

# Caldwell - Bugtown

The following is a speech written and researched by Betz Purcell given in 1973. Betz was born Elizabeth Corn in 1927. Her first marriage was to William (Bill) Purcell. Later divorced and married to Les Montgomery. Elizabeth like to be called Betz and gave the following speech first to the AAUW and three times later to various organizations.

Do you remember the day you first saw Caldwell? The day I arrived some people were wearing these funny hats (I don't remember much about the hats, but they were funny looking and resembled a chicken – SP)



I understand it was Egg Day, June 21, 1927. I lived for two weeks in the Caldwell Maternity Home and then went home with Mother to Middleton. Using one of Dr. Boone's expressions, that is medieval history, and I'm supposed to talk about ancient history.

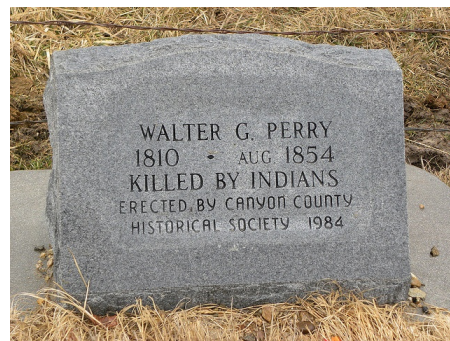
When Marlene asked me to give my talk a title, I felt that the best description of Caldwell would be Alkali, Sagebrush, Water and People. It is the last part—the people—that is the most important part of it; why they came, what they saw and what they did. I would like to make some of these people alive and real for you so that Caldwell's ancient, medieval and future, would be more than just streets and buildings, that you will feel the spirit that gave it life and perhaps sense its pulse even today. You people will have to help me by looking beyond the dates and through the wood and the brick.

Imagine that Jayne's house is gone (in Caldwell), we are sitting in a sagebrush plain with a valley spread before us and a river running through the middle of it with large cottonwoods and many willows along it. Watch for the people passing by because somewhere there was probably someone very much like you.

This valley according to Annie Laurie Bird, an Idaho historian, was the Peace Valley—an area reserved by the Indians, the Shoshoni, Bannocks, Nez Perce and others I have never heard of, as a place to trade with each other, hold councils, racehorses, play games, make love. Table Rock was the Indian Radio Station, all trails converged upon it—the Indians called it "Place to build a fire at certain times." Some of the first known white people to



see it were those in the Reed party, part of McKenzie's group going to Oregon. They were here in 1812, and massacred close to what is now Notus, Mrs. Dorion, wife of one of the men, and her children managed to escape, but with a great deal of suffering. The river was called Reed because of the massacre, and it was also understood ably called the Wood River. In May



1824, Bonneville, following the Old Indian Trail saw a "bright running stream and vast grassy meadows," and someone said, "Les Bois, Les Bois, See the trees." In August

1836, the Whitman-Spalding party passed through here. Mrs. Spalding's diary mentions the dreary, rough, barren country but adds, "I look forward in thankfulness and forget the inconveniences." Mrs. Whitman said in speaking of that location which has now been swallowed by

# Caldwell - Bugtown

the Snake, “We found a miserable pen of a place at that time called Fort Boise.” In August 1854, Mrs. Ward and her sister Mrs. White lunched by the river four miles east of here on a Sunday afternoon. I won’t try to describe how they saw it; I don’t like to think about the tragedy and pain of their last few hours, or the pain and tragedy the next year for the Indians who caused it. Their bones all lie together in the same spot.

In 1862 gold was discovered in the Boise basin and

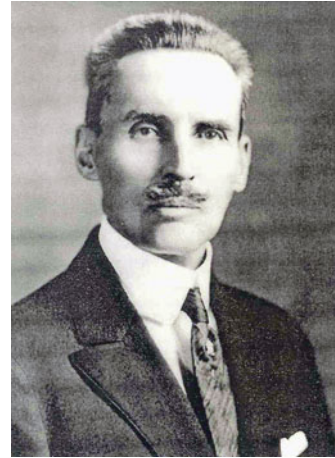


people begin to stop—more women came—they bring their featherbeds with them, and they begin to ask for perfume and house linens. In 1863 Middleton and Boise City are founded people beginning to build ditches. Dr. Junius Wright, arriving in 1864 on his honeymoon, builds a cabin for the winter somewhere close to the old River bridge and he speaks of a pleasant winter hunting deer, ducks, and big white rabbits. In 1868, Samuel Foote, my grandfather, came to see what fortunes were in this area, returned to Sacramento, learned the milling business and in 1870 Middleton became his home.

