

THE MAYS FAMILY

It is the theory that the Mays family in the United States are the descendants of the Rev. William Mays who came to Virginia in 1611 with John Rolfe. He was an important man in the colony and at one time was recalled to England by the King to give evidence. He was an ordained minister.

There is every likelihood that this is the case and many clues supporting it, but no proof.

The spelling of the name has been recorded as Mays, Mayes, Mayse, Mease, Meese, Mase, Maze, Maes, Mais, Maies, etc.

It is my purpose to write about the family from information from reliable persons now living (or recently so). My grandfather, Robert Mays, went to his father, Elijah, to compile family genealogy. Elijah had papers from his uncle Absalom, Benjamin's son. Benjamin's father was another William (the family is loaded with Williams), so we have "live" contact seven generations back.

My Mother and my Aunt Genevieve (G. W. M.) (Mrs. Pierce Mays) spent endless time and trouble trying to connect Benjamin with the original William. I have my Mother's file containing much very interesting information.

Benjamin, son of William and Elizabeth, was born in Stafford County, Virginia (near the mouth of the Potomac River). The family later moved to Amherst County (central Virginia) where Robert, Benjamin's son, was born. Benjamin was a Revolutionary War soldier, having four periods of service totaling about six months. He applied for, and was granted, a pension in 1832. Robert, his son, moved to Iredell County, North Carolina (central part, Statesville) sometime before 1805, and to Illinois, via Tennessee. Various locations in Illinois are mentioned in connection with the family.

Elijah, his son, born in Iredell County moved to White County, Tennessee (east central part) prior to 1829 and then prior to 1836 to Illinois. He came to Oregon (via the Plains) with his sons Robert and Joel in 1852.

Elijah was a preacher, not ordained but a deeply religious man.

The branch of the family that moved south from North Carolina became rich planters with slaves, and influential people. Those that stayed in North Carolina became poor and ignorant, a very run down part of the family.

It has been my opinion (George A. Mays), not supplied by any evidence, that the name came from the Mease River in Liecestershire and Derbyshire in England.

GRANDFATHER ROBERT MAYS

Robert Mays was born in White County, Tennessee, October 25, 1830. His family moved to Illinois before he was six years old. In September 28, 1849, while he was still eighteen years old, he married Lodemma Fowler, on her sixteenth birthday in Blandinsville, Illinois.

According to my Father, he was a fairly large and powerful man. In 1852 the whole of Elijah's family crossed the Plains to Oregon and settled in the Willamette Valley in Lane County. He took a Donation Claim on Long Tom drives,

In crossing Oregon he was very much taken with the country around The Dalles and moved back there in 1858. The rest of the family stayed in "the Valley." His first, or home ranch, the "Mountain Ranch" was near Dufur, a little south of The Dalles. The next ranch was the Tygh Valley place. He established the first substantial and permanent bridge across the Deschutes River, at what became known as Sherar's Bridge after he sold it to Joseph H. Sherar.

The next ranch was between the bridge and Shaniko and was known as the "Horse Ranch." Part of this was taken as a "Timber Claim." If you planted timber the government would give you the land. The timber never survived but the claim stuck.

He acquired other land in Eastern Oregon, principally a ranch at Prineville and one in Wallowa County.

He had other business interests with which I am unfamiliar.

He built a great stone house in The Dalles but it burnt down. I remember its skeleton walls with gothic windows and not being allowed to play in or near it.

As regards his character, he was one of the most respected men in Eastern Oregon. In his later years he was called Judge Mays because he had been a Justice of the Peace, a position much more important then, than it is now.

He served two terms in the Oregon State Legislature, one in 1860 and one in 1874. In the first he worked for, and cast a deciding vote in, keeping Oregon in the Union. His was not a popular stand in Eastern Oregon and his feelings placed him at times in personal danger. He took his politics seriously, his first three sons being named Benton, Polk and Franklin Pierce. Then came three daughters, then the war, and the next two sons were Grant and Edwin Stanton. Only on the last was there a family name, Robert.

