

# Thomas Francis Meagher

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## **Thomas Francis Meagher, His life and murder**

### **By unknown author, unknown source**

Thomas Francis Meagher, writer, patriot, convict, general in the army of the U.S.A. and acting Governor of Montana. A formidable C.V. by any standard but, this was an unusual Waterford man from a city that produced many famous people that had an influence far beyond our shores. We can all be very proud of our city, its people and its many achievements in the political, commercial and educational spheres.

Until very recently, the City had a run down appearance and tourists rarely lingered here. They took a quick run around the Glass Factory and then, shook the dust from their feet and headed for better publicized areas for our history was hidden from view. This is now changing and hopefully, we can again return to the golden age of our industrial past when the name of Waterford was known the world over.

Here, in this city, in 1864, the first steam driven ice breaking ship for Russia was constructed at the Neptune Iron Works, that great firm owned by the Malcolmsom family. This ship weighed 2,600 Tons and was named "S.S. Avoca." She was the largest ship in her day, the keel stretching over the Park Road. The same firm built one of the first ships to sail through the Suez Canal on its opening day. This was the "S.S. Una." This famous firm, which turned out dozens of ships was situated on the site now trading as Graves in Park Road and these ships carried this city's name to the seven seas. We have forgotten our past and also, in many cases, our people that brought honour and glory to this city. Such a man was Thomas Francis Meagher. More than 120 years after his death, his end is still shrouded in mystery and his disappearance is still on the books of the U.S. government as being unsolved. Our own history books and history books of Montana state that Meagher was accidentally drowned in the Missouri River on the night of 1st July 1867.

This Chapter will present evidence that this is incorrect, that Meagher was murdered and that the Klu Klux Klan had him murdered and that he was murdered for political reasons. 100 years after his disappearance, the President of the U.S.A., John F. Kennedy was also murdered. It is a coincidence that both men were Irish, liberal and Catholic. It is possible that the same evil organization was responsible for Kennedy's death also. The evidence seems to point in that direction. The Klan has a blood soaked history and on its own admission, is anti Negro, anti Catholic and anti Jewish. It is still a dominant force in American politics and Meagher seems to have been it's first political victim. You the reader can decide on the evidence presented if Meagher was truly murdered. The verdict is yours.

Meagher was born in Waterford on 23rd August 1823 in what is now the Granville Hotel. The birth took place in what was later room Number 10 in the old Hotel register. Two years later, Meagher, Senior, sold the house to Bianconi and it then became the Waterford terminus for the famous Bianconi long cars and was named "Commins Hotel. " The Meagher family moved to the Mall to what is now Derrynane House. This house was part of the dowry of Meagher's Mother, the former Miss Quan, whose father, a city Merchant, had been a member of the original Bridge Committee and who had also bought much of Edmund Rice's business when the latter sold out and set up the Christian Brothers' Order in 1802.

The paternal Grandfather of T.F. Meagher had been a farmer near Fethard in Co. Tipperary. He was evicted from his holdings after the 1798 rebellion for harbouring and assisting rebels. He went on the run and was carried to Newfoundland in a ship owned by Edmund Rice who had arranged for many such people to escape the vengeance of the establishment. In St. John's, he set up as a Merchant and was soon trading with Waterford and this soon became his major trade link. From Waterford, he imported glass, meat, sugar and woolen goods and exported fish, fish oil and animal skins. Trade from Waterford became so great that a manager was need at that end so in 1816, he placed one of his sons, Thomas, in Charge in this city. He could not visit himself as he was still technically an escaped rebel. Young Thomas proved to be an astute businessman and began to buy property in the city and after a few years married. He entered local politics and in 1847 became the City's first Catholic Mayor since the Cromwellian period. (At that time, Mayors were elected - not selected and there were no questionable pacts in operation.) He stood and was elected to Parliament in 1847 and spent 10 undistinguished years at Westminster. He was a curious contradiction, an ultra conservative son of a rebel and he fathered another rebel.

Up to the age of 11 years, young T. F. Meagher was educated at Mount Sion School and it is very likely that there he came to know Edmund Rice personally. In the summer of 1834, his Father sent him to Clongowes Wood College in County Kildare and from the Jesuits he learned self-discipline but, they

failed miserably to turn him into a conservative. Perhaps his formative years at Mount Sion had shaped his character and destiny.