An abundance of sagebrush, full of jackrabbits, coyotes, horned toads and kangaroo rats—ticks—rattlesnakes—sagebrush giving way to greasewood—alkali whitish on the soil—dust roads full of chuckholes—that’s the way Caldwell looked in May 1880.

In September 1881, the Middleton Miller writes his brother in the east telling him about the railroad survey going on and hoping it would mean the tracks would go through Middleton, they didn’t, and here in August 1883, a town was laid out—a dozen or so houses and tents appeared. For a short

time, a few people called it Hamburg, because a Jake Ham had started a blacksmith shop about 1882 at what is now 2<sup>nd</sup> and Aven. Another name used by some was “Bugtown”—for the Railroad camp half a mile below described by the Statesman as “. . . the liveliest hole in Boise Valley with its good number of tent saloons dotting the sagebrush plain.” Some considered the townsite beautiful and Mr. Cuddy who found the Caldwell Tribune, a four-page weekly in 1883 predicted Caldwell would be the metropolis of Boise Valley. The townsite was owned by the Idaho & Oregon Land Improvement Company who owned other townsites along the Oregon Short Line. C. A. Caldwell (ex-Senator from Kansas) was President of the company and



Robert F. Strahorn, who was Vice-President and General Manager, named the town for him. The lots sold from \$25 to \$400. The townsite company owned the water rights to the canal, the Strahorn, that was dug to supply Caldwell with irrigation water. Along Front Street (now Main) one or two

businesses started—a restaurant opened—in process of building was a saloon and billiard hall and Mr. Haskell was building a hotel. There was a pump in town and a sprinkling cart was badly needed. The only street retaining its name is Kimball. (Streets were River, Dixie, Middleton, Canyon, Kimball, Williams, Morse, Bruneau. The Avenues were Owyhee, Malheur, Market, Front, north of the railroad—Boise, Payette, Weiser and Shoshone, south of the line.) On returning from a courting trip to California in March 1884, my Grandfather writes Delia that the railroad town has made some improvements, that many of Middleton’s “denizens” were leaving there for Caldwell, including Monte Gwinn, the grocer, the Postmaster left so fast that mail service was left to chance. Mr. Liggett was tearing down his commodious hotel. In Caldwell, the corner of Chicago and 9<sup>th</sup> saw one of the first building—a private school—the teacher was paid \$65 a



# Caldwell - Bugtown

month. That fall a public school was opened, taught by Monte Gwinn's sister, Carrie, who later became Mrs. Henry Blatchley. The school was furnished with homemade desks for older children, benches with no backs for younger ones, blackboards were sheet iron. The old Lincoln school (Sears) wasn't built until 1888. In 1884 the Tribune summarized the growth—600 inhabitants, 40 business houses, about 150 structures in all, Rocky Mountain Bell had made Caldwell the nucleus for western Idaho. In two months', time the town had received 200 carloads of lumber, 150 wagons, 500 carloads of



coal, 500 of merchandise and thousands of pounds of wool, hides, fruits, vegetables and 2,000 sacks of flour (Grandpa was busy) had been shipped out.

There were four hotels, plans for a banking business, and a public park (probably where Van Buren School is now). Dr. Isham organized a theatrical group—first play was "Ten Nights, in a Barroom." A town band was organized—the instruments ordered and the businessmen who



already worked 15 hours a day, learned to play them in time for the Fourth of July celebration—The Caldwell Silver Cornet Band led the parade—one mile long. The only songs they knew were America and Nearer My God to Thee. It is said 2,000 people were in town that day for the community basket dinner, games and contests, the greased pole, dancing at the schoolhouse and the skating rink which was on Front Street. As in many new towns, fire struck that first year—burning the Caldwell House and its furnishing (Mr. Haskell's) and the Liggett Hotel and its furnishing (Mr. Liggett

should have stayed in Middleton), two saloons, a bakery and the Charles Seabee's lost their brand new home before they could move into it. Indian Creek flooded—the stockyards were finished—46



cars of cattle sent out—a solid pile bridge over Indian Creek at Kimball was

constructed and close by Gwinn and Baker put up a brick building 25' x 100'. The Coffin Bros. built a brick building 40' x 100' at Front and Kimball (Golden Rule Building). Mr. Melvin and Mr. Nuzman were busily delivering their Canyon Hill Brick all over town. The Grand Pacific Hotel opened and if it was like all the other hotel openings "a hundred couples danced at the ball." The first circus came in 1884, 8,000 attended and people brought their tents and camped by the River. And the first church—the Baptist—was built at 11<sup>th</sup> and Chicago.

