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MY MEMOIRS RECOLLECTIONS OF PIONEER LIFE IN BEAR LAKE VALLEY Written by Walter Edward Clark Chapter VIII MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES IN MICHIGAN The summer of 1913 I looked forward to a mission as a means

MY MEMOIRS

RECOLLECTIONS OF PIONEER LIFE

IN BEAR LAKE VALLEY

Written by Walter Edward Clark

Chapter VIII

MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES IN MICHIGAN

The summer of 1913 I looked forward to a mission as a means of escape from a life I was not enjoying. Mother was worried that I was expecting something enjoyable and would be disappointed. I was ordained an Elder in May, 1910 by Marion C. Clark, president of the Elders' Quorum. (age 21) On October 23 of that same year I was ordained a Seventy by Charles Hart, a member of the First Presidents of Seventy. I suppose it was in anticipation of a mission call.

Early in the summer of 1913 Miles Weaver, senior seventy president, had asked me if I would accept a mission call. Late in the summer he called again and asked why I had not gone as I had promised. I replied, "I have not received a call." The call to the Northern States soon came with instructions to have my Bishop sign my acceptance. The Bishop, Alma Hayes, told me, however, that my place was at home and that I should get married –the kind of advice he gave his own descendents. His son Wilford had taken a missionary course, but did not fill a mission. It was not until I learned that Alma Hayes was an orphan and had had a hard life as a boy that I understood why he felt economic security was so important. I finally recovered from my resentment and admire him as a man and bishop even though he seemed not to emphasize missionary or temple work. His specialty was encouragement of the sick. Late in life he moved to Soda Springs and visited at the hospital almost daily.

December 5, 1913 I accompanied Father and other members of the Clark family through the Salt Lake Temple. Late in the day a Brother Steed, a relative, took us through many of the temple rooms. On December 10, 1913 I again went through with a group of young men who were leaving on missions. I was accompanied by Mother, who insisted that I go to the home of the Presiding Patriarch to receive a Patriarchal Blessing before leaving that evening for the Northern States Mission.

In those days there was no pre-conditioning. If I remember correctly we met to go through the temple, met as a group to be set apart, and were on our own until we met at the railroad station to board the train for Chicago. No one was placed in charge. We were all very mature, at least in years and experience, if not in knowledge of the Gospel.

I spent several days in Chicago, staying at a hotel, meeting at the church, and seeing some important sights –the stockyards, a museum, and an industrial plant –before leaving for my first assignment in Battle Creek, Michigan. Two lady missionaries and four elders labored there that winter.

Christmas holidays were not favorable for house to house calls, so the elders were studying during the day and visiting by appointment in the evening. I could not study all day, as I had been accustomed

to twelve or more hours of physical activity per day. I attended the meetings of the First International Race Betterment Conference being held in a hall close by our living quarters. I enjoyed the lectures as well as the music. I was starving for intellectual and emotional activity. It was at these meetings that I received much of my Word of Wisdom material.

The rule of companions being together came later. We tracted with one elder on one side of the street and a companion on the other side of the street. Evening visits were made with two elders and one sister together or one elder and two sisters, as lady missionaries were called.

At Christmas I bought a basket of fresh fruit and took it to the lady missionaries' room. I did not enter the room, but the presiding elder took me to task. It was a lesson I never forgot or violated again. On our evening visits, each missionary paid his or her own transportation fare. But as it would have appeared most improper in those days for ladies in accompaniment of men to pay their own way, the lady missionaries would slip me a nickel in advance to pay the street car fare. It was embarrassing to me. I was not enthused about lady missionaries and was glad there were none in West Iowa when I was transferred there to be a Conference President. Later in life I changed my opinion about lady missionaries, and as a Bishop I recommended as many girls as boys to be called to serve as missionaries.