At the age of 16 his very wealthy father sent him to Stonyhurst College in Lancashire to finish his education and here, he spent four years, graduating in 1843 with honours. He returned to Waterford well educated but, with a pronounced English accent of a very upper crust type. When studying at Stonyhurst, he met a man he was later to despise, his fellow Countryman, Daniel O'Connell, who, on being shown an article written by Meagher for the school magazine, remarked, "The genius that can write like that is not destined to remain in obscurity". Back in Waterford, Meagher joined the Repeal Movement set up by O'Connell to repeal the 1800 Act of Union, an act that still causes trouble in the six North Eastern Counties of this land.

After a short time, Meagher grew bored and disillusioned with the endless debates of the Repealers for he was a man of action. Debates annoyed him for despite his background and education, he was a rebel and socialist in the traditions of his grandfather and the rebels of 1798. He became a regular visitor to the miserable shack that housed the native population of Waterford but, he was eyed with suspicion for his father owned much of the property and further more, he did have this terrible upper crust English accent. The people he wanted to help distrusted him, a wealthy young man who spoke about changing their status and of liberty. Centuries of persecution and suppression made them naturally suspicious. It might be as well here to see what the City of Waterford was like in that year of 1843. It was a prosperous city of 29,000 people and roughly one third the area of the modern city. The wealth was in the hands of about 2% of the population and living conditions of the other 98% were appalling by our standards. They lived in conditions which we would be reluctant to house our domestic pets in.

Here is a description of a typical labourers cottage of 1830/50, according to a Royal Commissions Report on the state of Ireland in 1836, 56% of the people lived in one-roomed cabins. These one- roomed cabins had the natural earth as a floor, they measured roughly 20 feet long x 12 feet wide. They were roofed with sods laid on untrimmed branches of trees which acted as rafters and covered with a thatch of straw or river reeds. Many had neither chimney nor windows, the smoke from the fire escaped through the open half door.

In a corner, near the fire was housed the family pig and the poultry shared the rafters with the children. Furniture consisted of a crude table, stools or forms and the bed was a cooped out hollow in the floor and filled with straw. You can use your imagination about the sanitary arrangements. Cooking was over an open fire and the utensils simple, a can for water, a pot for potatoes, plates and mugs made from timber or delph. The residents in rural areas had better housing for here, 25% had 2 to 3 roomed houses and the very poor existed in stone built cottages unlike the city and town dweller, who had to use mud for his walls.

In 1830, 57,000 adult males were unemployed and their dependents were estimated to be roughly one million people. Meagher wanted to change this imbalance. In 1843, Meagher tired of the Repealers and joined the Young Ireland Movement, a radical group which published a seditious Newspaper named "The Nation". This paper had as its editorial staff, three brilliant young men of differing backgrounds and consisted of Thomas Davis, a Mallow Protestant and graduate of Trinity College, John Blake Dillon, a Mayo Catholic Landlord and Charles Gavan Duffy, a self educated Northerner. These three were later joined by John Mitchell, son of a Unitarian Minister. All had a burning desire to set Ireland free and through their Newspaper, promised action rather than debates.

Meagher joined them as did many other young men and Meagher was appointed Military organiser for Waterford under the command of James Fintan Lawlor and John Mitchell who were responsible for all military affairs. Lawlor, a Tipperary farm labourer had much talent for military organization and was a natural choice.

Meagher organised hurling clubs (pre-dating the G.A.A.) in the area and used this as a means of recruiting and drilling. Pikes were made in preparation for rebellion and guns smuggled into the city from Canada and Newfoundland. It was a bad time to think of rebellion for in 1844, occurred the failure of the potato crop end the beginning of the Great Famine. Survival took precedence overall other considerations. The rebellion was fixed for June 1848 and in May of that year, Mitchell was arrested, tried and sentenced to 14 years transportation to Van Diemens Land (now Tasmania). In July 1848, the remaining leaders tried to start the revolt but failed and it petered out in a cabbage garden at Ballingarry, Co. Tipperary. Meagher and the others were arrested, tried and sentenced to death for waging war against Her Majesty. In a rare gesture of clemency, the sentence was changed by Royal Command to Transportation for life and so, in July 1849,

Meagher set sail from Dun Laoghaire on the S.S. Swift to join Mitchell in Tasmania. He would never see Ireland again.