My Aunt Geneveive (Mrs. Pierce Mays, his daughter-in-law) in a letter I have, to my Mother, speaks for several paragraphs about him saying amongst other things: "a long continued study of the Mays lines has disclosed no such other high and lofty character."

Grandmother Mays was a kindly woman of whom I have the fondest memories. She was very small. She died before I was ten but I remember being almost as tall as she was.

CHILDREN OF ROBERT MAYS AND LODEMMA FOWLER MAYS

Benton

Born October 23, 1850 in Illinois. He crossed the Plains as an infant in 1852. In 1874 he married Lizzie Parker. She was a large, very pleasant, motherly person. They had five children: Otis, Polk, Gertrude, Grace, and Blanche. The two sons married and lived in the vicinity of Hood River. Gertrude died as a very young lady. Blanche married Parkins and lived in Hood River. Grace married Earl Muller, a railroad employee (secretary to the president) and lived in various places, Tennessee and Oakland, California, amongst others. They had one son, John Mays Muller.

Benton, I believe inherited his father's business interests in The Dalles. He was a very small man. I remember him putting on his vest (no coat) and going downtown every day, though what he did there I do not know. I do not know either his or Aunt Lizzie's death dates.

Polk

Born November 22, 1852 at King's Valley, Benton County, Oregon. He married Mollie Kelsay of Fossil, Wheeler County, Oregon. They had three sons: Harry, Dallas and Ted. Ted was my age. I do not know if that was his real name or a nickname.

He inherited ranch lands in Wallowa County and raised cattle. I believe Ted stayed there and that Harry and Dallas came to California.

Franklin Pierce

Born May 12, 1855 in Lane County, Oregon. In January 31, 1884 he married Genevieve Wilson at The Dalles. She was interested in genealogy and much of the information I have she gathered. They had two children, Wilson and Genevieve. Wilson died while attending the University of Oregon. Uncle Pierce established a sun-dial on that campus commemorating him. My sister and I unveiled it. I do not know the year but it was during Taft's administration. Genevieve married Joseph Dodd. They had two sons, Joseph, who now owns the Tygh Valley ranch, and Wilson who lives in the Bay Area.

Uncle Pierce inherited the Tygh Valley Ranch and raised cattle, specializing in Short-horn Durhams. He was also a successful attorney in Portland. He bought an interest in the Howard Automobile Company in Salt Lake (Buick distributors for the West Coast). This was a very profitable investment.

He was indicted in the Oregon Land Frauds case. It was the habit of cattlemen to build fences on government property to keep cattle from straying too far. The government prosecuted for this. Uncle Pierce, among many others, was convicted but was pardoned by President Taft.

He died February 29, 1932 in Portland, Oregon.

Frances Iola

Born Lane County, February 8, 1858. Died The Dalles, February 20, 1873.

Rachel Elnora

Born _____, August 20, 1860. Married Alex Rankin Thompson January 2, 1889. They moved to Van Nuys in the San Fernando Valley where they had a chicken ranch. They had two daughters, Edna and Lois, and a son, Alfred. The daughters never married. Aunt Nell and they were strong Christian Scientists, and Edna and Lois were Readers in the church. She died August 30, 1955.

Eunice

Born June 27, 1864 at Tygh Valley. She married Luther _____ Crow at the The Dalles September 25, 1887. He died January 16, 1919 in Portland. They had one son who died in infancy.

Grant

Born _____, December 15, 1866. In January 18, 1907 he married Vesta Bolton (an exceptionally pretty woman) of Boyd. They were married in The Dalles. He inherited the Prineville ranch and ran cattle. He used to drive large herds to The Dalles, resting them over at my Father's ranch and again at Tygh Valley. He died August 24, 1919 in Portland.

Edwin (see following pages)

Robert Carl

Born August 14, 1872 at Tygh Valley. He married Madge Summerville at Portland. They had three children: Jocelyn was a spastic and died as a child. The other two, Robert and Mary live in the Los Angeles area, both married.

