

*It takes more than a good resume to get a government contract.*

## **William Flemming Byars (1871-....)**

**From: “An Illustrated History of Klickitat, Yakima and Kittitas Counties”: Interstate Publishing Co., 1904.**

**W**ILLIAM FLEMING BYARS, editor and proprietor of the *Goldendale Sentinel* and deputy county surveyor of Klickitat county, was born in Wilbur, Oregon, February 26, 1871. He is the son of William H. and Emma A. (Slocum) Byars, the father being one of Oregon's most prominent and popular citizens. William H. Byars, who is also a newspaper man, was born in Iowa in 1839, the descendant of a Virginia family. He crossed the Plains to Oregon in the fifties with his mother and stepfather, John Mires, and settled in Douglas County. As a young man he became United States mail carrier on the Oregon-California route and during the Modoc war had some very narrow escapes from death. He was on the early government surveys through Oregon and Washington and still follows that line of work. His first newspaper was the *Roseburg Plaindealer*, which he purchased in 1873 and changed to a Republican journal. He was elected state printer in 1882 and while in Salem bought the *Daily Statesman*, which he conducted for several years. He was one of the founders of the *Daily and Weekly Journal*. Besides holding the position of city engineer of Salem, he was for a number of years Surveyor General of Oregon with headquarters at Portland. He was afterward appointed commandant of the Soldiers' Home in Roseburg and served in that capacity four years. In the early seventies he was at the head of the *Umpqua Academy* and also served as superintendent of schools of Douglas County. At present Mr. Byars makes his home in Salem, where he follows his engineering profession. His wife is a native of Kentucky; her father was born in Massachusetts and mother in Ohio. The family crossed the Plains to Oregon in the early fifties, settling in Douglas County.

William F. remained with his parents throughout all his early life, living in Wilbur, Roseburg, Salem and Portland. He was graduated from the public schools of Salem and took a business, scientific and Latin course in the Willamette University. During his father's service as Surveyor General, William was draughtsman and clerk in the office and at this time, also, attended the Oregon Law School in Portland. Very early in life he learned the printer's trade, so that he might assist his father, and also acquired a thorough knowledge of surveying, being now a United States deputy surveyor. His first work was with his father on the survey for the extension of the Oregon & California Railroad from Roseburg in 1881. In 1893 Mr. Byars came to Goldendale, and took

*charge of the Sentinel, being a stockholder. After a six months' stay, he returned to Portland and worked as a draughtsman in the United States surveyor general's office until the next summer. Then he returned to Klickitat county and resumed charge of the paper, and has continued in charge ever since. Gradually he has acquired the interests of others in the plant until at present he is practically the sole proprietor. The Sentinel has the distinction of having been the only Republican paper in the only Republican county of eastern Washington at the time of President McKinley's first election. It is a progressive, ably edited journal, which has not only acquired a high standing at home, but is well known throughout the state. A comprehensive sketch of the Sentinel appears in the press chapter.*

*Mr. Byars was married at Goldendale, May 4, 1893, to Miss Ada Nesbitt, a daughter of Hon. Joseph Nesbitt of this city. He was one of Klickitat's pioneers and a prominent citizen during his entire life. At one time he served this district in the legislature. He was county commissioner six years and county auditor two terms. At the time of his death, quite recently, he was manager of the Goldendale Milling Company. Miss Nesbitt was born in Kansas. She is a graduate of the Conservatory of Music, of Willamette University, Salem, and is an accomplished musician. Mr. and Mrs. Byars have five children, William Nesbitt, Azalea, Alfred Theodore, and Marguerite and Miriam, twins. Mr. Byars has one brother living, Dr. Alfred H. Byars, residing in California, and one dead, Dr. J. Rex Byars, at one time surgeon on the line of the Portland & Asiatic Steamship Company; he also has two sisters, Mrs. S. W. Thompson and Miss Vera, living in Salem. Fraternally, Mr. Byars is connected with the Masons, Knights of Pythias, Artisans and the Modern Woodmen. In 1899 he was appointed county surveyor by the board of commissioners and served the rest of the term; he had acted in that capacity before for several months, also as deputy assessor. Mr. Byars has been connected with various public enterprises since he came to Klickitat County and in private, official and professional life has ever sought the welfare of his community. Energetic, able and with progressive ideas, he is one of Goldendale's popular business men and a citizen of influence.*

**From: The Klickitat County News, Goldendale, WA., June 28, 1934, P4**

*Postmaster W.F. Byars, on being requested to tell some of the incidents of his life, said he did like the idea as people might think he was getting old.*