Because Meagher and Mitchell were both convicted of political offences, they were not treated in Tasmania as criminals and were therefore designated "ticket of leave" prisoners. This meant that they could build their own accommodation, were given a piece of land to cultivate, had to give a certain number of hours to government work each week and had to live in a designated area. This very clever idea saved the Government the expense of feeding and housing them and it was hoped that such people would eventually colonize the country. There were many such ticket of leave prisoners amongst them, a 1798 rebel from Wexford, named Bennett, who had married a native woman and had a family, one of whom, Catherine, a girl of 17 years, Meagher fell in love with and married. They had a son who died in infancy and lies buried in Hobart.

In November of 1850, Meagher and a fellow ticket of leave prisoner named McManus decided to try to escape. Meagher's in-laws procured a boat for him and under cover of darkness, both men set out to sea. They had no nautical equipment of any kind and if captured, the mandatory sentence was death. They hoped to reach New Zealand and from there, anywhere not under British influence. After five days at sea in the open boat, they were picked up by an American Whaler, whose captain was violently anti British and delighted to assist fellow rebels. They worked on the whaler in the Antarctic and landed in New Haven, Connecticut in February of 1852. Meagher was now 29 years old. He went to New York and was feted by his fellow Countrymen who regarded him as a hero. He began touring and lecturing the eastern states speaking of Ireland and preaching the gospel of republicanism. Meanwhile, his wife had been smuggled to Waterford by a Fr. Egan, who ran an escape route from Tasmania. She arrived in the year of his father's change of heart towards his wayward son. He was now very proud of young Thomas Francis and openly boasted about this hero of the people. The year was 1853, the famine had ended and once again, the Irish were speaking and thinking of freedom. Catherine Meagher was a rallying point. As she waited to join her husband in the U.S., she was taken on a tour of the country and introduced to an ecstatic people as the wife of T.F. Meagher, one of the very few convicts ever to escape from penal colonies. She visited Cork, Kilkenny, Clonmel and in Dublin she contracted typhoid or typhus fever. We cannot be certain which of the fevers. She was taken back to Waterford a very sick woman and there she died. She is buried in the Meagher vault at Faithlegg, her son in Tasmania and her husband - somewhere in the U.S.A. That burial place, unfortunately, in Faithlegg is sadly neglected. It is my hope that the neglect will soon be remedied and the resting place of this heroic lady be turned into a proper monument to her courage and bravery.

At the outbreak of the American Civil War, Meagher joined the army of the Potomac and was commissioned with the rank of Captain. He appealed for permission to form an all Irish Brigade to fight in the War but was refused. After the Battle of Bull Run which resulted in the partial defeat of the Union Army, permission to form an Irish Brigade was granted. Meagher began recruiting in New York and his fellow countrymen flocked to his standard. The Brigade, under its green banner with a gold harp fought in all the major battles of that bitter war and each man placed a sprig of green in his cap before each battle. They suffered appalling losses for Meagher, though brave, was a terrible general. He led men into suicidal engagements but, to his credit, he always led from the front and seemed to have a charmed life. That brigade formed by General T.F. Meagher is now the 69th New York Regiment and only accepts people of Irish descent into its ranks. It's a very proud regiment and is known as the fighting 69th.

At the end of the Civil War, Meagher was an out of work general - he was redundant. He had served his new country well and was entitled to be rewarded. He had remarried in 1856, Elizabeth Townsend of Boston and had a family to support. This, his second wife died as late as 1901 in New York. Her grandfather had been a leader in the 1812 war against the British, she was of old Yankee stock and her marriage to the fiery Irishman was not greeted with joy by her family who regarded themselves as a founding family. They dated their arrival in America from "The Mayflower". However, blood is thicker than water, so his in-laws used their influence to secure him in Government employment. He was appointed Territorial Secretary of Montana and to this strange, wild and untamed land, the 42 year old Meagher set out. It was the year of 1865.