I had been an early riser and the habit continued. I was told I would soon get over that habit, but I have not. It was difficult for me to reduce my physical activity and spend time studying for long periods of time. But I did learn to cooperate in the time scheduled. The longest, most disagreeable hours I spent in the mission field were from 6 to 8 a.m. waiting for the room to warm up. We retired between ten and eleven, but with reduced physical activity, seven hours of sleep seemed sufficient to me. We tracted both morning and knocked on as many as 100 homes on a "blue Monday."

After returning from church my first Sunday in Battle Creek, Michigan, the Conference President said to me, "I expect to call on you, but you look so unconcerned I did not want to frighten you." I did not tell him I was expecting to be called on to talk. Street meetings seemed to me to be an undignified method of spreading the Gospel. The first night out, with intention of holding a street meeting, I think I was not the only one who was glad the Salvation Army took the street corner while we hesitated. The next time out the Conference President was present and called on me as the first speaker. I cannot sing and I may have smiled inappropriately and needed disciplining. I was not frightened, but I shouted and in that damp, cold atmosphere I was soon hoarse. On the second experience I controlled my voice, and was not frightened, but my mind was a blank, and at one point I detested even the thought of that method of proselyting. My third experience was in Detroit six months later. All the missionaries in Michigan Conference were in Detroit attending a conference and all had gone to hold a street meeting. I was the first and only speaker. But that night the blessing given me by President Seymour B. Young that my tongue would be loosed was fulfilled. My subject was the Book of mormon; the time, they told me, was one hour –to a large group. From then on I enjoyed street meetings and the Iowa elders responded to my suggestion of holding street meetings. In March, 1916, when my successor came to Council Bluffs, Iowa, he asked about the climate. I told him the temperature was comparable to Salt Lake City, but the relative humidity was much higher. He asked, "How do you hold so many street meetings?" I replied in three words: "We are converted."

My first companion in MIchigan, Elder Hall, was a forty-five year old man who was a convert. He had prayed that as a sign to him of the truthfulness of the Gospel he would be the next missionary called from his ward. He was a hard, faithful worker. I was indeed blessed to have such a good companion. At times I felt impressed and did take over the conversation to check his emotional enthusiasm when he was challenged or disagreed with. I seemed to be able to respect others' beliefs. I often said, "We agree with all the truth you have. We want to add to it or show you a better way."

Our Conference President, A.C. Olson, was in Battle Creek and we all went to a Protestant Sunday School. Before separating for classes the person in charge called for answers to the question that he had posed to the congregation the previous Sunday. The question for the next Sunday, as I remember it, was: How many knew Jesus was the Son of God at the time of his crucifixion? As an assignment, President Olson told me to answer the question the next Sunday. I am not so sure today that I could answer the question, but that day I felt sure of myself. The next Sunday several, including me, stood up to answer. I was the last to be called upon. I referred to the mission of the Comforter or Holy Ghost and added that he had not yet been sent to earth but that certainly those who had heard the voice declaring "This is my Beloved Son" and those who had been visited by an angel should have known. It was evident that the answer was appreciated, but we were given a cold reception and not invited back as a week before. During the week it became knowledge that we were "Mormon" missionaries and were thus looked upon with disfavor.

In the spring of 1914 the missionaries and a few saints went to a near-by park for an outing, including boating. (I did not know that in 1912 advice had been given to keep out and off of water for pleasure purposes.) I was assigned to row a boat with two young lady saints. When I went to let loose of the oars one hand was stuck to the oar and I had to break it loose. The rest of the day I kept my hand closed to conceal a bloody palm and a raw sore.

In June, 1914, it was made known that we were all going to Detroit for a conference. I asked the Conference President why he did not send two elders on a trip to visit the saints on their way to Detroit. He responded by starting a younger elder and me on the trip. We spent a Sunday with a saint in Jackson, Michigan. He was a barber. He suggested as an after shave lotion we use equal parts glycerine and bay rum, scented with rose water. It is especially good in a harsh atmosphere. I continue to use the same formula.

