

MORE THAN 500 BABBITTS RECOGNIZE 125TH ANNIVERSARY

BY BONNIE STEVENS FOR BABBITT TIMES REVIEW AUGUST 2011



Commemorating 125 years since the five Babbitt Brothers of Cincinnati made Flagstaff the hub of what would become one of the West's largest cattle ranching operations, 507 Babbitts posed for this picture in front of the Elks Lodge on Saturday, July 9.

"The venue was great with the view of the Peaks in the background," said Melanie Dorn, one of the reunion organizers, of David Babbitt lineage. Her great grandfather was Joseph Babbitt, David's son and her great grandmother was Viola Babbitt. "That, for me, is the sight of home. The mountain is such a great reminder of our heritage, but the reunion was all about the people; watching people meet each other, enjoy each other and share memories."

On Sunday, July 17 a color photo full of Babbitts graced the front page of the Arizona Daily Sun. Reporter Betsey Bruner documented the gathering that drew family members from all over the country. Many Verkamps and Shoeneys traveled all the way from Cincinnati, and some George Babbitt family members traveled from as far as Connecticut and Florida.

Jim E. Babbitt declared, "Oh, it's just wonderful to have the whole big family together." Jim is the youngest of five in the Paul J. Babbitt and Frances Perry family, of C.J. Babbitt lineage.

"The best part was checking people in at La Fonda for dinner," said Claire West, Dorn's mother, also the granddaughter of Viola Babbitt. "I got to hug everybody. It was wonderful. And even the relatives you hadn't met felt like relatives, especially the Verkamps. There are certain traits in the family and you could just see them in so many people. You knew they were yours."

The Cincinnati Verkamps funded the original ranching venture. Three Verkamp sisters married three of the original five brothers. David married Emma Catherine, Charles (C.J.) married Mary and Edward married Matilda.

"The Babbitts of Flagstaff always remember their maternal family and continue to honor the maternal heritage and names," said Dorn. "There are as many names associated with Babbitts as there are women who have married them."

Family members wore color-coded nametags identifying to which of the five brothers they were related. Flags donning ranch brands were created representing each of the brothers.

The event planning began in September and finished 15 minutes before the party. "We used snail mail, email, Facebook and lots of phone calls. It was a long process of getting names and people together. The last reunion was 25 years ago," said Dorn.

Besides Dorn and West, organizers included Ruth McCarty, Rayma Sharber, Stephanie Erickson, John Beuerle, Sally Veazey, Deanne Despain, Linda Woods and Meg Crossman.

"Getting everybody together was worth every bit of the work we put into it," said Crossman, a Bilby family member and descendent of David Babbitt. "It was a joy being together and feeling so proud of our family."

On April 7, 1886, David and Billy Babbitt stepped off the Atlantic and Pacific Rail in Flagstaff and wired "We've found the future!" More than a century later, Flagstaff photographers captured what that future looks like.

Reunion photo courtesy Tom Alexander Photography



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MEMBER FEATURE

FOUR TENDERFEET CAME WEST IN 1886; STAYED, AND “GREW UP WITH THE COUNTRY”

BABBITT BROTHERS WENT INTO CATTLE BUSINESS, LATER FOUNDED TRADING COMPANY
BY PLATT CLINE

Excerpts and photo were borrowed from The Coconino Sun, Friday, July 7, 1939 for the August 2011 edition of The Babbitt Times Review

Looking For a Cattle Ranch

As a result of the decision of the brothers, David Babbitt had left Cincinnati in 1885, and had visited cattle ranges in Montana and Wyoming. Not finding just the type of opportunity the brothers desired, he had returned to Cincinnati. The brothers eventually decided on the northern part of Arizona Territory as the most likely location.

At the time of the arrival of David and William Babbitt in Flagstaff in 1886, the Tonto Basin cattlemen's-sheepmen's war raged; Apache Indian raids were a constant menace; the country was infested with stock rustlers, necessitating that a stockman have a wary eye and a quick gun hand; and the Civil War was just 20 years in the past; nearer to the people of that day than the World War is to us of 1939. Flagstaff was tough, and the surrounding country was tougher; only men of courage and determination could hope to operate cattle and manage to get most of them to market.

