

**William Henry Sammons and Emma Edith Luther**  
**(1848-1924) (1857-1904)**

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**C**harlie Sammons was my maternal grandfather. He was one of two children (Charles & Vespa-cious) born to William Henry Sammons (1848-1924) and Emma Edith Luther (1857-1904). The story of his parents was unknown to my mother (Mary Sammons Beirne) and all of her siblings as it was never discussed and they were discouraged from pursuing the topic with any questions.

In some prior research, it was discovered that there were a number of Sammons who lived in the Towanda, Pa. environs and some who were prominent in their chosen fields. Although there were Sammons' aunts, uncles and cousins, this was unknown to the children and grandchildren of Charlie and Josie (Kelly) Sammons.

The reason for the mystery was never revealed. It was always thought that it was because Charlie's parents had divorced which was a big "no-no" in our Catholic culture. Later, it was discovered that Charlie Sammons' relatives were Protestant and Methodist. Given that he converted to Catholicism to marry Josie Kelly, it was assumed that the break with his relatives was due to religious differences. Also, his mother (Emma Edith Luther) traced her roots to the Martin Luther family. Given the intensity and strict adherence to their Catholic faith, the assumption was that this mystery was never revealed because it was shrouded in a combination of divorce (never talk about that!!), Luther bloodlines (look out!!), and the Methodist ancestral voices (don't go there).

After some careful detective work, it is now clear that Charlie's upbringing was very difficult and that his father, William Henry, was not one of the good guys. The divorce of Charlie's parents was very ugly and occurred at a time when divorce was uncommon and rarely pursued by a woman unless there was/were unusual circumstances. This was the case.

Emma Edith Luther (1857-1904) was my great-grandmother. She was the 2nd of two children born to David Soper Luther (1823-1893) and Polly Strobe (1823-1884). She also had an adopted brother Frank Albert Luther (1864-1937) and a half sister Marie Luther. Emma Edith was born on August 26, 1857 in an area of Pennsylvania called Burlington Township in Bradford County. It is only about 3-5 miles from Towanda. The county was originally founded in 1810 as Ontario County but had a name change to honor US Attorney General William Bradford, a member of Washington's cabinet. Until 1878, Emma Edith lived in Burlington Township (Bradford County), Pennsylvania on her father's farm.

At the time of her birth, James Buchanan was president and the U.S. was embroiled with the beginnings of the Civil War. The Dred Scott decision was made; Frederick Law Olmstead was designing New York's Central Park; Louis Pasteur was born; and Gustave Flaubert published his fa-

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mous novel “Madame Bovary.” Within a year, Theodore (TR) Roosevelt and William Bonney (a.k.a. Billy the Kid) were born; the Lincoln-Douglas debates occurred; Macy’s Department store opened in NYC; the first transatlantic cable was used to communicate across the ocean; and stagecoach service and mail delivery was introduced between Stylus, Mo. and San Francisco, a distance of 2812 miles.

It is not certain how William and Emma met, but it is likely that he was employed at Emma’s father’s farm. It is known from various census records that William and his brothers moved from New York State to the Burlington Mountain area of Bradford County, PA. David Soper Luther employed many of the local men at that time. It is likely that William was employed at one of the mills and worked on David’s farm. It was common in those days for men to work for their room and board. Also, various court depositions document that William Henry was indebted to David Soper Luther. This is where and how William and Emma met.

At some time prior to 1872, William Henry arrived in this area of Pennsylvania from Dutchess County, New York. He was seeking work and was a farm-hand/laborer on the Luther farm where he met Emma Edith. Sometime during August of 1872, Emma became pregnant with William’s child. She was 14 or barely 15 years old at the time. William was 24. From various court records<sup>1</sup> surrounding their divorce, it is possible that Emma’s pregnancy was the result of an assault by William as he was not one of the good guys and is one of my “mystery men” (see insert in James Beirne story).

They were married on October 24, 1872. She was 15 years and 59 days old and he was 25, a difference of 9 years. She was two months pregnant at the time. According to her, they then lived together for four years and she “kept house” for them on the Luther farm. Her father David may have made the offer of the home to induce William to remain there and provide a husband to his pregnant daughter. There was more than one house on the property. David S. Luther and his wife Polly occupied the homestead (main house) and Emma and William Henry lived in another house on the property.

William worked the farm “on shares.” This meant that he did not own the land but worked it with David Luther in exchange for his use of the house and land. In addition, he received a share of the crops for his labor. For the first year or so (circa 1871-1872), they worked it together and David lived on the farm for part of each season. David and his wife Polly kept house there while David and William Henry did seasonal farm chores like haying and crop picking. They worked it together until 1875. William Henry worked it alone through October 14, 1876.