He being the youngest never outgrew the name "Babe" and was so called by the family and many others all his life. I do not know what he inherited from his father. He went to Edmonton, Alberta where he established a Real Estate and Insurance business and died there August 12, 1914.

EDWIN MAYS

Edwin Mays was born in Dufur, Oregon, January 13, 1869. He was born in a squared-log cabin which was still standing when I was a child. It was near a spring and Hawberry bushes. The Indians used to come and camp and paint their faces and dance all night and when grandfather was away grandmother would sit up with the fire-shovel in her hands, but the Indians never made her any trouble.

My father was named Edwin Stanton, after Lincoln's Secretary of War, but he dropped the Stanton after he grew up.

His boyhood friend Coke Hill went to the University of California and when Cal was looking to strengthen its track team, said he knew a man in Oregon who could run down jack-rabbits. So Edwin was sent for and became a track star at Berkeley. I remember, as a child, playing with a cigar box full of medals. He held the Inter-Collegiate hundred yard record when he graduated in 1893, and the record for some shorter sprints until they were broken by Charlie Paddock, thirty years later.

He was a strong fraternity (Zeta Psi) man and took a lifelong interest in it. He went east and secured a charter for the Nu chapter at Stanford.

After he graduated from Berkeley he went to Willamette University at Salem, Oregon, and got a law degree. While he was practicing law in Portland a serious epidemic of cattle rustling broke out in Eastern Oregon. He became attached to the United States Attorney's office in Portland as the one person available who knew cattle, brands, and law. He traveled throughout Eastern Oregon organizing law enforcement against the rustlers until the operation was broken up by deaths, jail sentences, etc. He was in considerable danger as several of the rustlers had sworn to "get" him.

He returned to private practice but in 1904 decided he was tired of "taking other people's troubles home with him." He then took up the development of his inheritance, the "Horse Ranch." He worked hard at this and increased the original 4000 acres to 10,000. His operation was hay, grain, and cattle. In 1913 he decreased his cattle and bought sheep. He still had a large number of horses and these were very much in demand by the British and French in the early days of World War I. He broke these horses himself and I remember, during the training periods, riding around with his horse "snubbed" to my saddle horn day after day.

The sheep and grain became very profitable and he borrowed large amounts of money from the bank (French & Co., The Dalles) to increase his livestock holdings. To get summer range beyond the government allotment in the Forest Reserves, he leased timber land from lumber companies

on the west slope of the Cascades and shipped train loads of sheep around to Molalla and trailed in from the west.

In the early twenties the bank failed and dragged its customers down with it. So at this time my Father lost the ranch. He then came down to California, refreshed himself in law, studied California law, passed the bar examination and set up a practice in East Oakland in partnership with his lifelong friend, Coke Hill.

He purchased the house in Berkeley where my sister Eunice now lives.

He died in 1944 of complications following an operation.

By George A. Mays, 1970

PIONEER DAYS OF ROBERT MAYS AND
HIS WIFE, LODEMMA FOWLER MAYS

(As told to the family of Benton Mays in the fall of 1909 by Lodemma Fowler Mays, including incidents told by her to other members of the family.)

At the time Captain Jack (Indian) was creating a disturbance in Southern Oregon, the young bucks of the Warm Springs reservation were trying to arouse their tribe to sympathetic rebellion. The older Indians remained cool headed and would not break with the Government. There was a Hawberry patch at the lower end of the meadow, at the Mountain Ranch, where it had been the custom for Indians to dance and paint themselves. At this time the young Indians were not allowed any demonstrations of sympathy on the reservations so - "One night when I was alone with the children they came to the Hawberry patch and painted themselves and had a war dance. They screamed and howled all night and I sat up with the shovel in my hand. I didn't know when they might come up and kill us; but they stayed down at the patch. Often I would be busy working and, suddenly, the room would darken and I would look up to see Indians looking in at me from all the windows. I had to go on with what I was doing as if nothing frightened me, but I was always scared."