*"Don't you know some of these young fellows around town speak of me as 'old man Byars?'"*

*"After all, I guess I'm getting old. It has been 81 years since my parents passed down the Columbia for the first time. Of course they weren't married then.*

*"I was born in Wilbur, Oregon February 26, 1871. My father was a teacher in the Umpqua Academy. The town got its name from Father Wilbur, who was in charge of the Yakima Indian Reservation. Wilbur street in Goldendale was named in his honor.*

*"When I was two years old my father purchased the "Roseburg Plaindealer". So for that reason our family became residents of the county seat of 'Old Douglas'.*

*"When but a young man, my father had the contract for carrying the U.S. mail between Oakland, Oregon and Yreka, California. He also served Douglas county several times as surveyor and as school superintendent. At the latter part of the Civil War he was in the Oregon Cavalry. Previous to his enlistment he attended Willamette University for two years. While a student there the Willamette river had the biggest flood ever known.*

*"About the time our family moved from Wilbur to Roseburg, the Oregon and California railroad was completed between Portland and Roseburg. It was ten years later that the work was resumed and the connection between Roseburg and California completed.*

*"Roseburg was a busy place before extension of the railroad to California. After the train had gotten in from Portland, the mail distributed and the inner man attended to, a big stage drawn by six horses could leave about seven o'clock for California. Since the horses were changed about every twelve miles, an average speed of about six miles an hour was maintained. Then too, there were the big freight wagons and trailers going and coming at all hours of the day and night, some with 20 horses and mules attached and the leaders with their bells jingling.*

*"I had a wild ride on top of one of those stages when I was 11 years old. My father had a government surveying contract on Canyon and Cow creeks south of Canyonville and we were camped on Canyon creek near the summit. Instructions came to me from Roseburg to take the stage home as they were short of help in the printing office. When the stage came along, "it was loaded to the gun-wales", so Willie had to ride on top of the coach back of the driver. The only protection one had from falling off was the low iron rail around the edge of the top. It was forty years afterwards that I passed through Canyon creek canyon again. The paved highway superseded the corduroy road and the automobile of the stage coach.*

*"I learned how to stick type when I was ten years old. I had to put the big dictionary on a stool to be tall enough. It may be I imbibed so much spelling knowledge from such contact that I was able to spell down the school the following year.*

*"In those days it was customary to paste the posters on the wall at the back end of the office. One of them was a campaign poster with a big eagle printed on it. The*

*reading matter ran something like this: Grand ratification at the court house tonight. Speeches by Hon. Binger Hermann, L.G. Wells, G.O. Holman and others. Music by the band 'Marching to Victory'. Ladies invited. Come everybody.*

*"As a small boy I remember the presidential campaign of Garfield and Hancock. We kids took as much interest in the campaign as the older people. Our chief argument went something like this: Garfield rides a white horse. Hancock rides a mule. Garfield is a gentleman and Hancock is a fool."*

*"Rutherford B. Hayes, the only president I have ever seen, passed through Roseburg when I lived there. Of course I knew ex-President Hoover when he was a young man at Salem.*

*"I remember General Joseph Lane, one of Oregon's territorial governors, who was a Roseburg resident. The bodies of General Lane and his wife are reposing in a twin vault in the Masonic cemetery northwest of Roseburg, which is adjacent to the new U.S. Hospital grounds. His wife was a Catholic. Their grandson, Father Lane, who attended school at Roseburg when I did, has been a pastor of the Albany, Oregon church for many years. One of General Lane's sons, Lafayette, was a member of congress, and Harry was the mayor of Portland and U.S. Senator.*

*On a hill, in the northwest part of Old Roseburg, was the Chadwick home. Mr. Chadwick became secretary of State and governor. His son, Stephen Chadwick, became a supreme judge of this state. After we moved to Salem, a younger brother and sister attended the old East Salem school when I did. Oregon has furnished three members of our Supreme Court, Oregon Dunbar, an old-time resident of Goldendale, who is buried in the South Salem cemetery, Mark Fullerton and Steve Chadwick. All have passed to the great beyond. Judge Deady, of Portland, I believe came from Douglas county, and Rufus Mallory married a daughter of Aaron Rose, the founder of Roseburg. The two Rose boys, Aaron and Johnny, were my school mates and cronies. The latter died before I left Roseburg.*

