

JACOB A. MEYERS CALLED BY DEATH

* From the standpoint of personal knowledge, shrewd observation and long study of the old journals and records of the past century, few men were as well informed on the early history of this region as the late Mr. Jacob A. Meyers of Meyers Falls. Although he had lived in the northeastern part of the Territory and State of Washington for over fifty-six years, Mr. Meyers never claimed the distinction of being a pioneer; the real pioneers—the fur traders, the missionaries, the gold miners and the old army men—he said, had all been here ahead of him, and they, he believed, were entitled to the full credit of pioneer effort. Of late years Mr. Meyers has passed considerable time each year in Spokane and the Coast cities. It was my good fortune to have been intimately acquainted with Mr. Meyers and in recent conversations with him he gave me the following interesting account of his family and their early experiences in Washington Territory; which I had typewritten and submitted to Mr. Meyers for his revision a couple of weeks before his death:

“My full name is Jacob Allen Meyers. On my father’s side I am descended from an old New York Holland Dutch family. John Wattermeyers, a Loyalist, moved with his immediate family to Canada during the Revolutionary War and, shortening the name to Meyers, founded the present Meyers family. His father and seven brothers were members of Washington’s army and remained in the State of New York. On my mother’s side I am descended from the Spaldings and from the same stock as Ethan and Noah Allen. I have thus both tory and union blood in my veins. I was born at Bellville, Ontario, Canada, on March 22, 1855, and I lived there until we came to Washington Territory in 1869. My father, Louthur Walden Meyers, joined an expedition of Canadians bound for the Pacific Coast that left Bellville on May 12, 1862. They came by way of Fort Garry, now the site of the city of Winnipeg, with Red River ox carts and wagons, across the plains, over the Rainy Mountains to the south branch of the Saskatchewan, reaching Edmonton on August 8, 1862. Most of the party went direct to the Cariboo mining country by the north pass; the remainder comprising thirty men, women and children and eighteen carts, came overland by the old Hudson’s Bay Com-

pany's trail into the Colville Valley, crossing the Rocky Mountains and coming by way of the Kootenai River and Montana. My father reached the site of the present town of Colville on November 7, 1862. He played a prominent part in the early development of the Colville section.

"For several years my father was employed in the Colville Valley and being an expert cabinet maker by trade he did considerable work about the old trading post and mill, as well as at the Military Post. In 1863 he took charge of the Oppenheimer Mill and worked until 1865. In March of that year he quit his job as miller for the D. H. Ferguson & Company after operating the flour mill on the Little Pend O'Reille River, and went to the gold mines at the Big Bend of the Upper Columbia River in British Columbia. My father's diary or journal gives the details of his experiences and the names of other contemporary miners, including many men identified with the earliest settlement of North-eastern Washington. The following are some of his fellow-miners: Joe Lapray, later to locate at La Pray's Bridge; Dave McLoughlin, son of Dr. McLoughlin of Old Oregon fame; Al Murray, Shep Bayley, Johnny Cluckston, for whom Cluckston Creek in Stevens County is named; John Campbell, Henry La-Flures, Bill Downey, John McCrea, Bob Ridley, George F. C. McCrea, Henry (Hank) Carnes, Bob Nobles, Joe Roberts, who settled near Addy; Joe Martin, George Taylor, Wm. Muirhead, Frank Jenett, Wm. Yagar, R. H. Douglas, Peter Liberty, a brother of Steve Liberty for whom Liberty Lake was named; Henry Wellington, A Chambois, Moses Dupais, Wm. (Billy) Weller, 'Texas' Hilburn, Vick Shefferfield, Ben McDonald, Ben Bergunder, McNeil, Curmers, Kelly, Thompson, Murphy, Pervis, St. Germain, Cole, Gerald, Anderson, Smith, Kirby, Seaman, Wilson, Baird and others.