The brothers had a letter of introduction to Dr. Brannen, a cousin of the owner of the Brannen Mercantile Co. The Babbitts called on Dr. Brannen upon their arrival, and in a short time had met most of the business men of the town, including John Lind, bookkeeper and general manager of the Brannen store. He was to become, later, a trusted employee of the Babbitts, after the establishment of the great trading company, still years in the future. The brothers took up then temporary residence with Dr. Brannen, in a small frame building standing back of the Bank hotel.

David and William spent their time, for several months, constantly looking for the range and herd of cattle that would measure up to their desires.

First Cattle Purchased

The Babbitt brothers made a deal for their first herd of cattle, over 1000 head, in early May. On May 17, the weekly newspaper, the ancestor of the The Coconino Sun, edited by George H. Tinker, had this to say: "Just as we are going to press, we are informed that Messrs. Hosler and Warren have sold to Babbitt Bros. of Cincinnati, something over 1000 head of cattle." The cattle were of the "Boot" brand. The week following the purchase of the first herd of stock, the newspaper expanded on the article of the previous week: "The Babbitt Bros. of Cincinnati have purchased from Messrs. Hosler and Warren about 1200 head of stock, consisting of 800 cows, 35 fine grade bulls, 200 two-year olds, and about 200 yearlings. The cattle purchased are all first-class stock, and in fine condition. We are informed by a prominent stockman that he considers the herd one of the best in this vicinity, and considers that the gentlemen have made a cheap and excellent purchase." Thus the beginning of a business that was to spread far and wide, that was to operate literally dozens of business establishments, that was

to employ hundreds of people in northern Arizona in years to come.

The cattle were all re-branded with the "C-O-Bar" brand, which is still in use by Babbitts to this day. It was composed of the initial letters of "C" incinnati, "O" hio, as a tribute to the home the boys had left behind. This first herd of cattle were run in the Little Colorado river country, Charles J. Babbitt recollects.

In May, 1886, Charles, 21, arrived in Flagstaff to join brothers in the new venture. From that time on, and for almost half a century, he was to be actively engaged in the stock business. His job in later years, with his brother William, was to take care of the livestock interests of the not-yet-born Babbitt Brothers Trading Co. He states that the first five years he was in Arizona, he spent practically every minute on the range with the stock.

Looking for the Range

Constantly looking the country over for better range and water, it was natural that the brothers should become acquainted with Al Grady and Jack Smith, partners in the stock business, who controlled some excellent land and water rights, the latter consisting of a spring that is now the main water supply for Flagstaff. In company with Grady and Smith, David and William set out on a visit to the famous spring, a trip more or less beset with hardships, only to find it covered with a blanket of snow over seven feet deep. The party camped in the vicinity of the spring. Jack Smith shot a bear, and two mountain sheep were seen by the boys. A writer in the The Coconino Sun many years later wrote of the incident, as remembered by David Babbitt.

"Camp was pitched, but in the morning the first thing to greet their eyes was another blanket of snow that had fallen during the night. Breakfast being of course in order, wood was gathered, the coffee made ready, in fact all preparations made for a hearty meal, when it was discovered that in the whole party only a match and a half stood between them and hunger, and that Mr. Dave Babbitt happened to possess those."

"After much cajoling on the part of Al Grady he was entrusted with the one whole match. True to life, the first match went out, and then only the half match remained—truly a critical situation with the prospect of no breakfast if the remaining half match failed to function. Pleading on the part of Al Grady did not seem to do any good this time, for history records that Mr. Babbitt kept the match and lit it, only after a careful gathering of all the inflammable material to be obtained. The half match in the hands of Mr. Babbitt seemed to realize its responsibilities, and a roaring camp fire and a good breakfast for all hands resulted."