*"I might mention as old school mates, Schiller Hermann, now of Portland, Roscoe Oakes, a San Francisco millionaire, and Louis Belfils, now of Oakland, Cal. Schiller Hermann was a member of the Oregon legislature and is a son of Binger Hermann,*  

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*formerly a member of congress and commissioner of the general land office under McKinley.*

*Judge Austin Mires, my father's half brother and the first mayor of Ellensburg, made his home with us while he was a mail clerk on the run between Portland and Roseburg. He afterwards graduated from the Ann Harbor, Mich., law school and located at Ellensburg, where he has resided for over fifty years. He is the only living member of the Washington State Constitutional Convention.*

*"There were 12 Hendricks brothers, of whom 2 H.H. and Robert, learned the printing game on the old Roseburg Plaindealer. H.H. became a reporter on the Oregon Statesman, after my father was elected state treasurer and bought an interest in the Statesman. When Wheeler county was established Gov. Z.F. Moody appointed him superintendent of schools. He afterwards studied law and has been a resident of Fossil for the past fifty years. Bob, as he was known to us, became owner of the Statesman and was its editor for over forty years. He is a resident of Salem.*

*"I have to distribute some mail, so will tell you more at a later date."*

*The Klickitat County News, Goldendale, WWA., July 5, 1934, page 4*  
**INTERESTING PIONEER INTERVIEWS**

**From: The Klickitat County News, Goldendale, WA, July 5, 1934, page 4.**

*Adding to his remarks of last week, W.F. Byars, local postmaster, has given The News more interesting information. A second interview reads:*

*"There is a correction I wish you would make. Gov. Moody appointed H.H. Hendricks superintendent of schools of Gilliam County, not Wheeler. The latter county was taken off the south end of Gilliam at a later date. All counties east of the Cascades in Oregon, Washington and Nevada were in the beginning part of Wasco County, Oregon.*

*"H.H. Hendricks was one of my teachers in the Roseburg public schools. So was Attorney F.C. Brodie formerly in the law business here with E.C. Ward. When Mr. Brodie was my teacher, he had whiskers which were very dark. After leaving Roseburg I did not see Mr. Brodie again until about thirty-five years. He was then a court stenographer in Portland. As he no longer wore a beard, he was a very different man in appearance than my school teacher of former days.*

*"The summer before we left Roseburg we attended the state fair at Salem and camped at the fairgrounds. To me it was something wonderful, especially the fire-works display at the race track on the night of the Fourth. After the fair was over we went to Portland, stopping at the Esmond and St. Charles hotels on the corner of the Front and Morrison streets. It was something great to take a ride in those horse-drawn street cars. There was very high water in the Columbia that year, and when we visited the Oregonian office, then on the southeast corner of Stark and Front streets, we had to go on a temporary walk built above the water. We also went to Mt. Tabor to visit Mr. and Mrs. Henness. Mrs. Henness was a cousin of my father her former husband being Mr. Ross for whom Ross Island was named.*

*"There wasn't very many homes in East Portland in those days. About all I can remember were bridges and water and the state asylum, which was then located in East Portland. The trip was made in a cab, which to me was a new experience. These are of a past generation and are seen no more.*

*"In 1882 to my father, W.H. Byars was elected state printer of Oregon. He attended the session of the legislature and that winter and we moved to Salem in February, 1883.*

*"At that time Salem was not the city it is today. It had no paved streets or sewers and cows which permitted to run in the streets. So my father decided to take our two cows to Salem and a box car was secured from the R.R. Co. as a means of transportation. My father, brother Fred and I went with the cows in the box car. At Junction City the train stopped for the night and we slept at the hotel. About noon the next day we arrived at Salem. We had our first meal at the Chemekete hotel on the southeast corner of Commercial and Ferry streets. This hotel is now called 'The Marion.' Across the street to the west was the post office. As my brother and I stood on the hotel corner viewing the sights, with thought Salem was some burg and the hotel equal to any in the Northwest.*

*"Right here I will tell you some unwritten Oregon history. Gen. W.H. Odell preceded my father as state printer. He had been elected two years before on account of the death of the preceding state printer, as it was supposed, to complete the unfinished term of the decedent. Mr. Odell told my father, as he understood the law, he had two years longer. Rather than go into court, they agreed to leave the matter with Judge Lord and abide by his decision. The judge was of the opinion that Gen. Odell could serve two more years. Rather than have the office expire at a different time than the term of the regular state offices, they decided to go into a partnership. Mr. Odell and Alonzo Gesner were the owners of the Oregon Daily and Weekly Statesman, so my father purchased Mr. Gesner's interest in the paper and took over the duties of the state printer.*