During that time (1872-1876), William Henry and Emma were supported by the Luthers with living supplies. William went to David for provisions, groceries, flour and such things needed for William, Emma and their children. This may have been seen as part of his “cash draw” until the crops were harvested and sold when they would normally have “settled up” which was the normal

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<sup>1</sup> The information about them and their divorce, including multiple depositions & declarations, are recorded in the Bradford County Courthouse; Towanda, PA.

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procedure at that time. However, William and David were never able to settle their accounts and affairs. Although David made several offers, William Henry refused to settle. It is likely that William was a deadbeat in more ways than one. He used his influence as the husband for David's pregnant daughter to control David and secure supplies from him.

At one point, David gave William Henry a cow to use for their milk, butter and cheese provisions. The cow was left with Emma and William for over three years. David indicated that he furnished William a good deal of stuff over the years and had entirely supported William during the last six months (April-October 1876) that he was on the farm. David recalled that William was not a good provider of either clothes or food for Emma and their family. Emma said that she was totally dependent upon her parents for support while she lived with William Henry but that he would provide for his "folk" (i.e. brothers and father). She said that "he occasionally furnished flour, but that he never furnished tea, coffee, spices or sugar," according to her recollection.

When they lived together, Emma always wrote his letters for him because William Henry was illiterate. These were mostly to his brother Walter (1858-1917) and she would sign William's name for him. She did not recall that he could write anything by himself. He was not pleasant to her and treated her badly on several occasions with verbal abuse and profanity. She recollected that he was mean to her and threatened to leave her on several occasions. One of their neighbors was Jayne Cruyne. She lived on the Luther farm until she subsequently moved to Towanda Township. While she was there, she knew both William Henry and Emma Edith on a firsthand basis. She recalled that Emma was a good woman and a good wife. Jayne's description of her as a woman is interesting because Emma was just 15-19 years old during those years. Jayne worked for Emma when Emma was sick with her firstborn (my grandfather Charlie) by doing wash and other chores. She remembers

William Henry Sammons  
 b. 15 May 1848, East Fishkill (Dutchess Cty), New York  
 d. 27 Feb 1924, Robert Packer Hospital; Sayre, PA  
 & Emma Edith Luther  
 b. 26 Aug 1857  
 d. 20 Dec 1904, Overshot, PA  
 mdy. 24 Oct 1872

Charles Joseph Sammons  
 b. 28 May 1873, Overshot, Pennsylvania  
 d. 12 Oct 1955, Towanda, PA  
 & Josephine Eulalia Kelly  
 b. 25 Jul 1880, Kelly Hill; Forks Township (Sullivan Cty), PA; near Overton (Bradford Cty)  
 d. 17 Jan 1954, Towanda, PA  
 mdy. 27 Jun 1906, SS. Peter & Paul; Towanda, Pennsylvania



Vespacious L. Sammons  
 b. 24 Jun 1875, Luthers Mills, PA  
 d. 2 Aug 1929, Endicott, NY  
 & Muzia Doria Swingle  
 b. 22 Jan 1874, Littleville, PA  
 d. 6 Nov 1964, Endicott, NY  
 mdy. 21 Sep 1901, Penn Yan, NY



that Emma's mother would bring food to the Sammons' house. This included sugar, coffee, and tea. These years were very difficult for Emma and there was considerable abuse.

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Emma Edith and William Henry had two children:

- Charles Joseph (1873-1955)
- Vespacious (1875-1929)

Charlie Sammons (my grandfather) was born May 28, 1873 at their house on the Luther farm. Emma was 15 years and 9 months old and William Henry was 25. Emma remembered that he used bad language and verbally abused her only a few months after Charlie's birth. She was not afraid of him even though he had threatened her life. It was only three weeks (circa June 1873) after her delivery of Charlie that one major attack occurred.

William Henry was critical of Emma on a regular basis. He searched for ways to find fault with what she did or did not do. Emma was sick in bed and needed help and Jayne had come to the house to assist. Jayne heard William complaining and scolding Emma because she was unable to make his clothes when she was sick. He wanted her to make shirts for him and his brother Walter. He demanded that she make two shirts. Jayne recalled that Walter was in the house with them during this exchange. Emma told him that she was unable to do it at that time because she was so ill. Jayne was dressing the baby (Charlie Sammons) in one room when she heard Mr. Sammons scolding Emma in the bedroom. William Henry was verbally abusing her in their meager bedroom. He had a butcher knife in his hand, and threatened to "cut her throat" saying that "if he would serve her right, he would cut her throat." Remember, she was only 15 at the time!