"When we first went to the Willamette Valley we didn't have anything, but some people who were there were very kind to us and gave us the school house to live in until we could build a cabin. They sent us milk and eggs and butter and we couldn't pay for it so I used to go over and sew for the woman. She had a lot of children and she was very busy and she couldn't sew. I sewed up a lot of things for her children and she was very grateful."

(May I make the comment here that this incident shows two of Mother Mays strongest characteristics; a pride in not being beholden to anyone, and a consideration for the needs of others. M. A. M.)

INCIDENTS IN THE LIVES OF JUDGE ROBERT MAYS AND
HIS WIFE LODEMMA FOWLER MAYS

Robert Mays, Born October 25, 1830, in White County, Tennessee
Died April 7, 1902, The Dalles, Oregon
Buried in Sunset Cemetery

Lodemma Fowler, Born September 28, 1833, in Edwards County, Illinois
Died December 23, 1910, The Dalles, Oregon
Buried in Sunset Cemetery

They first met at singing school in a little school house near the Mays farm in McDonough County in the spring of 1847. They were married at Blandinsville, McDonough County, Illinois on September 28, 1849. They lived with his parents, and then with her parents, until the spring, when they moved into a log cabin for a few months. They then built a little box house where they lived for two years. Their first child, Benton, was born there on October 23, 1850. The house had a brick fireplace where all of the cooking was done. This method was followed until 1857 when Lodemma had her first stove (in Oregon). When they moved into this new house they had a cow, a horse, two beds and a few other necessary things. The flat iron they had then is still in use (19). The handle was broken and in 1875 Clark MacCown and Robert made a new handle out of an old horse shoe.

On April 7, 1852, they left Blandinsville, Illinois in "covered wagons" for Oregon, with Robert's father, Elijah Mays, his mother, Mary Bradshaw Mays, and eight brothers and sisters, and Captain C. T. Hale (who married Robert's oldest sister, Willa C. Mays, the following year, 1853); the John Gilfreys and the Barstows. Mrs. Barstow died on the plains. The snow was still on the ground when they left.

Their object in coming to Oregon was to secure a good house. They had little realization of the hardships, dangers and troubles they would have to endure. There was no land to be homesteaded in Illinois, and they had no money with which to buy land. They were ambitious to have a farm and this seemed to be the only way.

Robert started with four yokes of cattle. A young man, with one yoke, helped for a few hundred miles; but he whipped the cattle so much that Robert had him leave. Then they struggled along for a couple of weeks

until Robert secured Ward Girton's assistance. He was already with the company and a good friend of the family.

They worked the first cow Robert ever owned across the Plains and when they arrived at The Dalles they sold her for \$33.00. They paid \$15.00 for one sack of flour; 50 cents for one quart of syrup; 25 cents for one pound of potatoes and 25 cents for one pound of beef.

There were about twenty-five wagons in the train. They divided at the Platte River because the grass was so scarce they feared the cattle would starve.

The water in the Platte was so impure they were forced to dig a hole near the bank to let it fill with water. This they boiled before it could be used.

"We had such impure water all the way out I often wonder how we all lived." Lodemma said.

In crossing the next river after the Platte they had to put props under the wagon bed to keep it dry. At Green River there was a ferry.

The cattle were so sore-footed the men had to shoe them with old boots and shoes; however that was not very successful. As the cattle were very thin, every one had to lighten their loads. Lodemma left a feather bed that had been given to Robert by his father. She also discarded three quilts and the little chair she held Benton in. She walked as much as she was able and carried Benton. (She was two months in pregnancy with her second son Polk when they left Illinois.) The men were kept busy helping the oxen with the wagons on the hills.

At Burnt River they threw away the chair and skillet. Twice they were forced to saw off and shorten the wagon bed to lighten the load, and later they threw away the side-boards. By the time they reached the Dalles the wagon bed was very short.

Lodemma remembered, all her life, just how the willow thicket looked where Robert threw away the chair and skillet.