From here on there will be mention of many towns in Montana so, it is better to pause and have a look at this, the 4th largest state in the U.S.A. Even today, there are areas of this large earth mass still virtually unexplored and it has the smallest state population of America.

1990 Official Figures:

The area of Montana is 147,138 square miles, Population of entire state - 786,700.

Capital - Helena, Population 23,900 Other towns in story: Missoula - Population - 33,400 Butte - Population - 37,200 Fort Benton - Population - 1,700 Virginia City - Population - 200

First Railway 1880. Transcontinental Railway 1883.

Became a State in November 1889.

Arriving at his new post, Meagher found the new Government Headquarters at Virginia City to be a rough log cabin and the Governor of the Territory, Sidney Edgerton eager to leave for his home in Ohio and to hand overall powers to the new Secretary. He appointed Meagher Acting Governor until his replacement, Green Clay Smith would arrive to take over. Smith arrived two months later, did not like what he saw, went on extended leave and left Meagher in charge of the territory.

The territory of Montana was inhabited mainly by Southern Democrats and as Meagher was a Union hero and a Republican appointee, it followed that he was not popular with the defeated Confederates. He fell foul also with his fellow Republicans. He attacked them for their treatment of the Indians and for their attitude towards the Confederates. He compared them to the British in his own Country. Neither Democrat or Republican wanted Meagher in Montana, he irritated both groups. By race and temperament, he was the wrong man for the job, he was too honest and his socialism did not endear him to the native Americans. He defended the exploited freed negro slaves and crossed swords with the powerful vigilantes, as the Klu Klux Klan were then known as. He tried to get fair play for the Indians on whose lands gold and silver had been found in the 1860's. Presently, Montana is rich in oil, gas, gold, lead, zinc, coal, phosphates and chromite. His Irish sense of independence was not popular with the population of miners, trappers, ex soldiers and professional gunfighters. He was not a diplomat and never could be for the blood of his rebel grandfather ran strongly in his veins.

In December 1865, Meagher fell foul of the courts. A man named James Daniels shot and killed a gambler in the town of Helena. He was tried and found guilty of second degree murder and sentenced to 15 years in jail. Daniels maintained he had shot in self-defence and appealed his case to the Acting Governor. Meagher personally reviewed the case (he was a Lawyer) and ordered Daniels' release. The U.S. Judge, Lynam E. Munson, objected to the release but, Meagher as Governor, overruled the objection and Daniels walked free. He returned to Helena and on the day of his return, the vigilantes hanged him and pinned a note on his body which read: "If the Governor does this again, we'll hang him."

Despite this and many other such threats from various groups, Meagher continued to govern in a fair and just manner and he made many friends but powerful enemies. The military admired him for his fairness and the ordinary miner worshipped him. Only the rich and powerful hated him and conspired to get rid of him.

Montana's weather is of extremes. In winter it sinks to minus four to minus six degrees celsius and rises to as high as 30 degrees celsius in summer, peaking in July. All kinds of insects abound in the hot summer sun. On 1st July 1867, Meagher, with a Company of Militia rode into Fort Benton to pick up a shipment of 2,500 rifles. They had left Virginia City, six days previously and had travelled more than two hundred miles over dusty trails and in intolerable heat. The entire company was tired, dusty and sick from flies and heat. Many, including Meagher, were also suffering from what Americans call summer sickness but you and I know this ailment as plain ordinary diarrhea. Meagher dismissed his troop for a week's rest and he went to the house of an old friend named Isaac J. Baker, a prominent merchant of Fort Benton. According to Baker's evidence at an enquiry some months later, Meagher drank large quantities of blackberry wine which was a known and proven remedy for diarrhea. Meagher later went to bed to rest in Baker's house. He received a visitor at 7.00 p.m. that evening, a fellow countryman, a river pilot named Johnny Doran (said to have been a native of Passage East). Doran and Baker testified that Meagher told them he had been threatened in the town and both men feared for his safety. They prevailed on him to spend the night on Doran's ship a paddle steamer moored at Baker's Wharf. The name of the ship was the "G.S. Thompson". Meagher agreed and spent the night in the company of the ship's Captain, James Woods, a paroled Confederate Officer, James Wright and his friend Johnny Doran. They played cards and drank

