

From THE HISTORY OF KLICKITAT COUNTY CORTEZ RUTHERFORD MILLER

Cortez Rutherford Miller, the fifth son of Capt. S.H. and Alice Boyce Miller, was born Dec. 13, 1880 on the family homestead six miles southeast of Goldendale. At the age of six, Cort rode seven miles by Shetland pony with brothers John and Henry and sister Sophia to the Fruit Flat School, Dist. 36. The school term was three months in the spring and three months in the fall. He hated the Shetland with a passion, since it could not keep up with the ponies his brothers and sister rode. He was always late arriving at school and getting home.

Cort received an early practical education in threshing and saw milling. When he was 16, with brother Henry he drove a 10-h.p. Advance traction engine from Arlington to Lone Rock, Or. To power his father's sawmill. At 19 years he rode his bicycle from Goldendale to Lone Rock, 125 miles, in two days. There he ran the same traction engine for the summer for the new sawmill owner, Herbert Halstead.

After graduation from the Klickitat Academy, Cort attended Washington Agricultural College. There he was simultaneously professor of Traction Engineering and a student studying to be an electrical engineer. Cort, a straight-A student, graduated in 1908. He immediately put his schooling to work by designing and supervising the construction of municipal hydro-electric power plants at Orofino, Idaho and Valley and Starbuck, Wa.

In 1910 Cort bought the steam-power light plant at Yacolt in Clark County. He replaced the steam plant with a hydro-electric power plant, the first in Clark County. It was located below Nysanger Falls on Big Tree Creek, two miles southeast of town. It was known as the Northern Clarke County Light and Power Co. The franchise for the power plant was obtained in return for furnishing the city free street lights.

On Aug. 24, 1910, Cort married Mary Stella Wexler at her home in Pullman. They had three children: Mary Eleanor, born Aug. 5, 1911; Harold Wexler, July 31, 1913; and Herbert Donald, July 20th, 1915.

Cort was a leading citizen, well respected and very civic minded. He was an ardent Mason and an Eastern Star, as well as a member of the Grange. Each year with other community leaders he took the younger Yacolt boys camping to teach them about the out-of-doors and self reliance. He was a true conservationist, an outdoorsman, who loved to hunt, fish and trap. He not only took many pictures, but catalogued them as well.

In 1928, after selling the electric light plant to the city of Yacolt, the C.R. Miller family moved to Pullman. There Cort became superintendent of the Washington State College Heat, Light and Power Department. The children received degrees from Washington State College: Eleanor in home economics in 1933; Harold, forestry in 1936; and Donald, wildlife management in 1937.

Eleanor married Seymour Morgan Beck, a University of Idaho agriculture graduate, July 11, 1937. They both taught in North Central Washington high schools. In 1953 when irrigation water came to the Columbia Basin, they started farming south of Moses Lake, retiring in 1970. Seymour died in Moses Lake, in 1978. Eleanor continues to live there

between travels to all corners of the world. They had two daughters, Mary Lynn Beck Laker, a public relations specialist for United Airlines in Los Angeles and Candace Beck Lee of Seattle.

Don married Frances Kiehn Jones in 1943. She had one son, Gregg, an Oregon State University graduate.

Cort retired in 1945. He and his wife returned to their ranch in Yacolt. There he spent his time collecting and restoring traction engines. He became the vice-president and secretary of the Western Steam Fiends Association. The annual meetings held in August on the ranch at Yacolt attracted several hundred enthusiasts, some bringing their engines and families. They threshed, hauled and sawed logs, held races and tooted their various whistles. Today in front of the Klickitat County Historical Museum stands one of the engines that he restored. Each year this Russell No. D 350 steam traction engine leads the Klickitat County Fair parade.

Cort was a strong supporter of the Klickitat County Historical Society. He established in the name of his father, Capt. S.H. Miller, the Miller Room on the second floor of the museum. This was his proudest accomplishment.

Cort died Nov. 29, 1961 at his ranch in Yacolt. His ashes were scattered over the land that he loved so much. His wife Stella died Jan. 12, 1968 at the home of her daughter in Moses Lake. She is buried in Pullman, in the Wexler family plot.

Note: This history was copied from Gary & Emma Millers family album and is posted with their permission. Gary is Cort's grandson and they live on the property Cort once owned.