On other occasions, Jayne said that he would scold her and often threatened to hit her. Jayne intervened in this scene and then made the two shirts for the Sammons brothers to make peace. He never paid Jayne for the shirts nor did he ever pay her for the other work that she did at his house for his family. Instead, Emma's parents paid Jayne what she was owed, including the shirts for William and Walter Sammons. Over the ensuing time, until 1876, Jayne recalled that he did not speak well of Emma because he said, "she didn't do enough for his kin." Jayne noticed that William Henry was "in rather poor circumstances" and that he did not want to live with Emma anymore.

Jayne said that Walter Sammons lived there all the time and that William Henry's father (Edward Sammons (b.1820) and another brother (George B. Sammons 1853-1929) were at the house most of the time. While she saw them at the table for some meals, she never saw any of them work and did not think that they helped out in any way. In effect, they were all dependent upon the Luthers.

In 1874, Emma was pregnant again and she delivered Vespacious, her second son by William Henry, on June 24, 1875. Emma was 17 years and 10 months old, William was 27 and Charlie was 1 year and 11 months old. Time marched on for another year and the situation did not change, nor did it improve.

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1876 emerged as a significant year. Mark Twain published “The Adventures of Tom Sawyer,” Alexander Graham Bell transmitted the first words spoken by telephone and was granted a patent, and the presidential election resulted in a popular victory for Sam Tilden and an electoral college win for Rutherford Hayes. This would not be repeated until 2000 when George Bush was elected. In June, Gen. George Armstrong Custer, the “Son of the Morning Star” and youngest-ever general of US armies, and 264 of his cavalymen were annihilated by Crazy Horse and other Indian leaders at the Little Bighorn in Montana. Wild Bill Hickock was killed in Deadwood on August 2 holding his famous “aces & eights.”

It was in October of 1876 that the bottom fell out of Emma’s and William’s relationship, such as it was. They had been married and “keeping house” together for almost four years and had two children. On the morning of the 14th, William arose early and walked to Towanda. It is unknown why he went or what he planned. This was the last time that he was ever with them. Shortly after his departure, the house was engulfed in flames and mysteriously burned to the ground during his convenient absence. It destroyed everything. Emma saved herself and her children and the three of them went to her father’s home. William Henry was the likely arsonist although he was never formally charged. Emma was 19 and the sole support for two kids when William deserted her and his kids. Charlie was 3 years and four months old and Vespacious was 1 year and three months old.

The fire and its aftermath made a big impression on Charlie. Years later, he would have his own large family. Charlie was always fearful about house fires ever since his experience as a three-year old when his own father committed arson in an effort to exit his marriage and responsibilities. It must have been a frightening experience because Charlie never forgot it. He would fret and worry about household fires when he was raising his 10 children on Ward Avenue in Towanda, Pennsylvania. The house had two major fire hazards: the first was the coal furnace in the basement, and the other, which was more significant, was the wood-burning stove in the kitchen. It was his constant fear that a spark might burn the house down and harm his family.

He rose early each day and tended the fire in the kitchen woodstove. He would fix his own breakfast as well as that of any of his kids who were awake at that hour and then leave the house to walk to the train depot where he would take the work train to Sayre. Prior to his departure, he would wake Josie and ask her “to watch the fire and mind the children.” His breakfast was called “Papa’s/Grandpa’s eggs” by his kids and grandchildren. It was a special treat! He would scramble the eggs in a pan on the woodstove while frying the potatoes and onions in the same skillet. The frying medium was either pure lard or leftover fat pieces.

Continuing with the divorce story, it was on the following day (October 15,1876) that William returned for no known reason after staying away all night. Perhaps, he returned to confirm what he had done but was shocked that his family had survived and he did not know how to recover. Emma talked with him at the site of the burned house. She offered to try and salvage their relationship by suggesting that they find another place, anywhere, to “keep house.” He replied, “He was not ready.” He left after their brief exchange. William then rented a house owned by Dicatur Ayers. At

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one point, William went to see Emma at her father's home. William was accompanied by his friend George Lampman. He requested that she move in with him at the Ayers house. Although she was only 19, Emma must have been pretty strong and perceptive. She was uncertain about it and did not agree to his request or demand. She told him she would go with him "when he could take care of her and his children rather than his folks" (i.e. kin). He said, "That would never be." She did not refuse to go with him. She just did not accompany him when he left.

She saw him again about two weeks later in Towanda. She again suggested that they get back together but that she would need ten dollars to buy dishes for them. He said that he didn't have the money and that "he did not want to live with her bad enough to give her the money for the dishes." During and after these exchanges, William never inquired about the children.

