

Bass Collection Bares Historic Concession Roots

Editor's Note: Royal Jackson, Associate Professor in the Department of Resource Recreation Management at Oregon State University, has received University funds for research-related travel and a grant from the OSU Research Council for preliminary cataloging, conservation and preparation of a guide to the Bass Collection. The NPS-CPSU at OSU has agreed to publish the product, for the light it can shed on historic tourism at one of the nation's most famous scenic treasures. Photographs are courtesy of Heritage Associates, Inc.

By Royal G. Jackson

An important historical collection brought to light recently by Heritage Associates, Inc., a private cultural resource consulting firm, concerns the Bass family, which played a central role in the history of the Grand Canyon National Park and the development of tourism in Arizona at the turn of the century. The Bass Collection is an assemblage of documents, letters, manuscripts, photographs, diaries, books and memorabilia belonging to the late William G. Bass of Wickenburg, Arizona.

William W. Bass came to Arizona from New York in 1883 and in 1884 became one of the first settlers on the South Rim of the Grand Canyon. His original purpose in coming to the Canyon was mining and prospecting but he soon realized the tourist potential, built a stage road from Williams, Arizona, to his camp on the rim 75 miles distant, and began to take tourists there in 1885. He continued to do this for the next 38 years. In 1926, at the age of 77, he sold his holdings to the Santa Fe Railway.

During his years at the Canyon, Bass built 140 miles of roads to connect his enterprises with transportation networks, more than 40 miles of trails within the Canyon, and numerous dams, cisterns, and even a 10-acre garden and orchard on the north side of the Colo-

rado River. He established a boat ferry across the river and built the first cable crossing over the Colorado. He had several working mines in the Canyon and filed claims on many others. His wife, Ada, was the first white woman to raise a family on the south rim. He also constructed numerous facilities at what became known as Bass Camp, and at other locations.

The first schoolhouse at the Grand Canyon was built by Bass. A self-taught poet, miner, geologist, photographer and businessman, he had friends and guests who included politicians, poets, writers, and photographers well-known in their day. Bass played an active role in the various legislative proposals affecting the Grand Canyon, from the initial establishment of Grand Canyon Forest Reserve in 1892 until the creation of Grand Canyon National Park in 1909.

Bass was a good friend of the Havasu Indians and often visited them, alone or with tourist parties. He gave them seeds and was instrumental in having a school and post office established there. He employed some of them from time to time and interceded on their behalf in Washington. His longstanding friendships with Sen. Henry F. Ashurst and Cong. Carl Hayden, both of Arizona, were helpful at such times.

Bass' wide ranging interests, intellectual curiosity and desire to learn were qualities unique among the early tourist operators at the Grand Canyon. His guests appreciated it and returned time and again, establishing lifelong friendships with him. George Wharton James, the prolific author of travel books and F.H. Maude, the noted landscape photographer were two who spent a great deal of time at Bass Camp.

With some justification Bass has been called a "visionary" by some of his contemporaries. He not only foresaw some of the later developments at the Canyon but took steps to adjust to them. He built stage roads to accommodate the tourists that were sure to come with completion of the Atlantic-Pacific Railroad (the forerunner of the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe). He saw

the need for a spur line to the Grand Canyon and actively lobbied for its construction, chairing the first organizational meeting of the Grand Canyon Railroad at the town of Williams in 1894.

He was quick to recognize the importance of the automobile and the changes it would create in travel patterns; he welcomed the opportunity it presented to break the railroad's monopoly on Grand Canyon travel. Although he never learned to drive, he bought the first car for his business in 1914 and added others later on.

Finally, as his Canyon years drew to a close, he dreamed of incorporating an airplane in his tourist business. He should not be faulted if he did not foresee the problems that signs, automobiles, airplanes and an ever increasing number of visitors would create half a century later.

When Fred Harvey was given the contract as the principal concessioner at Grand Canyon National Park, in 1920, the days of the Bass tourist business were numbered. The 71-year-old Bass had neither the energy nor the resources to compete with Fred Harvey and the Santa Fe Railroad. In 1923 Bass entertained his last guest and the family moved to Wickenburg. Three years later, in 1926, Bass sold his holdings to the Santa Fe Land and Improvement Company. He died at Wickenburg in 1933, aged 84. In accordance with his last request, his ashes were deposited by airplane on Bass Tomb, a prominent peak in the Canyon which commands a view of the section he explored.

Although the name of William Wallace Bass is not unknown to people familiar with the history of Grand Canyon and northern Arizona, the wide range of his accomplishments has gone curiously unrecognized. This is understandable since the western section of Grand Canyon National Park, so closely associated with the name of Bass, is not easily accessible and until recently the Bass Collection has been a rather closely guarded family treasure.

Preliminary cataloging of this collection resulted in the following: Seventy-three books; 503 photographs identified and annotated by William G. Bass; 129 glass plate photographic negatives; over 500 nitrate negatives; some 400 hand tinted glass transparencies and the projector for showing them; 200 stereographs; diaries of both William W. Bass and his wife Ada; hand and typewritten manuscripts of poetry and prose by William W. Bass; letters to and from Senator Ashurst and Congressman Hayden; correspondence with Fred Harvey and the Atchison, Topeka & Santa Fe Railroad; permits and mine location notices and other, miscellaneous documents; 19 hours of oral history with William G. Bass and Ed Kahle, a former employee of William W. Bass; and various items of memorabilia.

Stephen G. Maurer, President of Heritage Associates, Inc., is serving in an advisory capacity to the Bass family concerning financial support for curatorial needs and for locating a suitable repository for the Collection. A broad program of research by various H.A., Inc. affiliates include an oral history of the Bass family and others who worked at the Grand Canyon during these early years, analysis of diaries and personal correspondence, location and documentation of Bass-related sites in the Canyon, and investigations based on historical photographic materials. A recently completed work based on the Collection is Lisa Madsen's thesis, *The Grand Canyon Tourist Business of the W. Bass Family* (University of New Mexico, 1980).

The Bass Collection — a unique, irreplaceable resource, encountered in a dusty, and forgotten attic in the Wickenburg home of Bill Bass — provides a priceless opportunity to open up an hitherto neglected area in the history of Grand Canyon National Park and northern Arizona. In a larger context, it offers valuable insights into some aspects of life in turn-of-the-century America. No other collection related to Grand Canyon history, can match the variety and significance of the materials found in these papers.



Bass Camp, on the Grand Canyon's south rim, is the setting for this turn of the century photo. William W. Bass is second from right.