In August 1885, Sam Foote age 40 brings his 29-year-old bride home via the railroad—she will have an occasional hired girl and sometimes a Chinaman (Mother told me she was scared of the Chinaman and had a Saint Bernard dog to protect her. However, she was also afraid of the dog -SP) to help her with enlarging her home, papering and painting it, cooking for extra mill helpers, washing, ironing, planting gardens, picking berries, canning, churning and selling the extra butter, organizing a Sunday School, active in social life in Caldwell, anxious to have company, raising a family, taking food to the sick, sitting up with the dying, and like many other women trying to bring the best of the other life here. Some of those ladies (9 of them) were the founders of the Ladies Presbyterian Building Society. Mrs. Stahorn writes, "It may have been that pathetic need of sympathy that drew the women of Caldwell together so easily into the . . . organization. The purpose of it besides the building of a church, was to encourage social

# Caldwell - Bugtown

intercourse, to preserve harmony and to create a more homelike feeling among the ladies . . . nothing more important or more valuable to prevent brooding and homesickness than work, something to keep the mind employed with congenial effort.”

(Apparently brooding and homesickness was a problem. -SP) In two years, they had enough money to let out the building contract, send out a plea to the home Mission Society and aid and minister. The oldest church building in Caldwell is still there at 9<sup>th</sup> and Albany. And a minister did come, bringing with him his bride of 7 days. They got off the train in Kuna, took the stage to Boise, and with Rev. Barton, the next day the three of them went back to Kuna, caught the train, were in New Jerusalem (Nampa) at 5:12 A.M. and Caldwell at 5:34 A.M.—walked across the tracks to the Pacific Hotel. Dr. Boone in his ancient history says, “I will say that I unloaded myself upon this community early Wednesday morning on the 9<sup>th</sup> of November, 1887, that I looked out of the window of the old Pacific Hotel and my eyes went over the white landscape, and I perceived a building that was unpainted and it was blind, that is, it had the windows boarded up. There was an uncanny suspicion in my mind that that might be the Presbyterian Church, but I hoped that it wasn’t. I will say that the white that extended from here over there wasn’t snow, but it was just the rich fertility of the soil here in the way of alkali. It was a new sight to me.” The morning after his arrival, Dr. Boone called on Mrs. Strahorn to tell her he had decided not to stay. “The world seemed to whirl at this unlooked for humiliation to the band of women.” Gaining control, she

emphatically stated that if that was his decision then the work would stop there—they would surrender to Rev. Barton, who was against it from the first. Boone as a minister of the Gospel lacked the moral courage to continue what a few women had started, then the building would

be for sale the next day. She comments “the eyes of the man kindled with more interest than before

manifested.” He stayed. Years later in the funeral service for Mrs. Strahorn, Dr. Boone described himself “as the young minister flinching in the face of pioneer difficulties” and told how Mrs. Strahorn put “stiffness in his spinelessness.”

In 1880 the WCTU was organized—a temperance movement that led to a reading room and eventually the City Library. I will just say that Mrs. Gipson, Mrs. Stone, Mrs. Stephenson, and Mrs. Foote had the most to do with that accomplishment—their children helped to keep the Reading Room open and clean.

By 1885 orchards had been planted, comfortable homes were being built, costing from \$1,500 to \$3,000. Farms were fenced, fire protection started, and bicycle riding became the rage!



In 1890 Idaho was admitted to the Statehood; and that same year the College of Idaho was



established. In Dr. Boone’s words, “Like all great days Wednesday, October 7, 1892, came in due order. It was a typical Idaho day, calm and warm. The autumn sunshine was putting out the finishing touches on the royal purple of the prune,