"My father and the other miners did not make much money in their placer mining ventures, and many of them returned and settled in the Colville Valley. My father returned in November, 1865. The following June, 1866, with George B. Wonnacott, under the firm name of L. W. Meyers & Co. he leased the old Hudson's Bay Company grist mill and power, subject to its acquirement by the United States under the settlement then being made under the treaty of 1846. My father improved the dam and flume in 1866, and continued in possession of the mill after the Hudson's Bay Company relinquished its rights thereto and selected the lands embracing the falls of the Colville River as a

valuable land location, filing on and obtaining patent thereto when the lands were surveyed some twenty years later.

"In 1869 my father sent for the rest of the family to join him in the Colville Valley and on October 12, 1869, we started from Orono, Ontario, and came by train by way of Toronto, Detroit, St. Joe, Council Bluffs, and over the Union and Central Pacific railroads. Then via Kelton, Nampa and Baker City to Walla Walla where father met us. The trip from Walla Walla was made over the old Colville-Walla Walla Military Road that came up Cow Creek by the site of the present town of Sprague. There were then no towns whatever between Walla Walla and Colville, and only a handful of settlers. We reached father's home ranch in the Colville Valley on November 5, 1869. I have lived in the vicinity ever since.

"When I arrived the old Hudson's Bay Company Post, Fort Colville, was still occupied and conducted by the company with the late Angus MacDonal in charge as chief trader. The old United States army post, Fort Colville, was also occupied by a garrison of regular troops, and there was a little settlement near by called Pinckneyville, and afterwards Colville, which had a population of but sixty or seventy people. There was no settlement at all then at the site of the present town of Colville. The log buildings of the British boundary barracks, on the flat where the town of Marcus is now located, were still standing and some of them were used or occupied by the late Marcus Oppenheimer, who had a trading store there, and the flat and the town, later started there, became known as Marcus Flat and the town of Marcus.

"I was nearly fifteen years old when I came here to Washington Territory, and I have a very clear recollection of conditions as they then existed. The falls of the Colville River where the old Hudson's Bay Company's mill was situated became known as Meyers Falls. That old millsite had first been improved in 1827-1828 and was occupied by the first flour mill built in the United States west of the Rocky Mountains. The first patented flour ever made in the United States was manufactured there in 1866. In 1872, I assisted my father in dismantling the old mill, and in constructing a new mill on the site of the old "Goudy" mill of 1843. This old Hudson's Bay Company's mill once produced cereals that supplied all the employees of the Company from Utah to Peace River between the Cascades and the Rockies. I used to

help my father operate this mill, and in early days Indians would fetch their small stores of grain, threshed by being tramped out by the feet of cayuse ponies on a threshing floor, to our mill from the Spokane and Coeur d'Alene Valleys. The Chinamen, placer mining along the bars of the Columbia River, also patronized the mill. In my dealing with the Indians at the mill I soon learned to converse in the Chinook jargon. This mill was destroyed by fire in 1916.

"I was well acquainted with the Angus MacDonald family and I was frequently at the Hudson's Bay Company's Post occupied by them after its abandonment by the company. I was also well acquainted with Ranald MacDonald, son of Archibald MacDonald, but I was not as interested, thirty-five or forty years ago, as now in the early history of the Northwest and I failed to make timely use of my opportunity for first hand information afforded by my personal acquaintance with many of these early pioneer characters of the Colville Valley.

"The present town of Colville was started in 1884 and my father originally owned a considerable portion of the town. The townsite of Meyers Falls, named for my father, was also largely owned by him. In the spring of 1870, I set out on our farm what I believe was the first orchard planted north of the Snake River.

"In those early days there was no settlement whatever at Spokane Falls, and for a long time the only two crossings on the Spokane River were Monahans, afterwards known as La Pray's Bridge, on the Colville-Walla Walla Military Road, and Kendall's, afterwards known as Cowley's Bridge, on the Mullan Road; there were only a few hundred people living north of the Snake River. It was not until the 80's that we began trading at Spokane Falls. I met my first bandit going to Spokane Falls in 1882. There was not more than a few hundred people in the entire territory north of the Snake River at that time.