whiskey but on Doran's evidence none of the four were drunk. All three stated that several times in the course of the evening Meagher asked "Why do the vigilantes want me dead? I try to be fair to everyone." About 1 1.00 p.m. Meagher retired to his cabin on the middle deck, he had the meal, the first that day and it was noted that the diarrhea had stopped. From the town came occasional sounds of revelry and an odd shot from revolvers of drunken cowboys from Texas who were running cattle into the territory. A shifting mist hung over the Missouri River, visibility was reduced to a few yards. A lone crewman named Jim Freeman stood watch at the Wheelhouse and he bade "Good Night" to Meagher. Only two others were on duty, the stokers in the boiler room of the ship and they had to maintain a prescribed steam pressure and have the ship ready at a moment's notice to sail. Doran, Wright and Woods remained in the saloon playing cards after Meagher retired.

According to Freeman's evidence at about 12.30 a.m. a figure dashed from the second deck and ran towards the stern of the boat and dived into the river. Freeman clearly heard the splash. He raised the alarm by shouting "Man overboard". A search was made of the river and its banks by all on board. Nothing was found.

As the search continued, Doran noticed his friend Meagher was not with the searchers. He rushed to Meagher's cabin and found it empty. Neatly folded on a locker was Meagher's clothing and on a table near the bed was his wallet, watch and other personal items. The cabin window was open and through it came the sour smelling mist of the river. The man overboard was assumed to be Meagher. The search continued to sunset of the next day, but no trace of the missing General was found.

On 4th July, Independence Day, a meeting of the citizens of Helena was called and a \$1,000 reward was offered for the recovery of the Governor's body. On the following day, Green Glay Smith returned to the Territory and offered a further \$1,000 reward. - He issued a proclamation which was circulated throughout Montana and which read:

"Information having being received by me that the body of T.F. Meagher has not been recovered from the Missouri River and it being desirable that same should be done in order to ensure a decent and Christian burial, now therefore, I Green Glay Smith, do offer a reward of \$1,000 for the recovery of the said body and its safe delivery to Fort Benton or any of the Military forts on the Missouri River. In Testimony wherefore, I have hereby set my hand and great Seal of the Territory."

Despite exhaustive searching, no trace of the missing 44 year old General was found. He had vanished in a manner that was in keeping with his adventurous and flamboyant life. The mystery does not end here. In the summer of 1899, a body in a petrified state was found six miles downstream from Fort Benton on the riverbank. The find was made by a lone gold prospector. The body had a hole in the forehead right between the eyes. It measured 5'9 1/2" and weighed 22 stone because of the petrification. It was the body of an athletic man who had probably weighed from 1 to 12 stone before death. The man of stone was dressed in the remains of a nightshirt and there was no identification. The Prospector (unnamed) placed the body on his wagon and hauled it to Yellowstone National Park and there sold it to one Arthur W. Miles who exhibited the body dressed in the uniform of a U.S. General. He charged 25 cents per viewer. His handbills stated that the body was that of General T.F. Meagher.

Miles did so well that he took the body on tour and it appeared at the fruit fair at Spokane in November, 1899. The New York World ran a story about the body in its Sunday Magazine Section on 31<sup>st</sup> December 1899. The article described in detail the career of Meagher and ended by saying "if this is indeed the body of Meagher." Miles stated that he intended to send the body to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington for positive identification. The Institute has no record of receiving such a body. Miles died in 1933 and there isn't a body recorded among his possessions. Where had it vanished to?

By the turn of the century the memory of Meagher had faded though a county in Montana had been named after him and a statue of him on horseback in full uniform erected by public subscription and placed in the capital grounds at Helena. Meagher had been part of the early, raw and lawless days of Montana and the statue, unveiled in 1905 should have ended all speculation about his disappearance. Only old timers in 1905 remembered the fiery Irish Governor, but he refused to go away.

On Thursday evening, 20th May 1913, "The Missoula Sentinel" had sensational headlines, which read "Plainsman confesses to murder of Governor Meagher." The entire front page was devoted to the

confession and the centre of the page had a photo of Meagher in full uniform. On the right of the page, in a box, was the entire confession made by Pat Miller, alias Frank Diamond. "The Sentinel" was a widely circulated newspaper in Montana with a reputation for honest reporting and had as its motto: "Today's news today, tomorrow it will be history." The paper cost 5 cents and this historic copy is number 72 of Volume III. As the confession was made in the name Diamond, I will use that name in the interest of clarity.