If



# Caldwell - Bugtown

was setting the crimson on the cheek of the Johnathans and was curing the succulent stalks of the fourth crop of alfalfa, when promptly, at 2 o'clock P.M. the faculty of the proposed school was seen to gather itself into the small lecture room of the Presbyterian church. This corps of teachers was composed of young ambitious men and women, graduates of divers' institutions of learning in the East, among may be mentioned: Frank Steunenberg, John T Morrison, John C Rice, E E Maxey, Carrie S Blatchley, Chas A Hand, W J Boone. J H Barton having missed the train, so Boise was not represented. This ponderous array of intellect was arranged on one side of the little room, while on the other side sat two little trembling candidates for high education in the person of Misses Lillian Potter and Minnie Reed." Those people on the faculty mentioned gave their time in teaching with not any pay at all, that first year. Most of them taught 1-2 hours a day, Dr. Boone, 7 hours. There were 12 trustees, from Caldwell were Morrison, Rice, Steunenberg, Blatchley, Maxey, from Middleton was S S Foote. Dr. Boone tells that it was sometimes hard to get a quorum for meetings and he soon learned to let Carrie Blatchley know—Henry would be there.

On March 7, 1891, Canyon County was formed from Ada County and in November, 1892 an election was held to decide the county seat—Dr. Wright recalled " . . . Caldwell staged a celebration the like



Celebration Parade

of which has had no parallel since. The booming of guns, songs and street parades made the night hideous until the wee small hours. It was noised about the next day that there were only two sober men in the city that night. One of them was afterwards Gov. of the State, John T Morrison, and the other was busy in Wright's Dug Store managing the only telephone in

town!" Monte Gwinn, Howard Sebree, and George Paul (Parma) were the first Commissioners.

For awhile there was a Caldwell Anti-Chinese League formed—no violence, just boycotting of the "Mongol" and anyone who patronized him—for 60 days the names of firms boycotting him were published. One of the first ordinances made in February 1890, after Caldwell became an organized town was the enactment of a curfew which "prohibited children running about the streets at night and frequenting saloons and gambling houses."

The Stock Growers and Traders Bank was founded in 1887 by Howard Sebree and B F White—it became the First National bank of Caldwell and later the Bank of Idaho.



Commercial Bank was organized in 1894 with John C Rice as President and A K Steunenberg as cashier. My Uncle connects Ed Plowhead with it also. In 1906 the Western National bank was organized under the management of Dan Campbell, Gov. John Morrison and S E Simpson, cashier. In 1892 Caldwell and Nampa were connected by phone. Dr. Isham opened the Caldwell Opera House on February 22, 1895—the first minstrel show "failed for want of an audience."

In 1894 the Gem State Rural was founded by A E Gipson—and his son, Jim, founded Caxton's. In 1898 a county commissioner, S S Foote moved to Caldwell





# Caldwell - Bugtown

after dismantling his mill in Middleton. He built the first mill in Caldwell and operated it until it burned in 1905. In 1902, the City Hall was lit for the first time with electric lights, free of charge (interesting choice of words as the City Hall had to have a charge to light the lights – SP).

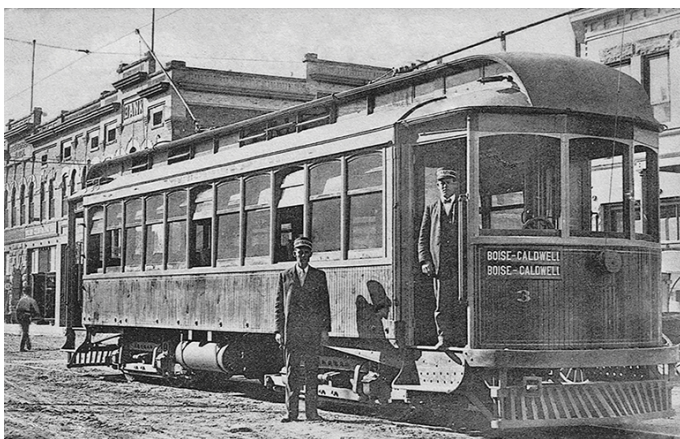
Dr. Dutton's ice cream parlor was the first store to enjoy water from the city water works—June 1903.

The Saratoga Hotel opened March 17, 1904—the



owners were Howard Sebree, and Mr. and Mrs. R V Sebree—the dining room could seat 150 and at 10 o'clock the doors were thrown open and 100 couples danced.

I wish I could have ridden on the interurban line between here and Boise. And I would like to



have taken the Sebree Line that went out to the Sunny Slope area—I understand that lots of freight went out there to be picked up by wagons going to Silver City.