"We had left the ranch at Meyers Falls early one winter morning and started to Spokane behind a four-horse team, to get supplies of food and clothing. Our route was by the road that comes from Hillyard into Spokane from the north. Arriving in the city we loaded up with the supplies and decided to return home via the Four-Mound Prairie road, which took us west for several miles and then turned northeast back to Meyers Falls.

"Four miles from Spokane, on this road we were stopped by a man on horseback. It was in the dead of winter and the country was mantled in snow. The stranger stopped us, evidently taking

us for tenderfeet, and asked us where we were going. We told him and he said that we were on the wrong road and that we must go south for four miles.

"We knew immediately that something was wrong, that the stranger was trying to mislead us. After arguing with him we managed to shake him off and proceeded on our way. We later learned that this same man was known to have robbed newly arrived settlers by sending them along the road which he claimed led southward. Once they were on this road, he pillaged them."

It was on this same trip that Mr. Meyers experienced what he claims was the coldest weather ever known in the Inland Empire. They had turned northeast toward Meyers Falls and decided, after going several miles, that they would camp out for the night.

"When we awoke the next morning we found that the mercury in the thermometer had become frozen and when we picked up the instrument the solid fluid broke through the bulb and fell to the ground like a bullet—and we were sleeping out!" said Mr. Meyers.

"We were just getting breakfast when Attorney Sam Hyde of Colville, later Judge Hyde of Spokane, arrived at the camp on his way to Spokane. We offered him a cup of the steaming coffee we had just made and he gulped it down in a way that made his breath look like smoke, and declared it was the best drink he had ever had."

Jacob A. Meyers at the age of 70, after a residence in the Colville Valley for 56 years, died at St. Luke's hospital in Spokane on Tuesday, October 20, 1925, following illness from diabetes. He had only been in the hospital a week, but was partly unconscious most of the time. Up to the time of entering the hospital he had been active as usual though he had been in poor health for over a year. His interest in the geology of the Grand Coulee caused him to spend several days at the head of the Coulee just a few weeks before his death.

Funeral services were held Thursday afternoon, October 22, 1925, at the Smith Chapel in Spokane, conducted by the Rev. F. L. Cook, former pastor of the Colville Methodist Episcopal church. The body was shipped to Colville, and services were held Saturday afternoon, October 29, 1925, at 2 o'clock at the McCord Funeral Chapel, conducted by the Rev. Mr. Cook. Burial was at Meyers Falls. Members of the Stevens County Pioneer associa-

tion and the Woodmen of the World and a number of friends from Spokane went to Colville and attended the funeral services.

The pallbearers were Hugh Waddel, George Peddycord, W. L. Sax, C. R. McMillan, C. B. Ide and Frank Habelin.

Jacob A. Meyers had been a resident of the Colville country for 56 years. He never married. In his early life he assisted his father in the many enterprises and land holdings of the family. After the death of his father in 1909 he took over a large part of the management of the estate, continuing his residence at Meyers Falls, named in honor of his father. Here he had his library and his extensive collection of historical papers, photographs and books, but he spent much time in traveling while in search of historical matter.

He was a charter member of the Woodmen of the World camp at Meyers Falls and for many years served as its clerk. When the camp was abandoned, he changed his membership to Colville. He was a charter member of the Stevens County Pioneer association, and a member of the Spokane County Pioneer Society, and of the Eastern Washington State Historical Society, and he always evinced a great interest in their proceedings.

His only brother, George E. Meyers, died in Spokane in 1923. The only sister, Mrs. Elizabeth V. Cagle, lives at Meyers Falls.

