

Margaret Trepp Yegen



Margaret Trepp was born in Switzerland in 1868 in the town Nufenen in the Graubünden canton. Like many Swiss children, Margaret grew up multilingual, speaking German, Swiss-German, Italian, and the less widely-known Romansh, which she learned from her grandmother. She added English after she and her sisters came to the United States with their parents in 1885. They came to Montana when Margaret was 17, at first to Townsend, before homesteading near Lewistown.

The news of the six young Trepp sisters' arrival made a splash with the young men in the region. These included Peter Yegen, who owned a store in Billings with his brother Christian. The Yegens were also Swiss. Like Margaret, Peter had been born in Graubünden, though in the village of Klosters, and the families had not met in Switzerland. In the late 1880s, he made a six-day buggy trip to meet the Trepp family, and he and Margaret were married in 1891.

They initially made a home on Broadway, but later moved the house to S 35th Street, where Margaret lived until the 1940s. Their son David was born in 1892, Peter, Jr. in 1896. A daughter was born in 1900, who died not quite a year later of a heart condition. Their daughter Elizabeth was born in 1902. Margaret ensured her children all spoke Swiss-German by speaking to them in that language when they had no other company. Peter Jr. also recalled learning Romansh and speaking with his mother in that language to the chagrin of his father, who did not know it.

Margaret was a devoted mother, and gave much of her attention to her children, but she was also a charter member of the Billings Women's Club and of the Billings YWCA. She was an early member of the Pioneers of Eastern Montana, an organization of early non-Native settlers in the region.

The Yegens were able to visit Switzerland again in 1909, taking their children David, Peter, Jr. and Elizabeth with them. Peter, Jr. returned a few years later, attending a Swiss boarding school for two years before returning to Billings for high school. When Margaret took her last leave of Switzerland, she said her goodbyes in Romansh.

Peter died in 1937, and a family tragedy struck again when Margaret's eldest son, David, died a few days after a car wreck in 1941.

Margaret passed away in 1963, over 70 years after coming to Billings. She was 94.

Sources:

- *Billings Gazette*, "In Romansh She Said, 'Goodbye'", March 17, 1963
- *Billings Gazette*, "Mrs. Peter Yegen Sr. Succumbs at Age of 94", January 11, 1963

- *Billings Gazette*, "Pioneers Pay Tribute to Their Mothers", May 4, 1982
- "Biographical Facts of Margaret Yegen", 1939, collection of Billings Public Library

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