Why did they come” why did they stop in

Caldwell? A K Steunenberg in his first editorial, January 1, 1887, as editor of the Tribune answers that question very well. “We are here for the money. We are here because we see in Caldwell a future city; because in either direction we see the most beautiful stretches of fertile lands ever kissed by sunlight, which will soon be divided into rich and prosperous farms, because locked up in the heart of our mountains are untold treasures, . . . because this country is going to boom and we want to boom with it.”

In 1887 I think the woman of Caldwell would have sprung to her feet, clapping her hands in joy? But in 1973, I think now she would sit down, fold her hands and say “please, not so fast, not too much, be gentle with me, let me have room to spread my green lawns, don't cut me off from the mountains—let my children have space to play and dream, freedom to walk without fear, let there be time for neighbors and caring for others, let me see alkali in the dirt, save me a sagebrush plain dotted with wildflowers, not tents, give me water to treasure and let me remember the people.”



## Sources

“That Man Boone” by H H Hayman

“Boise, the Peace Valley” by Anne Laurie Bird

Letters from S S Foote and Delia Foote

Articles from the Caldwell Tribune

Honors paper on early Caldwell by Beverly Edwards

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# Caldwell - Bugtown

The photos to the left and below are currently in downtown Caldwell of Indian Creek. Indian Creek no longer overflows its banks. These photos are from different



seasons of the year. Indian Creek is no longer an embarrassment to Caldwell. During the Christmas



season  
Indian  
Creek  
brings in  
many  
people  
and  
families  
from  
outside  
Caldwell.





# Caldwell - Bugtown

Betz gave the above speech several times to different groups. After each speech some people would come up to her and give her some more history of what they remembered or were told. There was a Caldwell custom of a community wedding being performed on several July 4<sup>th</sup> at the Caldwell Parks. Business men would give the couples presents. Dora Davis' parents were married that way.

One woman said SS Foote's flour bags (Joy Flour named after his daughter Joy Foote-SP) were highly sought for their good material. Some would use them for "wall linens." Some made good bloomers out of them. (I have one Joy Flour sack in my home -SP) Betz's uncle Sam Foote was the only one of the family in Caldwell when the mill burned down. He said a train came into town with "soldiers" he thought would help fight the fire but didn't. Arson was suspected. The mill was full of new grain but not yet paid. SS Foote returned to Middleton and built another mill. He managed to pay back what he owed, sold some of his property, and gave lots of property to Middleton for streets.

August 1854 was the Ward Massacre. The ward

family of about 12 people including 8 children was part of a wagon train from Missouri. Two boys around 12 and 13 survived with arrow wounds. For some reason, the 4 wagons had fallen behind the main party about a day. Six men all strangers, had joined them and were traveling with them. The place of the massacre is not where there is a sign. Betz was told it was close to where her uncle Dorian Corn



and family lived in the 1930s. Somewhere around Middleton Road and maybe Marble Front Road.

In another writing Betz wrote about Boise and Indians. By now you know that I'm a native

Idahoan (so am I-SP). If you aren't native how come you are here now? The first native Idahoans were the Indians and historians believe that the site where Boise is now had been a camping place for Indians for many generations. That in particular two groups met in Boise yearly. One group called Shahaptain occupied the North and West of the Snake on to the coast. The other the Shoshones Southeasterly to the Commanches and Apaches. The Shahaptain's were traders and brought things from the coast. Shoshones had many horses and hunted buffalo. They called this the "much cottonwood feast valley." Table Rock that sits high behind Boise was called "place to build a fire at certain times." It was the Indian Radio and all trails converged upon it and the signals could be seen in all directions. This is where they traded with each other, held councils, raced horses, played games, recalled their history and stories of the past, and probably talked about what they hoped to do. A lot like what goes on today in this same valley, but also very different.

I think you have been studying about the Oregon Trail and realize that part of that trail used old Indian Trails and that the Oregon Trail was about 2,000 miles from Independence



Missouri to the Columbia River area. In the 1840s about 12,000 traveled the full distance. In 1850 with the Gold Rush in California about 50,000 people went through the South pass. In places today people can still see parts of the Oregon Trail. At that time there was not much to stop for in Boise Valley and especially when people remembered the Ward Massacre.