The kindly figure of Jacob Meyers will be missed by his friends. The satchel which he invariably carried, the long beard in which he took such a pride, the overcoat slung over his arm—all form a memory which has been unchanging for many years. Especially will the writer miss him, for he never came to Spokane without stepping in my office for a word of greeting, a reminiscence, a bit of historical lore, which he had uncovered, or a hint as to where some historical fact might be further substantiated; and we spent many an evening together before the open wood fire at my home talking over various phases of the pioneer history of the Northwest.

Precision and accuracy were the rule of his life. He took care not to make mis-statements. He religiously adhered to the old-fashioned customs of diary writing, and by referring to his books could account for the exact date and circumstances of every important happening during his life, and he recently told me the experience of his family during an earthquake of long ago. He would spend months verifying, rather than permit himself to

assume a position which was open to controversy. He wanted facts, and he was willing to work for them.

In matters of early northwest history he was at his best. He spent a great deal of time, money and research in recent years in endeavoring to locate the correct sites of many of the old trading posts in this State and in Idaho and Montana. He personally visited all the various scenes of first historical interest throughout the Northwest with his camera, and making notes of his observations and discoveries. He collaborated with historians in this country and in Canada and was instrumental in definitely fixing many of the minor facts of Northwest history which are now accepted. His knowledge of Northwest tribal languages was of great assistance to him in his researches, and he took great care in tracing the history of the words and phrases which entered into the nomenclature of the early west.

He was not demonstrative in his actions, but was of a very generous nature in quietly extending aid to sufferers, and particularly in helping young people. He possessed an excellent memory and a keen mind, and to the solution of a problem he brought an excellent judgment and an unusual degree of "common sense." His statement of the origin of the name "Lo-lo" Pass (see *Journal of John Work*, edited by Lewis and Phillips, pp. 87-8, note) was an example of this. He had also, as the result of a long study of the Indian languages of the Northern plains, evolved a theory as to the trail origin of the name Oregon; a theory which is entitled to most respectful consideration.

Mr. Meyers was largely self-educated, as the country here offered no educational advantages to a boy in the decade between 1870 and 1880 when Mr. Meyers grew to manhood. Nature, however, had endowed him with an inquisitive mind and, becoming an omniverous reader, his technical knowledge, even of such subjects as hydraulics, engineering, etc., was surprising. Thirty-five years ago, when the Spokane Falls and Northern Railroad was being constructed through Stevens County, Mr. Meyers met, and for some weeks associated with, John F. Stevens—then in charge of locating the line from Colville north. Mr. Stevens was so impressed with his native ability in location work that he invited Mr. Meyers to join him in his railroad engineering work, and promised to teach him and to make a construction engineer out of him if he would enter his employ. Mr. Meyers thought he was then too old to learn a profession and compete with younger men of college education, so he declined.

His disposition was retiring and his modesty hid from all but a few intimate friends and associates a correct and adequate conception of his wide knowledge and remarkable intelligence; his kindness and real worth. An unhappy love affair occurring in the early 80's caused Mr. Meyers to become restless and he spent the years 1881-3 in the Kootenai district in British Columbia prospecting in association with Robert L. T. Galbraith,¹ an early locator of the coal deposits on the slope of the Rocky Mountains, in what is known as the Crow's Nest Coal District; and Robert Evan Spraulé,² who first located the famous Blue Bell³ silver-lead mine at Riondel on Kootenai Lake, B. C. Spraulé was later arrested, convicted and hung for alleged killing of Thomas Hammil, a claim jumper, relocating a claim which was an extension of the Blue Bell and in which Spraulé and Mr. Meyers were interested.⁴ Convinced of the innocence of Spraulé, Mr. Meyers spent over a year and a half in endeavoring to establish his innocence, and Mr. Meyers always maintained that Spraulé had been unfairly tried and unjustly convicted and executed.⁵

After leaving the Kootenai Country, Mr. Meyers spent the greater part of the years 1884 and 1885 about Bonner's Ferry, associated with Ed Such in prospecting and exploring the country along the Kootenai River. He spent the years 1887 and 1888 in the Pierre Lake district, and in 1889 returned to the home at Meyers Falls. His years of travel, prospecting and exploration in

1 Mr. Galbraith was one of the "old timers" in the Kootenay District and acted as Indian Agent there for many years—having died only a few years ago. A daughter, I am told, still lives at Cranbrook, B. C., where her father died and is buried.