We were walking in a rural area, visiting each house along the road. One evening it looked as though we would not receive entertainment and lodging. I became discouraged, asking myself why I had suggested the trip. I had not wanted to go myself and had not expected the assignment. But before my companion became discouraged I recovered. Pointing to a light at a distance I said, "That is where we are going to stay tonight." It was 10 o'clock when we knocked on the door and were told they had no room. We were tired and hungry. People had manifest no interest in our message or in us as individuals. I asked if they could give us a blanket and allow us to sleep in the barn. The answer was, "No, I am afraid you would burn the barn down." I stated I did not have a match and doubted my companion had one. We were asked where we were from. My companion and the man discussed the Strawberry Reservoir for a few minutes. We were invited in, given a supper and a bed, and visited the next day until 10 a.m.

My first automobile ride was in Battle Creek. My second was on this trip –a sixty mile lift to Ann Arbor, Michigan with two or three young men with fishing tackle and a case of beer. Along the way they had a flat tire and one of the men suggested it was not far to a town and we could walk, but the driver replied, "I am interested in these young men," and we continued to ride to Ann Arbor. After walking through the University campus, we took a room at a hotel, the only night on a ten day trip we paid for a bed. The next day we took the train, arriving in Detroit the day before the conference.

My next assignment was in Detroit with Lorenzo D. Young as a companion. One of the lady missionaries from Battle Creek was released, and the other, with a new companion, was assigned to labor in Detroit. V. V. Bean was presiding elder with a new young companion. V. V. Bean occasionally took me with him. We made a trip to Port Huron to visit a family of saints, going on the train and returning by boat. At one time on Lake St. Clair we could not see land, a new experience for me. I never expected to be out of sight of land. On another occasion we went to Windsor, Canada, across the river from

Detroit, and asked the Chief of Police if we could hold a street meeting. The policeman asked "You are from –?" Elder Bean completed the sentence –"my companion is from Idah, and I am from Oregon." "Oh!" he exclaimed. We received permission, but before the date arrived for the meeting I was transferred to Jackson, Michigan as a senior companion.

It was while I was tracting along in Detroit I met an elderly lady with whom I carried on several lengthy conversations. One day she told me she was trying to detain me so I would not deceive so many people. Another day she asked if she could put my name on the prayer list. I handed her my name card and she said, "I will pray that your faith will be changed." I replied, "Why not pray that I will understand the truth?" Later, she returned the Book of Mormon I lent to her, she left my name card in it. She immediately wrote,asking me to return it, and included a 2¢ stamp, the necessary postage for a letter. I took the card back in person and offered her the stamp. She said, "Keep it to help the work of the Lord."

President Olson unexpectedly transferred me to Jackson, Michigan as senior companion to Elder Weeks who had just arrived. He spent his 19th birthday with me. He was tall and slender. We could hear people say, "There goes Mutt and Jeff." The thought of being a senior companion worried me.

After returning home I learned the transfer came because the Conference President thought I was ambitious and striving to become the presiding elder in Detroit–a thought that had never entered my mind. I think the following circumstances were responsible for the mistaken judgment: One of the lady missionaries was sick. Her companion watched her by night and Elder Bean was on hand during the day. My companion, Elder Young, a widower, said his wife had died with a similar sickness. (I never knew the trouble) He was upset and remained at home or tracted fewer hours. I had never spent an idle day and perhaps overdid it putting in long hours working alone. I was enjoying the work and not seeing advancement.

On October 22, 1914, I received a letter from Mission President German E. Ellsworth which transferred me to the West Iowa Conference to be Conference President. I left Michigan knowing less about the activities of the people than I should have. I had drawn a map of Michigan showing physical features and we did spend one half day at the State Fair where we viewed the Grand Army of the Republic parade. I suggested we view the fireworks display too. Elder Bean thought we should visit some family, which we tried, but could find no one home. This disappointment of not being able to understand the background of the people I met effected my policy as Conference President.