The following are the details:

Diamond was a well known old time gunfighter living in the town of Plains. There were many such as he at the turn of the century, retired gunmen no longer needed and an embarrassment to the community at large. They belonged to a vanished age which Hollywood later immortalised and glamorised. As they died, many of them made death bed confessions which cleared up unsolved killings. Diamond had been a suspect in many killings. Nothing was ever proven against him, he had many powerful friends who protected him. In 1913, he had passed his 70th year, but did not know his true age, he guessed 70. On the day he confessed, he was drinking in Jack Thompson's Camas Saloon in Plains. He had a seizure, probably a heart attack. Thompson moved him into a back room and sent for a Doctor. Diamond asked for pen and paper and told Thompson to write as he dictated saying: "Take this down, Jack". This is what Thompson wrote: "I killed Thomas Francis Meagher near Cow Island on the Missouri River. Meagher was Governor and the vigilantes wanted to get rid of him. Axel Potter gave me \$4,000 for the job. I killed him on the riverboat and swam ashore. I killed Bill Clarke near the Dales in Oregon about 1874 - shot him. Big Nose George was hung in 1882, I should have hung instead but George was a murdering bastard and deserved to hang."

Diamond was arrested and lodged in jail under medical care. He rapidly recovered. A few days later, he withdrew the confession, the Attorney General nevertheless went ahead with the case and so reopened the 45 year old mystery. It was the main topic in Montana. Old timers that knew Meagher were wined and dined by reports from all the states papers and stories appeared about this stormy petrel of post civil war days. One old man named John Maloney (said to be a native of Bonmahon and a Miner) stated "One thing I did hear with my own ears, Governor Meagher was hated by the vigilantes. Diamond was charged at the time of the disappearance with murder but never brought to trial. The suspicion stuck to him for a long time even when the story got around that Meagher had been accidentally drowned."

Peter Coyle of Butte who had been working a claim near Cow Island in July 1867 stated: "I am positive as ever I was of anything that the vigilantes had Meagher killed. He was not drowned by accident and thousands living in the Territory at the time knew this."

During Diamond's confinement in jail, he was questioned by teams of law officers. He gave a wealth of detail not alone about the killing of Meagher but also about the foggy conditions on that night. He described the position of the lone crewman, Freeman. He declared that he shot Meagher as he slept and threw the body out through the cabin window. He relied on the noise from the town to conceal his one shot into Meagher's head. He was a cool killer - if his story is true and it sounds true. On 9th June 1913, County Attorney Heydron ordered the release of Frank Diamond stating as his reasons The State has not proven that Meagher is dead, neither is it able to prove.

"No one saw him die."

"No one saw him fall."

"No one found his body."

"He simply disappeared."

Was there a cover up, as in the Kennedy case, 100 years later?

Were the Klan involved in both killings?

Was the petrified body found 32 years after Meagher's disappearance the body of the missing Governor?

What happened to that body?

Was it sent to Washington and conveniently dumped from a moving train?

In modern times we have all seen how low American Politicians can sink to hold power and how much they are controlled by big business. The entire Administration of Montana and the Federal Government of 1867 failed to carry out a proper enquiry into the disappearance of a high ranking Federal Officer. The

only real official action taken was Smith's offer of a reward of \$1,000. We must, I fear, conclude that a cover up was ordered by very high authority for Meagher was rocking the Montana boat and had opened many cans of worms in the territory.

120 years have passed since that night at Fort Benton and a solution has still to be found. You have read the evidence. What is your view?



## Was Thomas Francis Meagher Murdered? Talk by Jack O'Neill, Waterford Literary and Historical Society

From The Munster Express 27.03.1981

The very interesting and informative talk to the almost capacity attendance of members of the Waterford Literary and Historical Society on Thursday, March 8th, 1981, took place at the Granville Hotel, Waterford. This is where Thomas Francis Meagher was born and on which building a plaque was erected in 1948. The vote of thanks was proposed by Mr. Michael O'Connor, M.P.S.I., and seconded by Mr. Joseph O'Donovan. It was chaired by Mr. J. J. Walsh Life President of the Society.

