

JAMES H. HERMANS

by **DAPHNE RAMSAY**

My interest in James H. Hermans began when my husband, Bud Ramsay, found a brass stencil with this inscription: “J. H. Hermanss, Inspector, Skamania County, W.T. Prime.”

Who was J. H. Hermans? What did he inspect? One thinks of prime furs but could it have been fish? The 1870 census states his occupation as fisherman.

J. H. Hermans' name appears in the 1860 census of Klickitat County as a trader. In the 1870 census of Skamania County he is listed as a fisherman, with a wife Em, and little boys Charles W. and Henry. In the 1880 census of Skamania County, he is listed as a wood chopper with a wife, Sarah, one son, H. C., and two little girls. The names of the girls are not given and there is a notation that the family was not at home when the census was taken and whoever gave the information apparently did not know. Note also that his wife's name is different, too.

From many sources, not all of them to be taken too literally, this is the story I have pieced together.

The Heermance family descended from Jan Fochen, or Fochen Jans, Heermance, who came to New York (new Amsterdam) from Holland in 1860 on the ship “The Spotted Cow.” James H. Hermans was the son of Cornelius J. Heermance and Anna Marie Bame and was born 1828 in Albany, New York. He had five sisters and four brothers. James was disowned by his family. It is unclear as to the reasons. I have no knowledge of that. James came to Oregon in 1850 and took up a Donation Land Claim on the creek that bears his name, about two miles east of Cascade Locks, or as Mrs. Rumbaugh, in her notes, names it “On the Indian Trail to Lost Lake.” He was apparently not a man to stay in one place for very long. He is mentioned in Klickitat Valley Days and in Fred Lockley's writings. In both writings he is mentioned as being appointed County Commissioner in 1854 when Rockland was the county seat. Fred Lockley mentions him in the Volunteers at the Cascade Massacre of 1856 at the Cascades with John Woodward and Amos Underwood. He also operated a ferry in 1860 at Rockland (now Dallesport).

From notes Esther Warren's mother, Mrs. Runbaugh of Hood River, left she states that J. H. Hermans married Indian Johnny's daughter Emma and that they had five children, to-wit: Chas. Henry, Henry Charles, Annie Laura, Laura Annie, and Ann. She said he built a house on the banks of the Columbia River on the north side next to the Felix Iman home, where the five children were born. Mary Lane, who was a friend, said that the house was painted white and had a picket fence around it so it would seem that James as not a typical adventurer but took some pride in his surroundings. Mrs. Rumbaugh also said that it where that James Herman's sister came to visit him about 1909 and that when she saw his Indian wife and children she said, “I've seen enough,” and left without visiting him (Editor's note:) The record at The Dalles I.O.O.F. Cemetery gives the date of death for James Hermans as August 18, 1896, and if this is his grave, which I believe it to be, the sister could not have been here in 1909.

His children would have been grown by that time and I am quite sure the family had gone to The Dalles by 1890. According to correspondence with Dorothy Oram of Pleasant Hill, California, James' brother, Joseph Orville Hermance, her great grandfather, sent one of the uncles to The Dalles to look for James in the early 1900's, but he was too late for James was dead. He was told that James had been killed for selling whiskey to Indians. I have gone through criminal court records at the Wasco County Courthouse in The Dalles, the city records and The Dalles Times-Mountaineer from 1890 to 1904, and have found no mention of such an event. After his name appearing in the 1880 census of Skamania County, I have never seen his name but once and that was in The Dalles Times-Mountaineer where he had advertised a fish business he was operating in 1889.

Going back to Mrs. Rumbaugh's notes, she stated that James was a fair complexioned man, a little inclined to be heavy-set, about 190 pounds. Esther Warren, daughter of Mrs. Rumbaugh, stated in her book that Emma, James' Indian wife, never had any children of her own, that she loved children and those she had were all adopted children, and yet, in Mrs. Warren's letter to me she had stated that they were all born when the Hermans lived below Stevenson. This needs more clarification.

These are the bits and pieces on the life of James H. Hermans, a pioneer and adventurer. Perhaps he left his mark in so many places here on the the Columbia River because he had some education. A man who could read and write was sorely needed in our early settlement of the West for many of the pioneers had never had an opportunity to learn.

Mrs. Rumbaugh states that she was told by Flora Nix, another of our pioneer women, that James left his family at The Dalles and that they never heard from him again; that they went to Yakima (I presume the Yakima Indian Reservation) and were still living there when she made her notes. I have made inquiries there but have never received a reply.

I do not know if James H. Hermans was a good man or a bad man, but I know that he was an interesting man.

1860 Census of Klickitat County:				
James H. Hermans	age 35	trader	born	N.Y.
1870 Census of Skamania County:				
Hermans, James W.	age 42	fisherman	born	N.Y.
Ema	22			W.T.
Charles W.	6			W.T.
Henry	3			Ore.

19880 Census of Skamania County:

House #91:

Hermans, Jim	Age 50	Wood Chopper	born	N.Y.
Sarah	33			Ore.
H. C.	12			
daughter	9			
daughter	66	(family not home)		

House #88:

Hermans, C. H.	17	salmon fisherman	born	W.T.
Salgonia, Morris	19	salmon fisherman		Ore.