



Rae "Bernice" Meamber

April 19, 1914 - February 2, 2011

Rae Bernice Meamber, 96, passed away on February 2, 2011 in Medford, Oregon. She was born on April 19, 1914 on the east side of the Little Shasta Valley in a farming settlement known as Tailholt. She was the third of four children born to Ray Soulé and Minnie Dexter Soulé, both from pioneer farming families of Siskiyou County.

Her family lived in the Little Shasta area until 1920 when they moved to Montague to be closer to school. "Niece," as some of her family called her, had a sharp mind that shined through from a young age. She excelled so much at the elementary school that she skipped one grade. Her family moved to the three story, Queen Anne styled Little Shasta Soulé ranch house in 1929 where her father was needed to assist her Uncle Charlie in the work there. She would tell her family and friends about her fun times of childhood play at the train depot, swimming in Little Shasta Creek, mild mischief with her chum and life-long friend Leah Wright, watching silent films at Montague's theater, riding a pig backwards, and all night dances with midnight dinners at the Little Shasta community hall.

When she finished grade school, she attended Yreka High School, where she again gained recognition for her studies—at one time winning a gold nugget for being the best all around student. Her gregarious, outgoing nature was seen in her participation as a student body officer, actress in school plays, yearbook staff, and honor society member. During these years, she met the teen-aged Fred Meamber while his family was on a deer hunting trip near her

family's ranch at Butte Creek, located northeast of Mt. Shasta. They became high school sweethearts.

After high school graduation in 1931, with the hope of becoming an English teacher, she attended Sacramento Junior College for a year. However, due to the Great Depression, she curtailed her scholastic education and pursued vocational training at Armstrong Business College in Berkeley. Following completion of her studies there, she returned to Siskiyou County where she did secretarial work for the newly created Civilian Conservation Corps and the Forest Service in Yreka. Bernice's adventurous character was seen during this time as she and her brother, Cline, successfully climbed Mt. Shasta's southside. During a second attempt, poor weather forced them to turn back from their ascent on the northside.

Due to difficult economic times, she and Fred Meamber delayed their marriage several years, but finally tied the knot on February 18, 1940 at her family's home in Little Shasta. They made their first home in Mt. Shasta where Fred worked for his family's business, Meamber's Bottling (located in the Ace Hardware building). After several months, they moved to Yreka where Fred worked for his family's bottling plant there (currently the location of the Bottling Works Mall). They lived with Fred's parents for several months while they had their own house built just one house down the block from her in-laws. They moved into this residence just after the attack on Pearl Harbor in December of 1941. (Bernice and Fred lived in this North Street house the rest of their lives, over 65 years!) When he was drafted into the Army, Bernice followed Fred to Texas and Louisiana where he was stationed for training. She returned to Yreka after Fred's division was moved to the European Theater during World War II.

Bernice displayed her organizational and leadership skills as she, along with other interested citizens, founded the Siskiyou County Historical Society in 1945 and served as the group's first secretary. Her diligence, thoroughness, and precision with words enabled her to serve as an editor for the group's publication, the Siskiyou Pioneer, several times. In 1951, her love for history,

along with the support of other civic leaders, was instrumental in helping to establish the Siskiyou County Museum in Yreka. Bernice and her husband, fueled by their passion for local history, worked together to collect old photos, conducted historical research, and presented slide programs for civic clubs, organizations, and schools throughout the county, wrote articles pertaining to Siskiyou County history, and many other activities. They also played key roles with the Conference of California Historical Societies with its regular symposiums.

In the 1970's, she and Fred, along with a few key community leaders and help from the National Trust for Historic Preservation, lead a successful effort to place several blocks of Yreka homes and businesses on the National Register of Historic Places. As an extension of her vision for preserving the rich heritage of Yreka's historic homes and buildings, Bernice helped to organize the Yreka Committee for Historic Preservation in 1972. This organization, which later became known as the Booster's Club, then the Heritage Committee, encouraged research, local history education, restoration, funding, and, above all, preservation. These groups, with assistance from Bernice and Fred, placed informational signs on numerous historic homes in Yreka, many of which are still displayed today. They also edited The Yreka Echoes, a newsletter which provided a valuable source of information that chronicled several buildings in Yreka.

Bernice received a number of awards for her devotion to the heritage of Yreka and Siskiyou County. In 1973, the Business and Professional Women's Club named her its Woman of the Year. In 1977, she and Fred received the Coke Wood Award from the Conference of California Historical Societies. In 1993, Bernice was honored with the Citizen of the Year award by the Yreka Chamber of Commerce. At the chamber's banquet, she was recognized as having "her footprints all over Yreka and Siskiyou County" and described by attorney and civic leader, Larry Bacon, as not just the Citizen of the Year but the "citizen of the years."

Bernice and Fred's passion for history eventually led to the writing and publication of their book, *Houses That Talk*, in 1986. It tells the fascinating stories of many historic homes on Third Street in Yreka. At the time of her passing, Bernice was working on a second book, *Houses That Talk II*, which will relate the history of more of Yreka's historic homes, primarily on Oregon Street. With the help of editors, it should be completed within the next six months.

Bernice's interests were varied. She liked to travel and to write. Her bent for history led her to collect many different types of items: historical artifacts, old photos and newspaper clippings, especially obituaries, even recipes, rocks, books, bottles, hats, spoons, and miscellaneous tidbits of information. When her family was young, she enjoyed going on field trips with them and the historical society to trace pioneer trails. Throughout her life she enjoyed reading, especially biographies, autobiographies, books and magazines on architecture, local history, and current events as well as magazines and especially the *Siskiyou Daily News*. Bernice's warmth and hospitality lead her to entertain frequently. She loved to cook and have family and friends over for big meals, parties, and visits, and enjoyed participating in potlucks. She also liked to keep in touch with family through letters and phone calls. In her later years, she embraced a new hobby, bird watching, and even attended a couple of classes to learn more about the subject.

Bernice was preceded in passing by her husband of sixty-six years, Fred J. Meamber (2006), her sister, Josephine (1970), and her brothers Stephen (1909) and Cline (2003), and a grandchild, Barrett Romaine (2005).

Bernice, a loving and faithful woman, is sorely missed by her three children, Donna Romaine, Melinda Boring, and Stephen Meamber; four grandchildren; three great-grandchildren; numerous nieces and nephews; all those who love her; and by a county and city who have "her footprints all over" them.

A memorial service is scheduled for 11 a.m. on Friday, February 11th at Mt. Zion Lutheran Church at 825 Knapp Street in Yreka. An informal luncheon reception in the church's fellowship hall will follow the service. A brief

graveside internment service at the Meamber plot in the Evergreen Cemetery will follow the reception. The public is invited.

Memorial contributions may be made to any one of the following three groups that were a big part of Bernice's life:

Mt. Zion Lutheran Church 825 Knapp Street Yreka, CA 96097

Yreka Committee for Historic Preservation 520 N. Oregon Street Yreka,
California 96097

Siskiyou County Historical Society 910 S. Main Street Yreka, California 96097