The verdict, by a show of hands, was that the Vigilantes murdered the Waterford-born patriot.

*The Waterford Patriot, Thomas Francis Meagher in civilian clothes. After he was sentenced to exile for life in Van Diemen's Land he was never seen in Ireland again. He was the founder of the "Fighting 69<sup>th</sup>" and commanded the regiment in the American Civil War and afterwards Acting Governor of Montana Territory. As an orator and lecturer he had few equals.*



### THE TRIALS OF A LONG SUMMER HORSE RIDE

Montana summers are fiercely warm with temperatures soaring into the 90's. Whiskey is consumed by the gallon to reduce the body heat. Flies of all kinds abound and all water must be boiled before drinking.

On July 1st. 1867; Meagher, with a company of Military rode into Fort Benton to pick, up a shipment of 2,500 rifles; They had left Virginia City, six days previously and had travelled over 200 miles through rough and inhospitable country: The entire company was tired, dusty and sick from the heat, and the flies, and many suffered from what the Americans call summer sickness, or as we know it, plain, ordinary Diarrhoea. Meagher was one of those suffering from this malady.

He went to the house of a friend named Issac J Baker, a prominent merchant in Fort, Benton and here he consumed liberal portions of blackberry wine, which was regarded as a cure for diarrhoea and in the house, he rested. Later that evening he was visited by a friend, and fellow Irishman named Johnny Doran, a river pilot on the paddle steamer, the J. S. Thompson. Doran is supposed to have hailed from Passage East, but this cannot be confirmed.

Doran was later to state that Meagher told him that his life had been threatened in the town:- Issac Baker, confirmed this in, evidence. Both men stated that they feared for Meagher's safety and, they prevailed on him to spend the night on board the J. S. Thompson, which was moored at a wharf owned by Baker .He agreed and spent the rest of the evening in the company of the ship's captain; James Woods, a parolled Confederate Officer, named James Wright and his friend, Doran. All four drank a fair amount of whiskey but on Doran's and Woods' evidence, none were drunk. In evidence later, Meagher's three companions stated that several times during the evening he asked "why do the Vigilantes want me dead? I try to be fair to everyone."

### A SHIFTING MIST OVER THE MISSOURI RIVER,

About 11 o' clock, Meagher retired to his cabin after a good; meal and it was noted that the diarrhoea had been checked. A shifting mist hung over the Missouri, visibility was down to a few yards. A lone crewman named Jim Freeman stood watch and he bade "good night" to Meagher as the latter passed to his cabin on the lower deck.

According to Freeman's , evidence, shortly after midnight, a figure dashed from ?????????? done in order to ensure proper Christian burial and now, therefore I, Greenclay Smith, do offer a reward of \$1,000 for the recovery of the said body and its safe delivery to Fort Benton St. Louis; or any of the military forts on the Missouri river, where it can be procured by friends. In testament wherefore, I hereby set my hand; and the great seal, of the territory.

Despite exhaustive searching no trace of the missing 44-year- old General was found. He had vanished in a manner that complemented his adventurous life: The mystery doesn't end here for rumours were now circulating that Meagher had been murdered. A few token arrests were made but all were released after questioning and slowly, the memory of the fiery Irish Governor began to fade.

In the summer of 1899, a body in a petrified state was found six miles from Fort Benton in the river bank by a lone gold prospector. The body had a hole in the forehead right between the eyes. The man measured 5'7½ and the weight, because of putrefaction, was 22 stone or it you like 308 lbs.

It was the body of an athletic man who had probably weighed about 11½ stone before being petrified. There was no identification. The unnamed prospector that found the body placed it in his wagon and hauled it to Yellowstone National Park and there sold it to one Arthur W. Miles who dressed the body in the uniform, of a US. General and exhibited it at 25 cents a viewer. His handbills stated that it was the body, of General T. F. Meagher.

