

THE MEYSAN FAMILY

By Elodie Meysan Drew

Charles Meysan was born in the town of Paillet in the District of Cadillac, Provence of Gironde, Bordeaux, France, on January 23, 1826. He died on March 11, 1902, at Lone Pine, California. His mother was Marie Marez and his father was Francois Meysan.

The name Meysan was originally spelled "Meysan." History writers from the Columbia, Tuolumne County, California area used the spelling: "Maisson."

In 1849 the Meysan brothers heard of the California Gold Rush. Charles decided to migrate to California. Elie Meysan liked the Argentine country so well that he did not wish to leave as they had bought land at San Luis, Argentina.

Charles Meysan and Madeline Gaudin were married in Columbia, Tuolumne County, California, on December 1, 1858. Thus her life in a new country began.

Madeline Meysan had many interesting experiences in those early years at French Camp and Columbia. She had a kindly disposition and was well loved by all who knew her. She was always tactful and made the Meysan place a real home. She had a beautiful singing voice and gave a great deal of pleasure with her music. Her husband also had a good voice and they often sang duets together. Their life was happy and they did well.

Things were always happening. One day Madeline put out a big wash on the clothesline. She went inside the house to attend to other duties while the clothes were drying. The building was close to the forest. A few hours later Madeline went out to bring in the laundry and there was not a garment to be seen! The whole clothesline had disappeared. Stunned she rushed to tell her husband of the loss. How could she replace all that hand-made lace? The tears began to flow as Madeline recalled the hours of work on the garments and linens that were part of her trousseau.



Charles Meysan

Meysan was more resourceful - he set out to find out who had taken his wife's wash.

After some quiet investigating he found that the clothes had been taken by a local Indian. As Meysan was on good terms with the Indians he sent out word that if the clothes were returned a reward of a bolt of cloth from the trading post would be given. It wasn't very long before the clothes were returned and a bolt of bright colored cloth, of the returnee's own choice, given in place. Madeline was very thankful to have her wash returned and from then on her clothesline was watched more closely.

The Meysans' first child, Blanche, was born in 1859. Three more girls were born next - Marie, Alice and Zelia. In 1865 Felix was born and he was the Meysan's only son. Before that time the family had moved back to Columbia and Meysan had an interest in a store on the Main Street of Columbia. His partners were Victor Pinchard and Louis Claverrie. The firm was known as L. Claverrie and Company.

In 1869 the partners sold the general store to a Chinese named Lun Sing and the firm of L. Claverrie and Company became "The China Store."

Meysan decided to leave Columbia as business was not as it had been. His family was growing. Eugenie was born in 1868. With regret the Meysan family left Columbia and many of their friends walked a long way up the mountain with them to wish them "God Speed." The family traveled up over Sonora Pass on their way to a new home in Southern California. This was in the summer of 1869.

After days of travel the family came down into the Owens Valley. They arrived at Bishop Creek and stopped at the Yaney place. Elma Yaney Crosby, of Bishop, found mention of this trip in the Pioneer Yaney Family diary. The Meysan Family was tired from the journey over the mountains and their covered wagon needed repairs. The horses were worn out too. The Meysan Family never forgot the kindness of the Pioneer Yaney Family. When the Meysan Family sat down at the table to a dinner Mrs. Yaney had prepared, Madeline Meysan said quietly, in French, to her children, "Eat sparingly, food is hard to come by in this country." Mrs. Yaney, who had been reared in New Orleans, answered in French, "Let the children eat all they want, we share what we have".

The Meysans traveled down the Owens Valley and when they arrived at Lone Pine Meysan became interested in the Cerro Gordo Mines. The family decided to make their home at Lone Pine as the mining boom at Cerro Gordo looked very good.

Meysan bought some property on the west side of Main Street in Lone Pine. He purchased this place from an Anna Heppner for \$600. The building was of adobe brick and the back part was used as living quarters, and the front part was made in to a general merchandise store. The deed was recorded on December 18, A.D. 1869, at Independence in the Inyo County Court House.

The winter passed and the next June, 1870, Mathilde Meysan was born. That made seven children living. (A girl had been born in 1866, at Columbia, but died in infancy).

About March, 1872, Meysan made plans to take Alice to the city for treatment, as she had something wrong with one of her eyes. Loading the wagon with what they would need for the journey they set out early one morning. When they got out of sight of Lone Pine Alice got home-sick. She was a home loving little girl and missed her mother. She started to cry. She cried for "Maman", she cried for her sisters, her brother and her friends. She wanted to go home. Alice cried nearly all the way to Mojave. After several days of tears Meysan turned the wagon around and brought her home. Three weeks later, on March 26, 1872, at 2:30 A.M. Alice was killed in the Earthquake of 1872.

Blanche Meysan was thirteen years old and her sister Marie was twelve, when the earthquake struck. Marie was sleeping on the outside of a bed that was pushed close to the adobe brick wall. Eleven year old Alice was sleeping next to her against the wall. When the earthquake came the wall collapsed and Alice was smothered by the fallen adobe bricks.

Doctor Louis Colleau, a doctor who lived at Lone Pine at that time, told Meysan that if he had "blown" in her mouth he might have saved her.

The ground was moving but most of the family managed to get out of the building, all in their night clothes. It was very cold. Madeline Meysan started to count the children, "Un, deux, trois, quatre" and so on. Her anguish grew greater as she counted - one was missing, it was Alice - she was inside the building covered by the adobe brick from the broken wall.

Alice is buried in the large communal grave of sixteen in the Earthquake Cemetery on Harvey Hill at Lone Pine, California.

Soon after the earthquake Meysan built an all lumber building on the site of the former adobe brick building. Remi Nadeau freighted lumber for this project. This was the first building put up after the earthquake. It still stands on the west side of Main Street in Lone Pine, California.

Meysan had two branch stores in the mining towns of old Panamint City and the other at Cerro Gordo (Fat Mountain). He did not do well with these stores as he did not run them himself, and mining camps are very uncertain. At the Lone Pine store Meysan's two older daughters, Blanche and Marie, were learning to keep the store books and wait on customers. Their handwriting is seen on the store records for 1874. Also for a number of years Meysan had a baker who supplied the store with loaves of bread at this time. Here is a story that happened about 1874 or 1875:

One night in the middle of the night a bandit came to the Meysan place. Meysan quickly woke up all the children as he did not know what was going to happen. The bandit wanted some bread. As Meysan talked to the bandit in Spanish, the bandit stood in the light of a lamp that was set in the center of the table in the middle of the room. The children were huddled in the dark corners of the room watching, frightened but curious. The bandit left in the night as he had come. This bandit was said to be Chavez. History tells us that there were bandits holed up in the desert in Southern Inyo in the middle 1870's.

Charles Meysan was elected to the office of Inyo County Supervisor for two terms, 1872 to 1876 and 1878 to 1882.