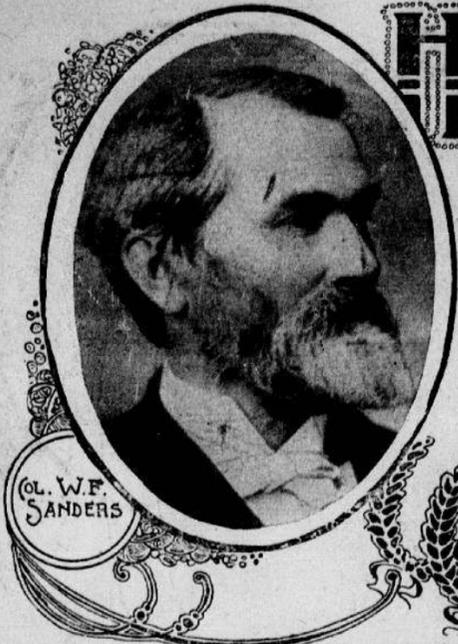


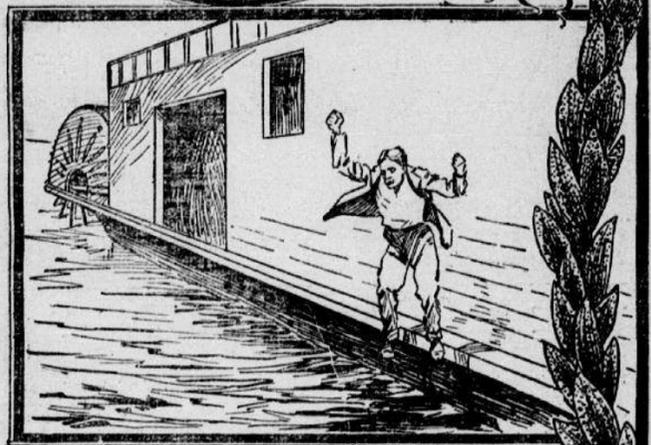
HOW GEN. MEAGHER MET HIS DEATH.



COL. W. F. SANDERS



HOME OF COL. W. F. SANDERS AT HELENA



THOMAS FRANCIS MEAGHER



By Col. W. F. Sanders.
EARLY in June, 1867, I left my home at Virginia City for Fort Benton to meet my family then on their way from the East to Montana via the Missouri River on the steamer Abscon. Remaining some ten days at Fort Benton in daily expectation of their arrival I accepted the invitation of the captain of a Pittsburg boat, the "Yorktown," to go down the river and meet them. Momentarily expecting to see the boat I sat on the deck for two days when at Spread Eagle Bar, near Fort Union, I was transferred to the returning steamer which was nearly three weeks thereafter reaching Fort Benton.

A little below the mouth of the Marias impatient at the slow progress of our steamer, in the company of Walter Trumbull I stepped ashore and walking four or five miles across a bend boarded the Gallatin, Captain Sam Howe, a boat which he had discerned in the distance then doing service on the upper Missouri and which was reputed to be able to navigate a light dew.

Having boarded the Gallatin we proceeded to the mouth of the Marias where Captain Howe discharged a cargo of mules and we availed ourselves of his offer and had a muleback ride to Fort Benton. About 12 or 1 o'clock I discerned upon the table land whence the road descended to the town a number of horsemen in military apparel and upon their arrival we greeted General Thomas Francis Meagher and his military staff. He advised us he was on his way to Camp Cooke after a hundred and thirty muskets which the general government had proffered to the territorial authorities for use in the Indian war in which we were then engaged. The day was intensely hot and the general and his staff had made a swift and dusty ride from Sun river, where Messrs. Carroll and Stull had a camp, and were founding that flourishing town, and near which Major Clinton was marking out the site of Fort Shaw, so named in honor of Col. Robert Shaw of the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts regiment, who at Fort Wagner had been "buried with his niggers."

Visited About Town.

I do not recall all the members of the general's staff nor their number, but one of them was Captain William Boyce, afterward a resident of Butte. The afternoon was delightfully spent in social visits through the business portions of the town and General Meagher seemed at his best in a conversational way, but he resolutely and undeviatingly declined that form of hospitality with which Fort Benton then abounded.

As he was my near neighbor at Virginia City and a most genial and interesting companion I spent most of the afternoon with him, introducing him to so many of the citizens and sojourners in that unique and thrifty seaport as he had not theretofore known.

The Fort in that early time was only 20 years old and although neat its pelme it was in very good form. Major T. H. Eastman had it in charge for the fur company then carrying on the trade, then about equally divided between the Indians and whites on this frontier. Major Eastman was a most intelligent gentleman and his abounding hospitality well maintained the repute of the remote trading posts of the West. His dinners were veritable feasts of Lucullus and scarce a day passed that a choice lot of merry guests did not surround his hospitable board. During the afternoon he invited General Meagher to dine with him at 6 o'clock, which invitation the general accepted.

Six or seven steamboats from St. Louis or beyond were tied to the river banks and among them was a somewhat cheap and rude old craft named the G. A. Thompson. It was a freight boat but had cabins for perhaps a dozen persons. The pilot or mate of the boat was an

Irish-American by the name of Dolan, I think, and when during the afternoon I had introduced him to the general he doubtfully interrogated me as to whether this was the famous Thomas Francis Meagher, renowned in the Irish rebellion of 1848, and upon my assurance that it was, he could not conceal his delight at meeting so distinguished a person who evidently was his idol, and he showed the general much deference and attention and wasted on him no inconsiderable blarney. Ascertaining the general's errand he invited him to become his guest on his voyage the next morning down the river as far as Camp Cooke.