William then left the area to return to Dutchess County in New York State. It is unknown what he was doing there. Emma continued to live with her parents and she raised her two sons on their property. On May 5, 1877, she formally filed her Divorce Petition (request) on the grounds of desertion and her father was her witness. Charlie was nearly 4 years old and Vespacious was almost 2. It would be another one year and seven months before the courts granted her divorce. During that time, the courts were involved in an effort to legally secure her divorce. Witnesses were subpoenaed, depositions scheduled and re-scheduled, depositions taken and refuted, public notification recorded via newspaper ads, validation testified by the editor and then the court hearing for the divorce. William was difficult to locate and he refused to answer the subpoenas. He would eventually drag out the divorce by having a countersuit filed in New York State in which he denied his desertion of his family even though he was nowhere to be found.

Her divorce was granted on December 3, 1878. She paid \$2.50. She had been associated with William Henry for a total of four years including the two years and two months that it took to get her divorce and custody of her children. She was 19 years and 99 days old. William was 30 years and seven months old (See divorce timeline at end of chapter).

After her divorce, Emma lived with her parents until she met Franklin Granger, a Civil War veteran and one of 12 twelve children born to Roderick Granger and Louise Ruty. She married Franklin on March 1, 1879 in Monroeton, PA. She was 21 and Franklin was 33. Charlie was almost 6 and Vespacious was 4. She and her new husband had custody of Charles and Vespacious Sammons as they were listed as family members of the Granger household in the census of 1880. In the 1880 census, Frank Granger is listed as a 34 year-old bark peeler with his wife Emma as wife/housekeeper and stepsons: Charles Simons (age 8) and Vespacia (age 6). The census incorrectly recorded the boys' names as "Simons" instead of the correct name of Sammons. They later lived in Towanda, PA. where they had three additional children: Henry B., Enoch Luther, and Mabel Granger.

Mary Sammons Beirne (Charles Sammons' eldest child and my mother) recalled one experience where the families connected. Apparently, Mary's sister Agnes came home one day and was telling her mother about a new boyfriend. Upon inquiry, her mother learned that his name was

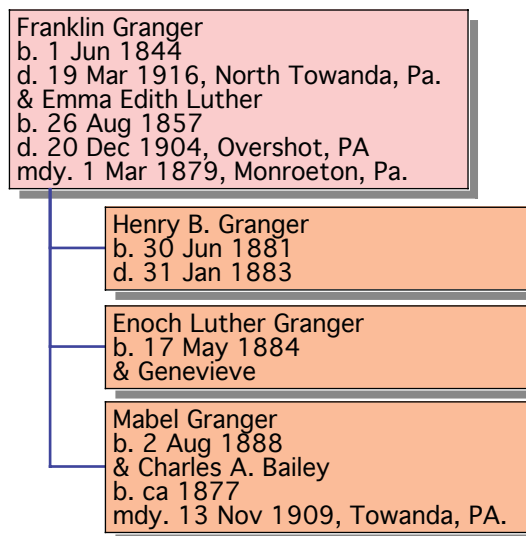
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Granger. It was likely Enoch Granger because Henry Granger had died. He was Agnes' half cousin but that was unknown to her because neither Agnes nor any of her siblings were ever told about the grandparents' divorce and her grandmother's remarriage. Agnes was forbidden to ever see him again without any explanation.

Emma's mother (Polly Strope) died August 1, 1884. She was 60. Emma's father remarried on January 1, 1885 to May Scudder. They had one child; Marie. David died September 18, 1893 in Towanda. He was 70.

Emma Edith died December 20, 1904. As reported in the local paper, Mrs. Frank Granger (i.e. Emma Edith Luther Sammons Granger) died at her home at Overshot, Pa. Sunday morning (December 20, 1904) at eight o'clock after a long illness. She was the only daughter of David and Polly Luther and leaves a husband (Franklin Granger) and three sons (i.e. Charles and Vespacious by William Henry Sammons and Enoch by Frank Granger), and one daughter (Mabel Granger) to mourn her death. Her funeral was held on Thursday at twelve o'clock at her house. Her obituary listed three sons and one daughter. She was 47. She had a short life and it was a tough time until 1878. She was married and had her first child at 15, abused for six years, divorced and remarried at 21. Her last 26 years were much improved from the first 21!

The Luthers Mills Cemetery records indicate that Emma's dates were 8/26/1854-12/30/1894. These are incorrect as discovered in other records and should not be used. The same cemetery record shows her son Henry Granger (6/30/1881-1/31/1883).