However, in 1862 gold was discovered in the Boise Basin. That is what we call Idaho City today. It was only about 15 miles across but had 250 square miles of creeks and gulches. There

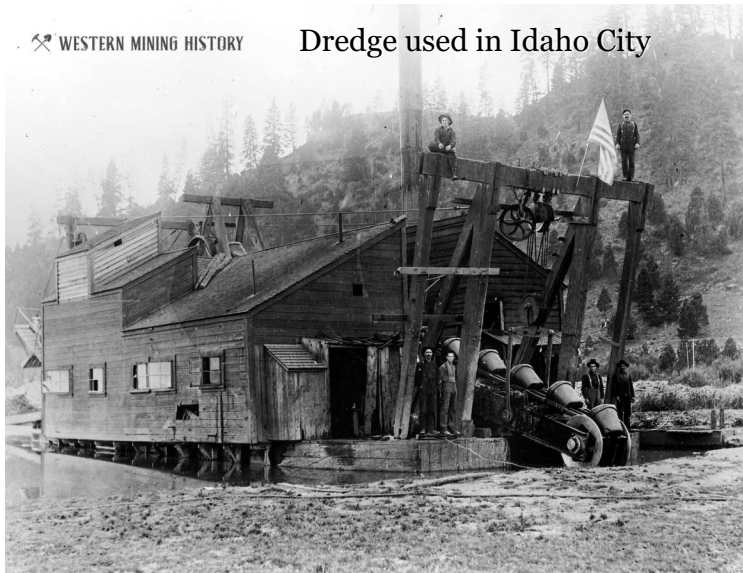


# Caldwell - Bugtown

was more Gold discovered in Idaho City than was



discovered during California's Gold rush. Thousands came and began to stop and settle in the



area, more women came and they brought their featherbeds with them and asked for perfume and house linens. (one house linen was a Joy Flour sack and I have one in my home-SP)

My Grandfather Samuel S Foote was finishing his formal education in Saybrook Connecticut. He belonged to the Episcopal church and his main teacher was the Bishop there in Connecticut. He was almost 17 and wanted to enlist and join his brother Ebenezer who was a Connecticut volunteer in the Civil War. His parents would not allow that but did let him join the crew of a sailing ship. My impression is that the captain of the ship was a friend of the family (John Dickison?) They traveled around Cape Horn to San Francisco a trip of around 15,000 miles. I have letters that describe his adventures, Guano, Honolulu, Sandwich Islands for provisions and a pleasant spot he ever saw. While

on the ship he fell from the rigging and broke a leg. He ended up with one leg shorter than the other and always walked with a limp. In April 1866 he left the sea and found a job on a ranch and then later that same year went to Idaho.

The easiest way to Idaho was to take a Steamer from San Francisco to Portland, then transfer to a Columbia River Steamer, and go to Umatilla or as Sam Foote did all the way to Lewiston. At that point the way of traveling depended on the size of the pocketbook. Some would buy a lunch, roll it up in a blanket and hit the trail as soon as the boat landed. Others would buy supplies at some packers or tool station camp. Sometimes people went together to buy a pack animal, put their supplies on it and take off on foot to the Boise Basin. A more expensive way to go would be by a personally conducted saddle train for a fare of \$50, paid in advance. The tour guide furnished each passenger with a horse and saddle and carried the baggage and cooking utensils and enough food on the pack animals. The passengers did the cooking in camp and the trail master looked after the animals and all took turns standing guard for Indians and Horse thieves. It took 12 days to go 150-200 miles. Since Sam went to several different mining sites before he ended up in Boise City, I think he either bought a horse or a horse and buggy.

At any rate, he ended up in Middleton, so named because it was located halfway between Boise City and Fort Boise. At that time there was no Caldwell or Nampa. He went back to California to learn about the milling business and later returned to Middleton to become part owner



# Caldwell - Bugtown

and then owner of the mill in Middleton. With the



mill came a two room house which was added on to before Sam went back to California to bring his bride home. He traveled by steamer, rail, and then stage both ways. His bride was Cordelia Irene Wilson, born 4/30/1857 and was one of ten children born to James and Judith Wilson. James, Delia's father was a Methodist minister. She was born in Chicago, grew up in Iowa, and later returned to Chicago a city she like very much and then moved to California with a sister when Delia needed to have an operation for an arm disease.

Delia's letter to her brother Walter:

Gorgia Foote born 2/3/1887

Harold born 9/28/1888 both born in Ada County.

Delia, Georgia, Harold went to Chicago in 1893 to the World Exposition

Joy Ruth 3/8/1895

Samuel S 11/13/1897 born in Canyon County in the same room but Ada County had been divided, and Caldwell became the County Seat, winning over Payette.

\*\*( -SP) When you see this it is a comment by Steve Purcell.