower Compact, an agreement of self-government. Doubtful of their legal standing they nevertheless explore the area for a month, finally deciding to settle near a clear stream and a high hill that had once been cleared and occupied by the

natives. A smallpox plague had wiped out the entire village in 1617. They move the Mayflower to this location on December 26 and call it Plymouth.

The settlers have a difficult time. Half of them die in the first winter. The Captain for the Mayflower keeps his ship tied up all winter to provide needed shelter for the colonists. In April the Mayflower sails for England, empty of cargo, leaving the colonists alone and without knowledge of when they will receive supplies. (On this return voyage the Mayflower sails into history. After arrival in England the shipmaster dies and the Mayflower disappears, probably sold as salvage. Other ships named Mayflower do sail to the colonies in later years.)

The colonists had formed a stock company with the merchants in an agreement that would last seven years. At the end of the seven years all of the profits and property would be divided between the merchants and the colonists. The empty Mayflower is not well received by the merchants and they refuse to send a supply ship. Instead they send the Fortune. It is a ship of about 55 tons compared to the Mayflower's 350 tons. It carries only those supplies needed for the journey. You board this ship with Elizabeth Tilden. There are 35 of you. Your company, including yourself, has no preparation, only hopes. You have no experience. You bring no supplies for the Mayflower colonists, only a letter from the merchants demanding their profit. You settle first in Plymouth, then in Duxbury and finally in Bridgewater, Massachusetts.

The partnership with the merchants does not work out and in 1623 the colonists are allowed to farm individual plots. In 1627 the merchants sell their interest to the settlers. It takes until 1647 to pay it off. Over the first ten years the colony expands to 300 people. By 1633 you are a large landowner, only four other people paying higher taxes. Your name is prominent in the establishment of several communities. In that time, Elizabeth bears you seven children. Your third child, Nathaniel, will marry Mary Dorcas Joyce and have a son they name Nathaniel who will marry Joanna Border. They will have a son, Nathaniel, who will marry Mehitable Huntington, who will have a son Oliver who will have a son Elias who will marry Matilda Salter. They are the parents of Charles Henry Bassett. They are in Nauvoo with the Mormons and migrate with them, arriving in the Salt Lake Valley in 1852: Charles Henry, his wife Permilia Dayton, three children born while traveling west, his sister Mary Matilda and his parents.

Another Bassett, Thomas, arrives at Boston on the Christian. Another William lands at Boston on the Abigale. A John lands at Barbados on the Falcon and an Oliver on the Alexander in Bermuda, all in 1635.

And you? You and Elizabeth pass into history around 1667, having experienced and contributed forty-six years of the new countries early history. Your descendents will participate in every phase of the countries development and growth as migrants, settlers, farmers, tradesman, teachers, scientists, merchants, soldiers and politicians.

(Family oral history has long taught that Charles Henry Bassett is a descendent of the William Bassett and Elizabeth Tilden who came on the Fortune. However, Charles Henry descends from an Oliver Bassett born about 1780 in Stephentown, New York. His son, Elias, father of Charles Henry was born in the same place. This Oliver's parents are not known. The trace down from William Bassett of the Fortune comes to an Oliver Bassett born in 1748 in Mansfield Township, Connecticut. This Oliver's descendents are not known. It seems unlikely to this writer that these Olivers are the same person. Hence the connection between the modern Bassett's to the "Fortune" Bassetts has not been established.)

The Bassett history began in 1050 in the city of Utica, Normandy with an Osmond de Bassett giving approval to build the Abbey of St. Elralph. This meant Osmond must have been Lord of the Manor, the Bishop of the diocese or the owner of the land. Osmond had at least one son, Thurstine. He became a trusted lieutenant of William the Conqueror and was given the title of Grand Falconer. Falcons were important in those times. In 1066 William defeated the English at the Battle of Hastings and the Normans took over England. The names of both Osmond and Thurstine appear in the "Domesday Book" and the "Battle Abbey Roll". These are the authority to claim Norman and English nobility. Thurstine was given the title of Baron and lands near Cowbridge in Glamoran, Wales (near Cardiff) where he built the Beaupre Castle. The ruins are still there.

The historian, W. J. Saxton, in his history of the Bassett family (circ 1911) states: "In England the Bassetts were a thrifty people, and in the early days after the Norman Conquest were large landed proprietors, had a Crest, a Coat of Arms and were associated with nobility. Dukedoms, lordships, knights, feudal barons and many other titles and estates were common to them." Thurstine was the paternal ancestor of the Bassetts of England. The son of Thurstine, Sir Ralph Basset, was the

principal founder of their greatness. He was made Justice of England and invested with power to sit in any court he pleased for the administration of justice. The records state that he was a statesman, a lawgiver, and an unsullied judge. From Ralph descended the Lords Bassets of Drayton, Sapcote, Umberleigh, and Tehidy.

Another Bassett castle is at Tehidy Park, in Camborne, Cornwall, where, it was said, "the mines of Cornwall gave the Bassetts a princely income." As of 1911 this estate, acquired in 1150, was still in the Bassett name. In Charles I's time (1600-47) Sir Arthur Bassett gave Tehidy to George Bassett, son of John Bassett, who had acquired the estate of Devon in 1556. This Sir Arthur had two brothers, Sir Thomas Basset and Sir Francis Basset, all three being Major Generals to the King.

The name is of French origin but the derivative is somewhat in doubt. The French name LeBas has been suggested, the Anglo-Saxon form being Bas, Basse, Bassi, or Bassite. The Basset spelling (with one t) appears to have been used in England, starting with Thrustine. Sometime in the fifteenth century the extra t was added.

History tells us that Ralph (son of Thurstine) and Falk (son of Alan) were the two most illustrious members of the family. Falk Basset was Bishop of London, consecrated October 9, 1244. The Magna Carta, signed at Runnymede June 19, 1215, contains the signature of two of the King's counselors, Sir Alan Basset and his brother Sir Richard. Among the signatories of the U.S. Constitution is a Richard Bassett, Senator from the State of Delaware.

Bassetts were among the first colonists, cleared and settled the land, fought in the French and Indian wars, the Revolutionary War, and the Civil War and were present in every phase of the great migration West.

Compiled by Bill Bassett

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