Charlie Sammons carried a picture of his mother in his pocket until he died in 1955. It is unknown what ever became of it, but he treasured his memory of her. He was 31 when she died.

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We do not know much about Charlie and Vet's relationship with Franklin Granger. When Franklin died March 20, 1916, he only listed 1 son and 1 daughter and made no mention of Charles or Vespacious. By then, both Charlie and Vet were married and raising their own families. There was never a mention of their stepfather (Franklin Granger) by any of Charlie's children. When I was only five (1949), my grandfather (Charlie Sammons) walked me to the bank in Towanda where he showed me the picture of the old covered bridge that crossed the river. He told me that he had walked across it many times when he was 12 or so when he went to town for work. That would have been circa 1885. He was "on his own" by then and only 12 years old.

In those days, it was perfectly common and accepted for rural youths to do a man's work at age 11-12. They were essentially on their own by this age and so was Charlie Sammons. There are many examples of this including John Rockefeller, Sam Clemens and William F. Cody. "Buffalo Bill" (1846-1917) was 11 when his father died and his mother arranged for his employment as a mounted messenger for the freight company Majors & Russell who started the Pony Express circa 1860. Buffalo Bill was one of the first superstars and began his show career in 1883: "Buffalo Bill's Wild West—America's National Entertainment." It would run until 1916 with various backers and partners and included Annie Oakley (Little Missie) in the show. Bill would appear in over 1700 dime novels, run 100-130 shows per year and employ over 500 people, including many of the Indians who survived the last of the Indian Wars in the 1880s.

William Henry was never discussed in the Sammons household so we don't know much but we have been able to identify what became of him. It is known that he worked for the Lehigh Valley Railroad in Athens as a janitor at the time of his death and had been there for many years. His son Charlie also worked for the same railroad so they must have seen one another on many occasions. Charlie's brother-in-law, Peter Sweeney, also worked there. Charlie never mentioned it!

William Henry's death notice was reported in the Daily Review on February 29, 1924 (a leap year):

"William H. Sammons died Wednesday, February 27, in the Robert Packer Hospital at Sayre. He is survived by two sons, Charles of Towanda and Vespacious of Endicott, N.Y., also a brother, George Sammons of Towanda. Funeral services will be held at the Stebbens undertaking parlor at Waverly on Monday, March 3, at 2 o'clock".

His death certificate reported him as a widower and was signed by Harriet Ball (his niece) of 607 Main Street; Towanda, Pa. He died at home at 3:10 am of gangrenous genitalis with uremia as contributory. He had been at the hospital for seven days. He is buried at the Tioga Point Cemetery in Athens, Pa. He was 75.

My mother (Mary Sammons Beirne) recalled going to her grandfather's (William Henry Sammons) funeral in March 1924. She went with her father, her sister Agnes, Uncle Vet, Aunt Muzie and their daughter Gladys to Athens, Pa. for the funeral/burial in Tioga Point Cemetery. There were



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very few people in attendance. The cemetery plot is owned and co-occupied by George Sammons (1853-1929) who was William Henry's brother. George moved from Poughkeepsie, N.Y. to Towanda, PA. Also buried there is another brother: Walter Sammons (1858-1917).

William apparently left whatever he had to a nephew in California. When Charlie and Vet were coached to contest the will, they said "that he never did anything for them in life, so they wouldn't want anything of his now. Just let it go."

**Timeline of Divorce**

- **October 14, 1876** Fire occurs and William leaves.
- **May 5, 1877** Emma files divorce petition.
- **May 8, 1877** Subpoena letter issued to William Henry.
- **September 4, 1877** Court issues Pleas subpoena.
- **September 7, 1877** Court depositions are taken: Emma Edith, David S. Luther, Hallock Armstrong (minister), Jane Cruyne.
- **September 19, 1877** Subpoena (2nd) issued to William Henry to appear in December.
- **December 10, 1877** Court issues notice that William Henry failed to appear.
- **January 1878** William Henry counter sues through an attorney in New York State.
- **February 11, 1878** Proof of publication by Bradford Reporter, a weekly newspaper, of Emma's intent to divorce on grounds of desertion.
- **March 27, 1878** William Henry enters plea saying he will appear.
- **April 26, 1878** William Henry gives deposition and denies that he deserted his family.
- **October 17, 1878** William Henry's lawyer issues deposition request to Emma and her father to appear on November 9, 1878.
- **October 17, 1878** Court appoints W.J.Young the authority to rule on the case.
- **December 3, 1878** Divorce is granted and Emma pays \$2.50.