

Originally published in the Yakima Herald-Republic on September 25, 1983

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Biography-Ayers

Local history

Yakima Herald-Republic

Sunday, September 25, 1983-1B



Taxi driver Bob Ayers, who has logged 28 years and 672,000 miles during his career in Yakima, washes his cab at the end of his shift

Cabbie About Town

Bob Ayers drives about 24,000 miles a year and rarely ever gets out of town. He's driven to Seattle and the Tri-Cities a couple of times, Wenatchee once.

But nearly all of Ayers' trips consist of shuttling people around town. He's been doing that over a three-decade span, making him the senior cab driver in Yakima.

Ayers first climbed behind the wheel of a Yellow Cab in 1955 and hasn't really wanted to do anything else since then. In his 28 years of cab driving, he says he hasn't really had any truly bad experiences.

Some strange and funny ones, but never anything really bad like being robbed or beaten.

"We're pretty lucky in Yakima on that," says Ayers.

Quick to laugh at himself, much of Ayers' conversation is punctuated with long bursts of laughter and huge smiles. In fact, every story he tells starts and ends with him laughing, his clear blue eyes providing a hint of mischief.

Like the time he had a drunk in the backseat. While the cab was stopped at a traffic light, the drunk began yelling at Ayers to get moving. When the cab didn't move, the drunk started to throw punches.

What the drunk didn't know was a police car was behind the cab.

"The policeman got the guy out and made him pay me right then and there," Ayers chuckled.

Then there was the time he drove a man with a heart problem to the Yakima Firing Center. While that may not seem funny, the way Ayers tells it with his infectious grin and near continual laughter, one can't help but smile.

"I picked up a guy one night who said he was having heart troubles and needed to go see his doctor at the Firing Center to get a nitroglycerin pill," Ayers recalls. "I drove out there going

about 10 miles over the speed limit the whole way. We got to the gate, and instead of them taking over, they waved me right through. We finally got out to where the doctor was — he was camped out in the field, and everyone's in their tents asleep.

"So we wake up the doctor and he comes out and says he doesn't have any pill and he can't help the guy," Ayers remembers, laughing his way through the story.

"So we head back on the freeway and I rush the guy all the way back into town and to the hospital. It was something else," Ayers says.

Then there was the shortest fare he ever had.

Ayers picked up another drunk in front of the Chinook Hotel "back in the hotel's good days." The guy got in and Ayers began to back out of the parking stall.

He asked the drunk where he wanted to go. "Chinook Hotel," came the reply.

"I pulled right back in, said that'll be 50 cents sir. The guy kinda sat there, shook his head a couple times and finally realized where he was. I guess."

The longest trips were to Seattle and Wenatchee. The Seattle fares were people going to hospitals, one for medical treatment, the other to a sanitarium.

The question of how many tickets and accidents naturally comes up. His answer reflects his personality.

"Oh, I've had about 14 in the last 15 years, or 15 in the last 14 (See CABBIE, Page 3B)

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Story by MARK WALKER
Photos by LARRY STEAGALL
Of the Herald-Republic



Meter ticks away the miles of a day's work



Jovial Ayers plans to stay in the cabbie business three more years before retiring



Ayers helps a fare after calling for him at a doctor's office

Cabbie/ from Page 1B

years. Something like that," he says, while laughing of course. Not that he was responsible for all those accidents, just a couple, and they weren't serious, he says.

Now age 67 with somewhere around 672,000 miles logged in his career, Ayers figures he'll keep driving about three more years. He's afraid retiring will leave him feeling too restless.

Ayers has good reason for the feeling. A while back, he was cut to four days a week. He says it got so bad he went down and signed up to be a volunteer driver on the extra day off. In a short time, he was back driving a cab five days a week.

"I'm just going to play it by ear and see how it goes."

Does he like the job?

"You meet some awfully nice people in this business, that's the best part. The tips are up and down, it just depends on if you catch people when they're partying."

And what does he do in his spare time? What else, but tinker with one of the four cars he and his wife own.