Robert walked nearly all the way across the Plains, excepting a few times when he was not well.

Sometimes they had to drive in the night to find wood and water.

Told to Mabel A. Mays by Lodemma

As George has asked me to write down what I can remember of what has been told to me about our ancestors here goes:

Anna Beatrice Dolan Sutton, told me she and her husband John, and their oldest child, Julia, aged six months, crossed the Isthmus of Panama from New Orleans, arriving in San Francisco the latter part of December 1850. The trip took about three weeks. Grandfather Sutton was an ensign in the Navy at that time, and Grandmother, with other officer's wives, crossed on mule-back. She was so frightened of the natives, snakes and strange insects, that she held her baby to her breast so tightly all the way over, that the baby had a stiff neck. It was several hours before Aunt Julia could move her head normally. Grandmother was young and inexperienced, so she thought she had ruined her baby and nearly cried her head off over it. Grandfather had crossed with his men.

San Francisco, at that time, was very rough. Many Mexicans were on the streets. The women wore high combs and mantillas. They were dark and sinister looking to poor Grandmother. She, in turn, fascinated them with her golden hair and china-blue eyes, so they would follow her. The women wanting to touch her. Grandmother got so nervous she sent for her old companion in New Orleans to come and live with her. Hannah Loomis came and lived with the Suttons for years, until she married someone from The Dalles, Oregon. I have always been sorry I did not know his name.

Sometime in the 1860's they moved to Olympia, Washington. Mother (Margaret Agusta Sutton) was a little girl and had never seen snow. They arrived by boat and tied up at the wharf at night. It had snowed and everything was white when Mother looked out of the window. She was greatly excited at the strange sight and ran to her parents saying "come, come and see. All the ground is covered with feathers."

Grandfather resigned from the Navy because Grandmother was distressed at his being away so much. He then bought a farm some place in the Sacramento Valley. However, he found "gentlemen farming" did not pay, and he sold out before going to Olympia.

He "had the sea in his blood" and returned to ships, running as Chief Engineer to Alaska on the old "George S. Wright." He took his family to Victoria in the later '60's where the twins were born, Ada Victoria and Albert, later moving to Portland, Oregon.

I remember the old house on 9th and Morrison Streets where they lived.

The "George S. Wright" sank near Queen Charlotte Sound in January 1873. There were no survivors. Grandmother nearly went crazy with rumors, false and true. Some said the Indians had killed those who got

ashore, some said they were being held captive but it was believed by the searchers that all were lost. They found the headless body of a sailor, the cabin boy lashed to a chair and the false hair of Major Walker's wife.

About 15 minutes after the ship left Wrangle a blinding snowstorm came up. Someone in Wrangle walked down the wharf with Grandfather and the Captain. He urged them not to leave. Grandfather, too, urged the Captain not to leave, the man said afterward, but the Captain was to be married on his return to Portland, and if he did not leave then, he would be late for the wedding ---!!! I knew the girl he was to marry, when she was old. She never did marry. I now forget her name.

Grandmother built a house in Tacoma, Washington about 1889. She lived there until 1895 when my Father died. She, then, sold that home and, except for intervals, lived with Mother until she died in 1905.

I know little about her childhood. She was born in Boston. Her father was James Dolan (or Charles). He made tombstones. They lived on Pinkney Street, near the Boston Common. Her mother died when she was a child and her father married again. She hated her step-mother and they had a time of it, I imagine. The step-mother wore her own mother's lovely shawls and laces and things, which infuriated Grandmother, so an older sister, Margaret, who was married to a man in the Geodetic Survey, living in New Orleans, took her to live with them. She there met John Sutton. Her brother-in-law was drowned. I have never known his name. The shock of his death killed his wife and the unborn infant. That left Grandmother alone except for her companion Hannah Loomis.

She had a brother Charles Dolan (or James) who died when he was in his young manhood. Her father had interests in the Erie Canal and sold his business in Boston. He moved to Buffalo, New York.

By Mabel A. Mays