

THE LIFE of CHARLES A. CAIRNS

Charles Abrams Cairns was born in Mt. Hope, Wisconsin on July 8, 1877 or 1878 (he and the family Bible never could agree on the date) to Andrew and Cornelia Abraham Cairns who prided themselves in their strong Scottish heritage. Mt. Hope was chosen by the Cairns family to be their home because of its terrain which reminded them of Scotland.

Charles lived on the family farm with three brothers and one sister. He helped with the farm work, going to a one-room school high on a hill above their home and later graduating from the high school in their small town. For two years after graduation he taught in the same one-room school that he had attended earlier.

Wanderlust set in. He went to New York City, a real adventure for one alone. He spent several months there going to school.

The pioneer life in the West fascinated him and in 1902 he left his family, traveled by train, got off at Boise and walked to Emmett where he spent some months with some early established sheep ranchers, among them Andy Little, a well-known Idaho sheepman.

About two years after arriving in Boise, Charles became involved in several Boise businesses. He lived in boarding houses and left his horse and buggy at livery barns.

About 1904 brother, Floyd, joined Charles in Idaho. From Louis Griffith they bought two hundred acres of land one mile west of Meridian. They lived together in the old farmhouse that had been built many years before.

The first year or two as they farmed, they raised potatoes(dry farming) and after harvesting they hauled the potatoes by wagon to Boise and peddled them to the city families.

For a few years Charles worked in Boise banks. He was a human adding machine, being able to add several columns of figures in one process. He walked from his home into Meridian to board the train, do his bank job and return home late evenings.

Charles was most knowledgeable on many subjects. He was a collector of good books. He had a large library of books, mostly classics. He spent his long evenings reading his books. On his death many volumes, complete sets of classics and others were donated to the College of Idaho, now Albertson College of Idaho.

Many orchards, apple and prunes were being planted in the Boise and Meridian areas. The orchards flourished due to the soil and climate. Charles became involved in several packing plants where the fruit was packed and sent by train to various cities for distribution.

The 200 acre farm was divided about 1905. Floyd built a house one and a half mile north of the shared farmhouse for his bride, Mable Tolleth, who he married in 1906.

Charles added a few buildings to his farm as well as corralls for cattle, hogs, and sheep. He planted acres of prune trees and continued taking care of other orchardist's fruit preparing it for shipping.

All farmers and orchardists were looking forward to the finishing of Arrowrock Dam which would bring water to the thirsty acres of the Boise Valley. The dam was completed about 1914.

While overseeing the fruit packing plants, Charles met Susie Monlux who worked packing fruit. They were married in Boise on May 8, 1912. To this marital union three children were born, Helen(1914), Donald(1916) and Arnold(1920).

World War 1 was declared in 1914. Many men were called to the service of their country. This made it difficult for farmers to get help so they joined together to help each other.

As the flock of sheep grew there was not enough room for them at the family farm. So after wintering at the farm, lambing in December and January, shearing in March the herd with growing lambs was trailed and "trained" to the Cairns Meadow Valley ranch for summer grazing and growth. About November the herd was returned to the Meridian farm for the winter, eating tons of hay. This routine went on for many years with the flock of sheep.

The war ended, the Great Depression came to Idaho as well as the other 47 states of the Union. Times were very hard. Idaho farm families were poor but most didn't know it--all were in the same situation.

In the 1930's Charles sheep herds meant many hundreds of the gentle animals. He was very busy with the sheep that he spent much time between Meadows and the home farm in Boise Valley. However, he found time to manage a large cooperative plant that was built in Meridian by the railroad tracks for the packing of fresh fruit and the processing of dried prunes. This operation went on for several years until the price of fruit declined and the cost of preparing it for marketing increased. Due to the above many orchardists began removing the fruit trees from their land, Charles many acres of prune trees were no exception so the prune trees were pulled.

In November 1943 Charles hired two young fellows to help him bring his sheep herds back to the Meridian farm for wintering. At an overnight camp in High Valley the two helpers had a plan--not herding sheep--buy to kill Charles and his faithful dog, rob him and flee in his car. They did as planned. The scattered, restless sheep alerted the nearby ranchers that something was wrong with Charlie's sheep. A few days later Charles body was found. He probably died November 9, 1943.

This was a tragic ending to the life of a quiet, kind, patriotic, learned, helpful and well-known pioneer of the Meridian area.

Charles Cairns is buried in the Meridian Cemetery in the family plot beside his wife, Susie, and son, Donald, who was accidently killed at the family farm in 1934 three weeks after graduating from Meridian High School.