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A "Pleasant" Valley Visit

A May, 1886, issue of the The Coconino Sun, records that the Babbitt Brothers, accompanied by a friend, set out in search of new range in the Pleasant Valley country, a trip which proved to be more exciting than had been bargained for. Riding into the beautiful green valley, known as Pleasant Valley, bordering the Apache reservation, they were met by a man riding toward them rapidly, warning them that the Apaches were on a raid, and that everyone was seeking refuge at the nearby Tewksbury ranch. "In their conversation on the way to the Tewksbury ranch," a writer in the The Coconino Sun several years ago says, "it was learned that their new found friend was named Sigsby. As the party passed a rather dilapidated cabin they made inquiry from their guide as to why the occupants were not warned of the coming danger, and were informed that the place belonged to the Grahams. Their guide went on to say that the Tewksbury and Graham factions were at war with each other, and inasmuch as Sigsby was a Tewksbury sympathizer, it did not seem quite in order to stop at the enemy's stronghold. From the way Sigsby talked the brothers gathered the impression that he was a bit more afraid of the Grahams than he was of the Apaches. The Grahams in this feud were the leaders of the cattle faction and the Tewksbury represented the sheep interests. As a consequence the party made all haste to the Tewksbury ranch, which they found to be in more or less a state of siege."

The Indian scare finally subsided, but about this time the climax came in the Tewksbury-Graham feud, one of the bloodiest chapters in the history of the state. The Babbitt brothers were not actively concerned in this warfare, but were right on the edge of it all during the time that it was at its worst.

"The Pleasant Valley country looked pretty promising for the cow business," related Mr. David Babbitt in later years, "and it wasn't long before we had made negotiations for some land, and were really full-fledged cattlemen."

The more prominent cattlemen of the Flagstaff section at that time included Acker & Walker, Lot Smith, Al Doyle, John Marshall, the Black Brothers, Henry Ashurst, and John Clark.

The "A-One-Bar" Cattle Co.

The largest cattle company in the vicinity of Flagstaff at that time was the "A-One-Bar," the Arizona Cattle Company, with headquarters in Fort Valley. The company was being "ram-rodged" by Captain B. B. Bullwinkle. In the early '80's, and until 1885, it had been managed by John W. Young, son of the famous Brigham Young, president of the "Mormon" Church. John Young, with a company of lumberjacks, had built the fort in what later became "Fort Valley" for protection against the Indians, while they were engaged in cutting ties on the slopes of the San Francisco Mountains for the Atlantic and



This picture was made about 1918 upon the occasion of a visit Edward (left) of Cincinnati, paid his four brothers in Flagstaff. From left to right: Edward, who has been engaged in the practice of law in Cincinnati for many years; Charles J., president of Babbitt Brothers Trading Co., David (1858-1920); George (1860-1920); and William (1863-1930). Charles, David, George and William starting with a tiny hardware business and a few cattle, built one of the largest business firms in Arizona, Babbitt Brothers Trading Company, which today does over \$4,000,000 worth of business a year.

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Pacific Railroad Company. Following the completion of the railroad in 1883, the fort was turned into headquarters for the big cattle company, which was financed by a number of wealthy easterners. Bullwinkle, whom old-timers described as an "original" had at one time been fire chief in Chicago for the insurance companies. He was a man who liked fast horses; riding his Kentucky racing stock from Fort Valley to Flagstaff, it was his pleasure to ride with a watch in one hand, striving to cut the time of the ride to the lowest possible point. Charles J. Babbitt remarks with a smile, that Bullwinkle's training as a fire chief, who "had to get there first" was the probable reason for the ex-fireman's continual hurry to get wherever he was going. Bullwinkle was killed in 1888 when a fast horse he was riding to Flagstaff to meet the "Hashknife" ram-rod, Captain Warner, fell with him near the western limits of town.

Following the death of Bullwinkle, the owners of the famous "A-One-Bar" decided to go out of business. Accordingly, that fall they shipped 19,000 head of cattle and the Babbitt brothers found themselves deeper in the cattle business than ever.

The Families

The five Babbitt brothers, including E. J., whom we have not so far mentioned in this story, were the children of David and Catherine Babbitt. Following a common school education in Cincinnati, their home, the five brothers attended St. Xavier's (Jesuit) college in that city.