A Sudden Mental Disturbance.

General Meagher returned from the fort about dusk, in company with some other gentlemen whose names I do not now recall. I was seated in front of the store of I. C. Baker & Co. when my attention was arrested by abnormally loud conversation, and as the party came nearer I saw that it came from General Meagher.

As the party came to the place where I was, and I had listened a moment, it was apparent that he was deranged. He was loudly demanding a revolver to defend himself against the citizens of Fort Benton, who, in his disturbed mental condition, he declared were hostile to him, and several who then joined us sought to allay his fears and by all the means in our power to restore to sanity his disturbed mental condition.

His nautical friend, whose host he was to be the ensuing morning, suggested that he go to his stateroom on the boat, and thither three or four of us accompanied him. He was still insistent that the people of Fort Benton were hostile



FIRST LEGISLATIVE HALL IN MONTANA.

FORT BENTON, SHOWING WHERE GEN. MEAGHER WAS DROWNED.

had no more loyal friends than those in Fort Benton who solicitously surrounded him there in his last hours.

Dropped Into the River.

I cannot say that any one remained in the stateroom with him, for nothing was farther from our thoughts than the denouement then impending. After a brief consultation on the lower deck, I went to the office of the Indian agent, opposite the G. A. Thompson and perhaps fifty yards distant, where I wrote a letter for the outgoing mail to Helena, which left at 11 o'clock. Perhaps I had been in the office 30 minutes when I heard Capt. James Gorman, the stage agent of C. C. Huntley, excitedly exclaim: "General Meagher is drowned!" I dropped my pen and hastened out the door and rushed across the gang plank and across the lower deck of the steamboat. There was a colored man, one of the men connected with the boat—the barber, I believe—who, replying to my interrogation, said a man had let himself down from the upper to the lower deck and jumped into the river and gone down stream. I immediately returned to land and ran down the river bank, repeating the alarm until I reached one of the lower steamers, the Guldon, I believe, where I went across the boat to the river side to watch for the general.

Boats were instantly lowered and manned, and many anxious eyes were peering in the darkness at the swift

rolling waters of the great river, that never seemed so wicked as then. It gave back no wished-for sight nor sound. The search was kept up all night, and for two or three days thereafter. Loaves of bread were cast on the turbid waters in obedience to a belief that they would cause a drowned body to rise to the surface of the stream. A cannon was brought into requisition for the same purpose, but the mighty river defied all our solitudes and kept its treasure well. I turned from the steamer as I saw the boats go down the river in the darkness to fulfill the sad duty of advising Mrs. Meagher of the overwhelming calamity which had befallen her and us all. She lived on the same street near me in Virginia City, and it seemed to me to be my duty to tell her the sad story. I inclosed my letter to Dr. James Gibson, the postmaster at Virginia City, an accomplished gentleman and a fast friend of Mrs. Meagher, confiding to his discretion the manner in which he should break to her the melancholy news.

Mrs. Meagher Told the News.

As there was no telegraph, the news of the event went by mail that night. No person, so far as I know, save the colored man, saw General Meagher go into the river, and he related to me the circumstances as I have told. The next day some members of the general's staff said to me that we must report that he fell from the boat accidentally and must not mention the mental aberration nor attribute it to that. I said to them I had written to Mrs. Meagher the exact facts as they had been related to me, and could see no imputation upon the general nor cause of humiliation to his friends if his eager devotion to his duties in hand had brought upon him so great an affliction. Some of them seemed to think otherwise, and in the proclamation by Governor Green Clay Smith announcing his death it was, I believe, alleged to have been caused "by accident."

I can well appreciate the affection which General Meagher inspired among his race and his countrymen. His form was manly, his manners cordial, his demeanor gracious, his conversation instructive, his wit kindly, his impulses generous, and I agree with Horace Greeley, who once said to me that General Meagher was one of the finest conversationalists and extemporaneous speakers he had ever known.

It is to be regretted that so much is said and written of General Meagher and the manner of his death that is not so. Those who were with him on that last day of his life will join me I know in denying that his death could be attributed to any convivial habit. I was with him most of the afternoon, and he was as resolutely abstemious as the most devout anchorite, and it is equally unjust to repeat such an accusation.

The river was searched for his remains down to the mouth of the Marias, but the search was in vain. Somewhere in the stream his manly form sleeps in as serene repose as it would in a casket at Arlington, but the jealous waters guard their secret well, and the rushing waves from unfound springs seem destined forever to be his monument and his grave.

His Hair.
 (Boston Transcript.)
 Teacher—Who was the "Sweet Singer in Israel?"
 Pupil—Samson.
 Teacher—Samson! I'm surprised!
 Pupil—Well, if he wasn't what did he have such a head of hair for?

Charcoal Eph's Daily Thought.
 (Baltimore News.)
 "Dey's a lot ob felahs in de world," said Charcoal Eph, "dat got a notion kase Rome war'n't built in er day dey gott'er take er week t' sweep de snow off'n de sidewalk."