

JAMES MADISON PAGE

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Sheridan Schools
Grade 8

Source: Interview with
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Mary and
Christine Holt
Twin Bridges

JAMES MADISON PAGE

James Madison Page was born in Crawfordville, Pennsylvania, on July 22, 1839. He was the youngest of five children. His parents, Wallace and Nancy Bonney Page, were natives of Massachusetts. Wallace was born in 1810, and Nancy Bonney in 1816. They were married at Ellington, Chautaugua County, New York, on April 18, 1832, and became the parents of five children: Elvis, Wallace Robert, Elmina, Rodney Walter, and James Madison. The first three were born in Ellington and the last two in Conneaut, Crawford County, Pennsylvania.

Both parental and maternal grandfathers of James Page were soldiers in the Revolution, and both families were established on American soil in the early colonial period.

Wallace and Nancy Bonney Page went to Crawfordville, Pennsylvania, in 1837, as pioneer farmers. Wallace died there in 1840. Later Nancy Bonney Page married again. But her second husband was an unkind stepfather, so the children left home to live with relatives in Michigan, where their mother had moved. Nancy died in 1852, in Henry (Henry) County, Illinois.

From his 10th through his 13th year, James Page was in the home of an uncle in the northern part of Michigan. There he attended school. He ran away and secured work on a farm. He resided in Michigan until he was 23.

On August 14, 1862, he enlisted in Company A, 6th Michigan Volunteer Cavalry of which he became commissary Sergeant. He became a prisoner of Andersonville Prison. His book, "The True Story of Andersonville Prison"

of 1908, is still available in many public libraries in the west. He received his honorable discharge on June 25, 1865. At the War's end, Jim was fortunately dissuaded by his sister, Mina, from rejoining the command of General Custer when he was sent on his western foray against the Indians.

In 1865, he entered the Eastman Business College in Chicago, graduating in 1866. In the spring of that year he went to Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. From there he started on the trip across the plains to Montana. He arrived in Virginia City, June 20, 1866. His party encountered a band of Sioux Indians near Fort Bridger, Utah, but the conflict was averted.

He persuaded his entire family to join him and make their homes in the lower Beaverhead Valley of Madison County in the community later named in their honor, Pageville. As late as 1907, they were still living there, an unbroken circle.

The oldest brother Robert, was the first to come, bringing his wife and three children from Minnesota via Missouri riverboat and "prairie schooner" in 1879.

The next year, The Henry Utley's arrived on the immigrant train from Michigan, "staging it" the last lap of the journey from Lima. A year later his brother, Rodney, came out from Michigan to help Jim on a government survey contract. He also brought his widowed sister, Vira Stephens, who in a few years married Newton Paige.

In the fall of 1866, Mr. Page and O.B. Varney broke eighty acres in the Madison Valley in what was then called Sodom. He paid five cents a pound in gold for seed wheat took all of his savings. Grasshoppers destroyed the crop the following spring. Nevertheless, he continued farming

until 1869. Then he went to Utah and bought horses, bringing them through the Beaverhead valley where he continued to maintain his home. He became one of the leading farmers and stockholders of this section owning about 1700 acres in different ranches. He raised sufficient grain for his own use and large crops of hay; but devoted most of his attention to cattle and horses, breeding high grade scho^hhorn cattle and fine Belgian strain of horses. His homestead ranch is located five miles south of Twin Bridges where his granddaughters, Mary and Christine Holt now live. The town of Pageville was named in his honor and was his postoffice address.

Primarily a surveyor, Jim was best known during the first three decades of his life at Pageville as having extended the United States Government surveys in every county in Montana. He spent many months each year for a long time "in the field." Many times his contracts allowed for two parties working at the same time, with his brother Rodney as co-contractor. They had most of the young men of Pageville, including their relatives, on their crews.

Jim and his wife, Mary, had four daughters: Helen (Nellie); Mina; Elizabeth (Lizzie); and Lena. Nellie and Lizzie were teachers for many years, and Nellie (Mrs. Beaidell) was a fine piano teacher.

Jim Page was very active in helping Madison County getting started in many ventures. He had a large part in establishing the school district called the Baker District, (later Centerville, in the "70's". After his youngest brother came to live at Pageville, Jim and his brother-in-law, Henry Utley, and others were leaders in starting the Pageville district No. 24. Having no school house, they held school in a room of Jim Page's home, with his niece, Miss Eva Page, who had just come from Michigan, as

teacher. This session lasted only from Dec. 4, 1882 to March 14, 1883. There were ten girls and seven boys enrolled. The next year, the district built a log schoolhouse across from the Utley's ranch home, and again Miss Eva Page was the teacher. The term was shorter but more children attended, ten boys and fourteen girls. Several of them were the teacher's brothers and sisters or cousins.

A few years later the schoolhouse was used as a meeting place for a Baptist Church.

The Pageville Post Office was organized in 1892, at the ranch home which is now the Henry Gien place. Robert, Rodney, and James Page and their oldest sister, Mrs. Vera Stephens, were postmaster for all the years the post office operated, about twenty-three years. The famous Methodist "Circuit Rider," called Brother Van Orsdal, is said to have given the name of Pageville to the community.

Among the things for which James Page will be remembered besides his interest in starting the local schools, are: his two terms as the Montana Territory Legislature; several terms as county surveyor of Madison County; President for at least one term of the Montana Mining Engineers; one of the three trustees who were responsible for getting the State Orphan's Home located at Twin Bridges; furnishing the maps and information for the telephone company to start their telephone system in this part of Montana; encouraging the mining industry; raising fine horses, both draft and "trotters"; encouraging the coming of the railroad to Twin Bridges and the Ruby valley; and many other interests. He was more than once head of the Montana Pioneers Society.

James Page was a very tall, about 6'2", a handsome, well-built man,

with a fine sense of humor and qualities of leadership which made people willing to hear him speak on subjects in which he was interested. He loved to give speeches about the history of the west, starting with the coming of Lewis and Clark, right up the river on which his home was built, the Beaverhead.

The latter part of his life, Mr. Page lived in Long Beach, California, but upon his death in 1924, his body was brought back to the Twin Bridges Cemetery for burial. His impressive granite tombstone wears the insignia of the Grant Army at the Potomac, (GAR).

Without James Madison Page, many of the fine institutions and improvements of Madison County and his part of it would have been much longer getting started. Much is owed to him.

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