2 The coal deposits in the Crow's Nest District were discovered by the fur traders in the early part of last century; and as long ago as 1811 Alexander Henry wrote of having noticed four seams of good coal there.

3 The Blue Bell mine is supposed to have been discovered first by the Scotch botanist, David Douglas, around the year 1825 or 1826. The early Hudson's Bay men and Indians used to make bullets from the surface ore. About 1864, during the Kootenay Lake mining excitement of those days, Mr. Geo. Hearst, afterwards U. S. Senator from California, visited the property and smelted some of the ore. In the year 1882, Robert Evan Spraulé with two companions, coming to Kootenay from Bonner's Ferry, re-discovered the mine. After staking the ledge, Spraulé at once left to record his claims at the nearest Recording Office which at that time was at Wild Horse Creek, some 240 miles distant. Under the existing Mining Laws at that time (which were framed to cover placer mining particularly) an absence of 72 hours from a claim constituted its abandonment, except in specified cases of sickness, etc. Another prospector who was in the vicinity, Thomas Hammil, took advantage of this provision of the mining laws and staked the claims after Spraulé had been absent 72 hours. Litigation followed, in which Spraulé managed to retain the Blue Bell claim but lost the other. Eventually he lost the Blue Bell, also, as it was seized by the sheriff and sold to cover the law costs. The law reports of the case recite that the claim was recorded in Spraulé's name July 31, 1882.

4 The other claim on the Blue Bell ledge, staked by Spraulé was the "Mogul" and this was recorded in the name of Gay Reeder, presumably a friend of Spraulé's. , ,

5 There was no eye-witness to the killing of Hammil, and the evidence against Spraulé was circumstantial. The accused was supposed to have been incensed against Hammil and was charged with having laid in wait for him and murdered him. Spraulé was eventually hanged despite strenuous efforts on the part of a number of influential people to save him. Mr. Meyers stated that Spraulé maintained until the last that he was innocent of the crime charged to him, and Mr. Meyers himself always asserted that an innocent man had been hung, and that if he, Meyers, had had the foresight to shave off his own beard so as to conceal his own identity he would have been able to secure the evidence to acquit Spraulé and to identify and convict the person guilty of the crime.

the woods and mountains had developed him into an unusual woodsman and a veritable pathfinder, and in later years he drew upon this experience in his search for the location of the long forgotten sites of the old trading posts established by the Northwest and the Hudson's Bay Fur Trading Companies in the early part of the last century.⁶

The Meyers family was among the most substantial and well-to-do pioneer citizens of Northeastern Washington, and the father, Louthur W. Meyers, left a substantial estate to his children. Mr. Jacob A. Meyers was himself a shrewd and careful business man and since middle age had been in a financial condition that enabled him to live in comfort, and to enjoy his hobbies. He took a great interest in the education of boys and girls, and a quiet, unostentatious way, financially assisted several to secure higher education in colleges and universities, and occasionally used his means in doing little acts of kindness to others less fortunate than himself. He was a fine type of pioneer citizen, and the community and his friends have sustained a substantial loss through his death. He was an occasional and valued contributor to the *Washington Historical Quarterly*, and his passing forever closes a reliable and accurate source of much valuable historical information concerning the early history of the Northwest. Many readers of the *Quarterly*, who knew him personally will feel a deep and permanent loss through his death.

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⁶ The writer is indebted to the *Colville Examiner* for some of the material contained in this and the succeeding article on Mrs. Peter King.