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MY MEMOIRS

RECOLLECTIONS OF PIONEER LIFE

IN BEAR LAKE VALLEY

Written by Walter Edward Clark

Chapter XIV

ESTABLISHING A HIGH SCHOOL

World War I reduced the supply of teachers, so no attempt was made for a ninth or tenth grade in Georgetown in 1919-20. Stanley Dunford was employed as grade principal for 1920-21, but after a week he was asked to revive the ninth grade, and his brother, Rao, was employed as grade school principal. For five years, ending June, 1926, Ernest Hoff struggled with a ninth and tenth grade with an average school enrollment of ten pupils. He had decided a high school in Georgetown was impossible.

When I came home from college in June, 1926, I was asked to help revive an interest in education. I accepted and asked for the use of the library as a second classroom and $1500 to employ a second teacher. Starr, a BYU graduate qualified to teach English and sewing as well as other subjects, was employed.

Violet and I were ask to organize a P.T.A. Violet acted as president for a number of years beginning 1926-1927 school year. Enez Hoff in writing said, “Under Violet Clark the P.T.A. activity was intellectual but later it became mostly activity.”

Before spring came there was a sentiment favorable to building a high school building. A public meeting was held to consider the matter. My neighbor, Ernest Hoff told me I had the better of the argument. He surprised me years later by telling me Mr. Throwbridge was at the meeting trying to show the absurdity of thinking we could support a high school at his (Mr. Hoff’s) request. He added, “I had no idea you could make a success of high school.”

I proposed to the board and others that we build a grade school with four rooms on the ground floor rather than a new building for a high school. The question of a gym was solved when I suggested the grade school would perhaps use the gym more than the high school. I could not realize how soon good roads would make consolidation possible, but I had a vision of what consolidation and reorganization could do to improve educational opportunities thanks to Dean John Nuttal and my own contact with a one room school every two miles in Iowa, where I labored in the mission field.

With a building provided, the next problem was the establishment of a curriculum. Because I had studied physics and biology to fill my physical science group in college, a course in both was included. I followed the suggestions of the State Supervisor in laying out a lab for physics and he said we had one of the best in the state for a small school. A third teacher, Rose Dickson was added to the staff. I taught what the others felt they were not qualified to teach. We always had a good lady instructor for English and sewing or typing or both. In college I had studied school organization and so-

cial science, but taught math and science in high school. I had taken a course in advanced algebra, used it in physics and in an educational measurement class, so that gave me no trouble. Geometry was my favorite subject. One of the few compliments I have received came after class where I had taught as a substitute teacher in Montpelier High School. I heard a class member say, "Doesn't he make it plain?" and other agreed. Biology gave the the most concern. I studied two additional text books. General Science, to me the most valuable course, was easy. We had a wood work department in a basement room.

One of my ambitions was to create a desire for and more appreciation of the arts. At my suggestion provisions were made for a motion picture projector in the Church meeting house, but a new projector with the audio was replacing the silent one and Geogetown was included in a circuit that came monthly, bringing good motion pictures. We soon purchased a Bell & Howell 16 mm projector and had weekly shows of industrial and travel films with occasional rented entertainment film. We brought in school lyceums in the afternoon, as they were not expensive, and they were well attended. But when I proposed adding music to the school curriculum opposition came from an expected source. E.E. Pinckney by this time was well established as Principal of the elementary school. He was popular, influential, and clever. He told me his secret was to keep his ear next to the ground and learn what the public anted and then help them get it. To me that is the method of the politician. The statesman, on the other hand, anticipates the needs of the people. I do not mean I considered myself a statesman, but I was independent. I had the farm to furnish me employment any time the public became dissatisfied with my services. At a parent-teacher meeting Edwin E. argued we had no room for music; it would be too noisy, school would be interfered with; too expensive; and teacher could not be secured. As his final thrust he said, "Remember he (referring to me) is a debater and can make anything appear feasible." We got the music department. Georgetown was proud of its band.

The clerk of the school board wanted to do some landscaping. I think the two male members gave in to shut her up. The cost was not high. The school children helped to plant the shrubs and trees while the elementary teachers played volleyball in the gym behind locked doors. Mr. Pinckney soon had a change of attitude and was carrying water to the plants the next morning as the farmers passed on their way to work. The trees and shrubs thrived thanks to the selection that had been made of plants adapted to our area.

It is important to anticipate and prepare. Before going to school one April first I put a small sheep bell in my pocket. As I entered the building I noticed the gong was mission from the school bell. I kept away from that area until it was time to sound it. Without looking or making any comment, I took the sheep bell and sounded it. Before noon the gong was replaced and neither party had exchanged a word.

Most of the boys played basketball and the coach, Ross Dickson, applied pressure to prevent the use of tobacco. I asked the only non L.D.S. board member if I could supply pressure on all the students, and he gave his consent. One day I reminded a boy he had violated school policy by smoking in the basement. After a few days he came and asked me who told me he had been smoking. He said each boy had denied having told me. I replied, "You did. I smelled your breath." I doubt he ever smoked again.

When the Georgetown High School first developed basketball players, lettermen were eliminated for M.I.A. competition, which was an incentive for Georgetown not to enter school competition. But the fall of 1933 I asked Mr. Dickson if we should enter the High School tournament. He thought we were not yet strong enough. When spring came the townspeople thought otherwise, and applied the pressure on Mr. Dickson who could only answer, "Talk to Mr. Clark." Within an hour after he told me he would like to enter the tournament I asked the district manager if we could enter. The reply was that the schedule had already been drawn. Next year we would be welcome.

That, of course, did not satisfy the basketball fans. I could not explain I had followed Mr. Dickson's wishes. I was principal and responsible for school policy, so I took the rap. I was notified of my dismissal a few hours before commencement exercises. I was surprised and disappointed. I had enjoyed teaching and had taught practically every hour of the day. I missed one week when Violet died, but seldom if ever a day due to any other cause. It proved to be a financial blessing, as I improved my farm. I had only received $1600 a year and paid for my supplies including all school correspondence, expenses attending meetings of principals, and activity meetings, as well as transporting students.

Nine years later, September 13, 1943, I returned to the school room under Grove Haddock as principal. I taught under him for two years, then under Lewis Munk one year, then I again accepted the position of principal. On May 28, 1947 I was appointed county superintendent of schools and a new phase of school work was opened up to me.