Miles did so well that he took the body on tour and it appeared, at the Fruit fair at Spokane in the Autumn of 1899; The New York World ran a story about it in its Sunday Magazine Section on December 31st, 1899. The article outlined in detail the career of Meagher and it ended by saying: This is indeed the body of Meagher.

Miles stated that he intended sending the body to the Smithsonian Institute in Washington for positive identification. The Institute has no records of ever having received the body. Miles died in 1933 and there is no record of the body in the list of his possessions, neither is it mentioned in his will. Where did it vanish to?

By the turn of the century the memory of Meagher had faded though a county in Montana has been named after him and a statue of him erected in the capital grounds and paid for by public subscriptions. The statue shows him in full uniform and on horseback.

He had been part of the early lawless days of Montana and the statue unveiled in 1905 should have ended Montana's greatest mystery, for 38 years had passed since his disappearance. Only ?????????? unsolved killings. Diamond had been arrested and questioned after Meagher's death, nothing has ever been proven against him for he had many powerful friends that protected him from enquiries of the law.

In 1913, he had passed his 70th year but didn't know his exact age he could only guess as to how old he really was.

On the day he confessed he was drinking in Jack Thompson's Canvas Saloon. He had a seizure probably a heart attack, Thompson moved him to a back room and sent for a doctor. Diamond asked for pen and paper and told Thompson to write as he directed saying: "Take this down Jack". Here is the text as written:

"I killed Thomas Francis Meagher near Cow Island on the Missouri River. Meagher was Governor of Montana and the vigilantes had to get rid of him and Axle Potter gave me £8,000 to get rid of him. I killed him on a steamboat and threw him in the river and swam ashore. I also killed George Mitchell in 1883 and threw him in the Willamette River. I also killed Bill Clarke near The Dalles in Oregon about '74, shooting him. Big Nose George was hung in '82 for crime. I should have been hung instead but George was a murdering bastard and deserved to hang. Thomas Irwin is the only man, that knows me and he is a rancher living near Parma. "

#### DIAMOND ARRESTED

It's signed Frank Diamond.

Diamond was arrested by Sheriff Kelly and lodged in Missoula Jail and under medical care he rapidly recovered. He withdrew the confession but the attorney General demanded the papers and the case of the missing colourful Irish General who had vanished 45 years before was once again in the headlines. All of Montana was electrified by the case and old timers that had known Meagher were wined and dined by reporters eager to learn more of this stormy period of the post Civil War days.

One old man is on record to have stated, "One thing I, did hear with my own ears Governor Meagher was hated by the vigilantes and their man Diamond was charged at the time of the murder but not arrested. The suspicion stuck to him for a long time before the story got around that Meagher had been accidentally drowned. The old man's name was John Maloney, a miner of Montana. Peter Coyle of Butte, who had been working near Cow Island in July 1867 stated: "I am positive as ever I was of anything that the vigilantes put Meagher to death. He was not drowned by accident and thousands living in the State, at the time knew this,"

#### CONFESSION AFTER 45 YEARS

????????????????

Smithsonian Institute and conveniently disappeared enroute.

This would have been easy for the body could have been thrown from a train over a convenient river bridge or cliff and much of the state of Montana is still wild and thinly populated.

The night that Diamond was released from custody he conveniently disappeared and was never seen in any part of Montana. Did he too end up in the Missouri River, silenced for all time as was Meagher?

#### ONLY OFFICIAL ACTION TAKEN

The entire administration and Federal Government of Montana of 1867 failed to carry out a proper enquiry into Meagher's disappearance and the reward offered by Greenclay Smith was the only official action taken. The enquiry held was a sham for the evidence was not taken on oath and there wasn't a Federal Official present, only the local sheriff and justice were the officials conducting the inquiry. I think that we must conclude that Meagher was murdered and that his murder was a conspiracy in which the highly placed were involved. 114 years have passed since that fateful night in Fort Benton.

You have heard all of the evidence which I have been able to gather about our fellow citizen and I would hazard a guess that for many of you it's the first time you have heard these details.

Meagher had faced many dangers in his eventful life and its unlikely he could have drowned as American and our History books claim because he was a very powerful swimmer.

Ladies and gentleman of the Jury, you have heard the evidence – What is your verdict?

My very sincere thanks for your kind attention and for inviting me to speak to you. I am most grateful.