*"Mr. Odell got the title of 'General' on account of having been surveyor-general of Oregon. Subsequently my father became surveyor general and thereafter was known as Gen. W.H. Byars. You have no doubt noticed that Mr. Odell and my father had the same initials. They were close friends up to the time of their death, which occurred about the same time, Gen. Odell passing away soon after attending my father's funeral.*

*"My father purchased the Odell residence on Commercial street, being the second house north of Marion Square. My youngest sister, Vera owns the old home, the place of her birth. Her husband is Attorney Ronald Glover, who was for years private secretary to former Congressman. W.C. Hawley. Attorney Glover's brother was at one time a conductor on the Goldendale-Lyle railroad and is now engaged in the mercantile*

*business at Underwood. After Gen. Odell's retirement from the newspaper business, he was appointed postmaster. He appointed brother Fred mailing clerk.*

*"Salem, according to its size, has produced more public men than any other city and the United States. Within a quarter of a mile from our home in Salem, might be mentioned the following: Charlie McNary lived on Commercial Street in the block north. He was appointed to the Supreme Court by Gov. Oswald West, who lived a block south of us and on the opposite side of the street. Charlie McNary was defeated for the nomination for the Supreme Court by one vote. He was elected U.S. Senator, is Republican floor leader, is mentioned as the next Republican nominee for president and has been voted as the smartest man in the Senate by representatives of the press. His brother John was county clerk, district attorney, district judge and is now one of the U.S. Circuit Judges at Portland.*

*"Squire Farrar, who lived across the street from us, on the south end of the block, was a state senator and postmaster. His nephew, Johnny Farrar, who lived on the same block we did, was postmaster for several terms. John Coffee, who lived across the street from us on the north end of the block, after he moved to Portland, became a member of the legislature and county clerk. He worked for A.B. Crossman, who conducted a mercantile store in Salem. He became P.M. at Salem and after his removal to Portland, became postmaster there. Herbert Hoover made his home near ours when a resident of Salem and became president of the United States. The present representative in congress, Mr. Mott, resided across the street from our home when a young man. John Monto formerly sheriff of Marion county, became a Collector of Customs and postmaster at Portland. I.C. Patterson was a State Senator from Marion county, was Collector of Customs and became governor of Oregon. There were several other Salem citizens who became Oregon's governor. When former Governor Oswald West was in Goldendale recently, he told me that Charlie McNary, himself, and brother Fred were the champion marble players in the Salem public schools. He and Fred used to hunt rats together in the Salem alleys, shooting at the "varmints" with their 22's.*

*"When I was a boy in Salem, they had the horseless carriage. Z.F. Moody of The Dalles was governor when my father was state printer. My father had purchased a new set of encyclopedias and the governor desired to inspect them. My worthy sire ordered Willie to deliver the set at the governor's mansion, about a mile distant. The only conveyance handy was the baby buggy. So into said vehicle were loaded the books and "yours truly" delivered the set, but he did not take the main streets or have any band lead the procession.*

*"You may not know it", but I have been a famous artist in my time. Mrs. Belle Cooke, who resided on the block north of us, gave drawing and painting lessons. I became one of her pupils and one of my productions was a crayon of the stallion "White*

*Prince." I entered the picture at the state fair under crayons produced by boys under fourteen. I was able to draw down \$4.00 for two years. I was such a fine artist that no other boy would compete against me.*

*"I was also a great 'cub reporter.' I met the trains to get personals for the 'Statesman.' One day a circus came to town and I did not show up at the office. My father wanted to know the reason of my absence. I told him something might have happened at the circus and the paper miss the 'scoop.' Of course he had to grin and bear it.*

*"A musician by the name of Jones moved from Salem to Roseburg and organized a boy's band. They got a contract playing for the state fair and some of the boys stayed at our house. After they went home, we organized a boys' band hit in Salem. Prof. Coomer, who was the leader of the Salem band, was our instructor. After the juvenile band got to going good, he took several of the players and put them in the older band. That was the finish of the junior band. Later, when attending Willamette University, we organized a school band and gave a steamboat excursion to Albany to raise funds toward paying for the instruments. I have a baritone horn which was used in the Goldendale band for over 40 years.*

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<sup>i</sup> **"An Illustrated History of Klickitat, Yakima and Kittitas Counties"**, with an outline of the early history of the State of Washington: Interstate Publishing Company, 1904.