

James Leslie Cassidy

James Leslie Cassidy was born 19 April 1853 in New Carlisle, Bonaventure, Quebec, Canada. He was the second of five children of Michael Wallace Cassidy and Ellen Sullivan. The family lived in Bonaventure, Lower Canada (Quebec), in 1861.¹ By 1871 they had moved to Albion Mines (now Stellarton), Pictou, Nova Scotia, Canada. This was a coal mining town and James' father was a ship carpenter while James was a laborer.²

James immigrated to America and in 1875 he was a miner in Storey, Nevada.³ He met and married Julia Hills Johnson (who was a cook in her father's boarding house in Silver Reef) in 1880 in Silver Reef, Washington, Utah Territory.⁴ James was a carpenter in the silver mines and he and Julia were living in the Harrison House hotel in 1880.⁵ They had seven children (the oldest child was born in Silver Reef). They lived in Washington City and then moved to Idaho and then to Arizona Territory by 1887.⁶ They settled in Nephi (four miles from Tempe) in Maricopa County, where Julia's half-brother Benjamin and other Mormon families from Spring Lake, Utah Territory, were living.⁷

In 1890, James went to Congress, Yavapai, Arizona, to build an addition to the stamp mill there. He built a "commodious cottage" on a 50x100 foot lot on the mesa west of town. He worked as the superintendent of construction for Martin Maier's new building in Prescott and was considered a first-class mechanic and millwright.⁸ In 1892 he was employed by Superintendent Taylor of the Quartz Mountain Mining Company to build the mill for that company.⁹ In 1895, Julie filed for divorce on grounds of abandonment.¹⁰ She remarried that year and had six more children.¹¹ James worked for many years as a carpenter for the railroad.¹²

James Cassidy was in charge of the day shift at the Last Chance copper mine in Yavapai. The "boss" mill builder in Arizona was Horatio Nixon Palmer, a business partner of James. Palmer went to South Africa with W H Johnson in 1896, where they were both murdered by natives.¹³ James joined the Bulawayo field force in June 1896 and went to Mashonaland where the natives had risen up and wiped out most of the prospectors and others who were keeping stores and stations. He was paid twelve and six pence per day.¹⁴ He headed the expedition that went in search of Palmer and Johnson's remains and assisted in their burial.¹⁵

James wrote several letters home which were shared with the newspaper. He wrote, "Palmer and his party were murdered while going to look at a mine and he was one of the first that was killed. They

¹ Quebec Census, 1861.

² Canada Census, 1871.

³ Nevada State Census, 1875.

⁴ Arizona County Marriages, 1871-1964.

⁵ United States Census, 1880.

⁶ *Familysearch.org*

⁷ *Arizona Republic*, 10 September 2015; 17 September 2015.

⁸ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 17 September 1890, p. 3; 8 April 1891, p. 4; 10 June 1891, p. 3; 26 September 194, p. 3.

⁹ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 9 March 1892, p. 1.

¹⁰ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 2 June 1895, p. 5.

¹¹ *Familysearch.org*

¹² *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 9 May 1900, p. 6; *Los Angeles Times*, 28 May 1900, p. 5.

¹³ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 20 November 1895.

¹⁴ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 18 November 1896, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 9 May 1900, p. 6.

were ambushed at the Shangani River between Buluwayo and Pretoria. I saw the official list yesterday and Palmer and Johnson were two of the victims. I would have been with them if I had made my connections as expected at Johannesburg. I expect to leave here in a few days for Rhodesia and if I get through alive I will find their graves and mark the spot.”¹⁶

Two weeks later, another letter explained, “Buluwayo at present is under martial law, on account of letting the troops go to the front. The Matabeles have concentrated in the Matopu Hills but they are still surrounding this place. I have joined Gifford’s cavalry and we expect to go to the front at any time now, under the command of Col Spreckly, as Gifford, our commander got his arm shot off in his last engagement and is in the hospital... All the troops that are quartered here have to sleep in leagues and all those who live in the outskirts of the city and surrounding country are leagued here... There will be nothing doing here for months to come. Our pay is \$3.12 per day and just covers our expenses and we have to cook our food ourselves... Milk has come down to \$1.75 per quart, one month ago it was \$7 per quart. Eggs sold this morning for \$4.25 per dozen and a month ago for \$9.50.”¹⁷

Another letter: “I believe I must have a charmed life, for when I came through the Manguyo pass there were a thousand hostile Matabeles on all sides, but they did not happen to see me... I have fallen in with a man by the name of James Mocks, and when the war is over, if we both come out all right, we shall go into the mining region below where Palmer got killed to prospect. There are some ancient diggings there ... which have not been located yet” ... there were sixty in the company, all well-armed and well mounted, and nearly all Americans.¹⁸

In 1897 he wrote, “I came in off my prospecting trip on Christmas evening, and have been in town ever since. I have been very successful and pegged twelve blocks of old workings in the south belt of the Guanda district, and am in great expectation that in six months from now I will be wearing diamonds. I will start on another trip in about four days for another belt known as the Bembesi district, about sixty miles from here and expect to stay until the first of March. Later than then it will not be safe to stay in the veldt, for when the natives get their grain in we then expect trouble from them. On the other hand, the rain will be over and the veldt drying causes most of the fevers.”¹⁹

James sent home pictures of the natives and scenery which were displayed in the window of Jules Bauman’s office in Prescott. A private in the British forces, he received the Royal Humane Society’s medal and a promotion to sergeant for saving Lt Findlay from drowning under circumstances that exhibited remarkable nerve. After getting Lt Findlay on his horse, he was washed away and swam ashore with the lieutenant, both being in full marching dress²⁰

James had written Julia about 1898 saying he had a “rush” job in South Africa and that if she didn’t hear from him within six months, either the fever of the lions got him.²¹ He was not heard from again and it was presumed that he died in South Africa some time before 1900.

¹⁶ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 3 June 1896, p. 1.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 19 August 1896, p. 1.

¹⁹ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 31 March 1897, p. 4.

²⁰ *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 27 October 1897, p. 4; 9 May 1900, p. 6; *Los Angeles Times*, 28 May 1900, p. 5.

²¹ Joseph Ellis Johnson, *Trail to Sundown*, by Rufus David Johnson.

H. N. PALMER, JAMES CASSIDY.

Palmer & Cassidy
CONTRACTORS and BUILDERS

QUARTZ MILL

—AND—

Mining Machinery

A SPECIALTY.

Plans and Specifications furnished on application. All work guaranteed.
Prescott, Arizona, January 23d, 1890.

(Image from the *Weekly Journal-Miner*, 5 March 1890, p. 4)