

**Helen Elizabeth Ricco**  
Sept. 25, 1918 - April 6, 2017



Helen Ricco

Helen Elizabeth Ricco was born in Metzenseifen, Czechoslovakia, on Sept. 25, 1918. Leaving this politically contentious area, her father sought a better life for his family in Cleveland. He worked seven years to earn enough money to bring his family to the United States in 1929.

The United States, even in the throes of the depression, was a better choice than staying in Czechoslovakia, which was about to be torn apart by World War II in just a few short years.

It seems Grandma maintained the careful thriftiness learned during this time. For many decades she would wash plastic sacks that her produce had been purchased in, to be reused for storing various items and worn-out clothes were never just discarded, but found a second life to be used as rags or patches for other clothes.

Helen was the second of four daughters and spoke only German when she moved to Ohio with her mother, sisters, one large suitcase and a willingness to work.

Somehow, she and her family made do. Her mother cleaned the bakery owners' house for unsold bakery items. Her father worked in a steel factory making nuts, bolts and shovels. He became very knowledgeable about various tensile strengths of steel bolts and could tell exactly how much force it required to break them.

The challenge of these early years formed strong family bonds. In 1993, as Helen comforted a granddaughter at the loss of her mother, she encouraged her with the knowledge that she herself still missed her parents. In her room, you would find a picture of her parents.

**Coming to Grant County**  
In 1943, Helen managed

to take a trip with her friend, Ruth, to Canyon City. They arrived in time for the '62 Days dance, where she met a confirmed 33-year-old bachelor who only wanted to dance with her.

Needless to say, at the age of 25, Helen's parents heard from their friends about how Helen had "over-picked" and would most certainly be an old maid for the rest of her life.

As Helen and the "old bachelor" were dancing, one of his acquaintances remarked to them, "Oh, Eugene Ricco, you have just bought your own ranch and so now it's time for finding a wife, I see!"

Helen started to will the floor to open up so she could just disappear. It would be two years before Eugene finally proposed and married Helen, and this only after a letter from Helen wanting to know his intentions.

If there were bumps and hard times for Helen in transitioning from Cleveland to Prairie City, I could not tell you, for she rarely mentioned it other than to say how she had missed her parents.

**Life in Prairie City**

Once again, Helen brought her German roots and Eastern European background to fruitfulness as she moved — our family has benefit-

ed from German strudels, German goulash, German chocolate cake, German flat pancakes (I have read somewhere how Germans love their pancakes, and it is true!) and chocolate mousse, to name a few!

No one cooked or baked like Helen! Her culinary skill was invaluable as she and Gene ran the Blue Mountain Guest Ranch and Hot Springs, beginning in 1967.

She was never one to be idle. If she wasn't cooking, then she was cleaning, sewing, doing books, yard work, gardening or crocheting.

Yet somehow, she still seemed to find time for her family. Her grandchildren recall many times that she read them books, played card games, put together puzzles or pulled out board games. She had a special set of small pans, so that her grandchildren could make small pies if she was making a pie or bake their own little loaf of bread on bread-making day.

Helen kept old beach size towels so her grandkids could make little tent houses and a couple of apple boxes filled with toys neatly set in her library room, which was the special spot for her grandkids to play. When the weather permitted, she played croquet, baseball, kickball or took the grandchildren for a swim.

At bedtime, her grandchildren begged her for story after story of the real life bear encounters she had experienced at the Blue Mountain Hot Springs.

Eugene and Helen were married until Eugene's death in 1978. They had four girls and one boy.

She sadly passed away on Thursday, April 6, 2017, at the age of 98 at the Blue Mountain Care Center in Prairie City.

**Jan. 25, 1952**  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Ing "Doc" Hay is dead. With his death in Portland last Saturday, a symbol of a past and colorful era in Grant County history passed on. Funeral services were held Thursday from Driskill's with the Rev. Mrs. Bach in charge. Interment was in the John Day cemetery.

Doc Hay's life in Grant County is so interwoven with the old mining history and the history of the Chinese colony in Eastern Oregon that there are hundreds of stories and anecdotes brought to light by his passing. Because he always avoided publicity and talked little of the past even to relatives much of the lore of his life has been lost. There is enough, however, to make interesting reading for newcomers and to bring nostalgic reminiscence to old timers.

His age was not exactly known. Relatives believe he was at least 89 and, for the official record, give his birthplace as Walla Walla in 1863. When the Chinese exclusion act was about to be enacted and Doc had to prove residence to establish citizenship, he went to Walla Walla and obtained an elector's certificate to establish his status. This certificate bears the date of July 31, 1897, and attested that he had voted in election there prior to that date.

His ability as a Chinese herb doctor became legendary in Eastern Oregon. Stories are recounted of the early days when he would travel as far as Prineville by horse and buggy to treat patients.