Oldest of the brothers was David, born in 1858. He was married in 1886 to miss Emma Verkamp, sister of the wives of Charles and E. J. Babbitt, and also a sister of O. J. Verkamp, manager today of Babbitts' Flagstaff curio department. To this union were born six children: Raymond G., at present

secretary-treasurer of Babbitt Bros. Trading Co.; Edwin D., proprietor of the E. D. Babbitt Motor Company, Flagstaff; Joseph R., vice-president of the Trading Co.; David M. Jr., who died in 1929; Elaine, who died in 1938; and Gertrude, who makes her home in Flagstaff. Mr. Babbitt died in 1929.

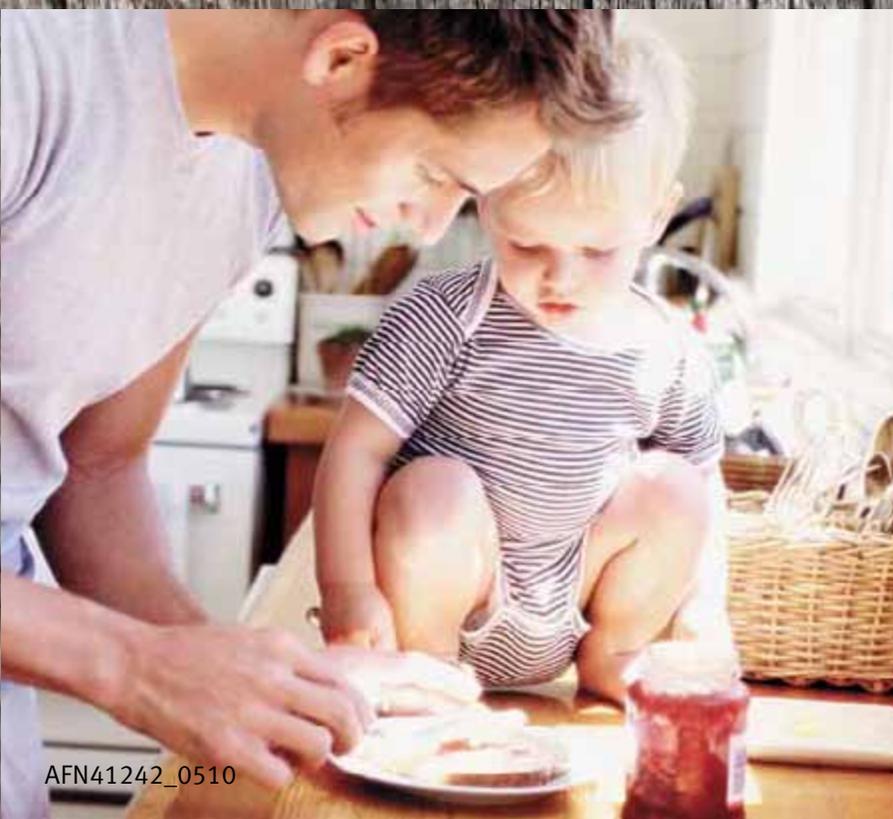
George Babbitt Sr. was born in 1860. He was married in 1887 to Philomena Wessell, of Cincinnati. The five children born to them were: Bertram H., prominent sheepman of the Flagstaff section; Marguerite (Mrs. Thos. McCullough, of Flagstaff); Herbert, proprietor of the Herb Babbitt garage in Flagstaff; George Jr., Flagstaff postmaster; and Eunice (Mrs. Ike Veazey). Mr. Babbitt died in 1920.

William Babbitt was born 1863. He was married in 1914 to Elizabeth Roach. Death came to him in Phoenix in 1930. Mrs. Babbitt makes her home in Flagstaff.

Charles J. Babbitt was born in 1865. He was married in 1891 to Mary Verkamp, of Cincinnati. Four children were born to the couple: Helen, who resides in Los Angeles; Paul, an attorney in Los Angeles; James E., Arizona State Senator, and an officer of Babbitt Bros. Trading Co.; and John, also connected with the Flagstaff establishment.

Edward J. Babbitt, who has practiced law in Cincinnati for many years, was born in 1868. He was a Senator in Arizona's Territorial Legislature in the '90s, also probate judge for a time. When he was a member of the legislature he rode on the first train between Phoenix and Prescott. Later he returned to Cincinnati, where he is still active in the practice of law. He was married to Matilda Verkamp. Their three children, all of Cincinnati, are: Mary, Elizabeth, and E. J. Jr.

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