A remarkable, almost phenomenal, memory was listed among the Doc attributes. Relatives tell of a huge volume of Chinese medicine he possessed. He practically had the contents memorized and, at the mention of any reference, would give the page number and paragraph in which to find the information. His eyesight began failing in the late '20s, and for the past few years he has been totally blind. In his old historic quarters, among the medicines, personal mementos and relics he kept several radios and kept abreast of world and national news. Ropes were strung for him to use as guides when moving out of the house.

Sometime in his youth

**Ing 'Doc' Hay**  
1863 - 1952

he went to China to learn the age-old precepts of herb medicines. The time when he started living regularly in John Day is hard to establish. His father, Orr Hogg, established the Kam Wah Chung store and herb center here in 1871. His father had arrived in the valley in the early '60s with the first rush of miners into the Canyon City diggings. He returned to China to spend his last year before the turn of the century and nothing further was known of him.

Doc Hay, according to the best information available, settled here permanently in the early '80s. He was not known to have visited China during this century, but on one of his trips to China, he married and was the father of a son he never saw and of whom no present trace is known.

In the heyday of the Kam Wah Chung business operation, it had a greatly diversified stock of all kinds of merchandise. Gold dust was brought over the counter. A frontier bank was operated, and at one time or another, much of the land of Grant County had loans from this bank against it. Most of the debts were paid, but many were quietly written off. Among the contents of the old store where the Doc spent his last years are papers, letters and un-canceled checks, all of which provided a rich storehouse of research material in studying the early days of the county. Among this material are un-cancelled checks, many of them dating back to the early 1900's, mostly in small amounts, and written by many pioneers of the county now gone. The amount of the un-cashed checks is estimated to total close to \$20,000.

Although the Doc was noted for always offering a helping hand to worthy needy and making modest charges for his service, he managed to accumulate a substantial estate. When his eyesight grew poor, he gradually discontinued his practice, and the bulk of the work has been carried on by his nephew, Dr. Bob Wah. Occasionally he would treat an old-timer but gradually made his retirement complete.

Doc Hay was a devout Buddhist but with the decreasing number of original Chinese immigrants too few were left to hold regular services. He maintained, however, a Buddhist temple in his quarters where he worshipped regularly. Although the Chinese colony here, which at one time numbered above 600, did not

have any designated leader, Ing Hay was regarded as a senior statesman to whom many went regularly for advice. His business partner, Lung On, reportedly about the same age as Ing Hay, died in 1940.

Mining camp gamblers at one time tried to use Ing Hay as an instrument in filching money from the miners. Part of his stock of merchandise consisted of playing cards. At one time he had approximately 1,000 decks on hand from which the frontier places of amusement regularly made purchases for their games. The gamblers offered Ing Hay a substantial amount of money for the cards: They would only keep them for several days and return them to him intact. He refused the offer, which obviously was intended as a way to steam off seals, mark the cards and then return them to Doc Hay to be sold for use in the games. The cards, as a product of Doc Hay's place would have been regarded as reliable, and the miners would have been taken to the cleaners more rapidly than usual.

Members of the Chinese colony of good repute could always get credit backing from Ing. Mrs. Margaret Herburger O'Brien, a native of Grant County, knew Doc Hay in the earlier days. Before her death late in June she had written several columns on the old doctor in the Ukiah, California Press which she owned. In a column appearing in the issue of March 24, 1942, she reminisced:

"It is a long time since I saw him last. His name is Doc Hay and he is a Chinese doctor. He lives on a famous placer mining creek in Eastern Oregon and he had done a lot of good. When you visited 'Doc' Hay he would not ask you what ailed you. He would take your hand and forearm and place them on a small pillow. Carefully feeling about the wrist he would find out himself what the matter was. He would then fuss around in a pot of herbs, leaves and roots — it looked like a woodrat's nest — and he would fix you up some medicine that would 'Catchem'. The Celestial was a smart old coot, too. I recall a cowboy who had a violent toothache, went in to try and fool him and told 'Doc' Hay he was plenty sick, 'Doc' Hay put his forearm on the pillow and quickly jabbed his thumb in the cheek of the patient beneath the tooth which was throbbing. 'Pull him out' was the diagnosis."

**Jan. 29, 1937**  
Blue Mountain Eagle

Word was received here yesterday afternoon of the death that morning of Dan Morrow of Long Creek, following an

illness of several days. Uncle Dan had been reported a day or two before as on the road to recovery, and his death came as a shock to his many acquaintances here. Mr. Morrow was the last surviving Civil War veteran in the county, and

his death wipes out the last G.A.R. member in the county. He was 95 years of age and still retained a remarkably clear and active mind. No information was received up to the time of going to press regarding funeral arrangements.

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