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Title: **Chapter IX: MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES IN THE WEST IOWA CONFERENCE**
Provenance:

Category: **Document**
Person: **Walter Edward Clark**
Date:

MY MEMOIRS

RECOLLECTIONS OF PIONEER LIFE

IN BEAR LAKE VALLEY

Written by Walter Edward Clark

Chapter IX

MISSIONARY EXPERIENCES IN THE WEST IOWA CONFERENCE

A letter from President German E. Ellsworth dated October 22, 1914 transferred me from the Michigan conference to the West Iowa Conference as its President. The letter suggested I go to the east shore of Lake Michigan and take the boat to Milwaukee to join in the conference. How I would like to have taken that trip, but my finances would not allow. Mother had been ending $35 a month to the mission office. Expenses had risen from $30 in Battle Creek to $40 in Detroit and I had not reported the need for more money. I wrote to Father in Farmington telling of my transfer and need for more money. He immediately addressed a letter, containing a check, to Elder Walter E. Clark, Council Bluffs, Iowa. There was no street address, but because of the prefix, Elder, it was delivered with the other Elders' mail. I went to Chicago and the mission office advanced me enough money to buy a ticket to Council Bluffs, the main center of activities in the West Iowa Conference. Some experiences in life have a great influence in determining our future actions. I have been without money several times, but seldom if ever, since this experience, have I been in a position that I could not get money for an immediate need. I been in a position that I could not get money for an immediate need. In fact I have gone to the extreme in saving for some possible future need.

In Michigan I enjoyed the relief of being free from directing the activities of other people and the worries connected with a livestock ranch as much as I did the opportunity to study and associate with people of high ideals. I was thrilled with new experiences and missionary work in general. I was a happy young man. I was surprised that I did not feel overwhelmed at the thoughts of this new responsibility as I had felt when I was made a senior companion. I accepted the responsibility with a feeling of confidence and satisfaction. It was my duty to observe and make suggestions for improvements in branches, teach elders proselytizing techniques, help keep harmony, and inspire to greater activity. During the seventeen months in Iowa I did not have an assigned companion, except as an Elder departed or arrived, leaving an odd number without me. I rotated working with the Elders, including every pair in six to eight weeks. I would leave Council Bluffs for Slouix City, then go east to Webster City, south to Boone and Des Moines, to Ames, and back to Council Bluffs. I made other stops to visit saints.

The first visit I remember was with Wells J. Robertson of Spanish Fork, who was presiding in Council Bluffs. If he had any feeling of disappointment at not receiving the appointment as Conference President I never discovered the fact. Some others expected he would follow Elder Kilpack, whom I do not remember, as President. It was Elder Robertson I depended on for counsel. He commented of a sis-

ter in the branch: "Sister Olson is an exceptionally good Latter-day Saint, but her husband is not interested." We visited her home and before leaving I asked at what hour we could call when her husband was home. Neither she nor Elder Robertson thought it was wise to call when he was home. At the Elders' quarters I asserted my authority and told the Elders not to go visit Sister Olson when her husband was not at home. They protested, but complied. Brother Olson joined the Church. Before I left for home he asked me to come to his place of business where he let me pick out a pattern and style for a suit of clothes. I bought the cloth and he made me a suit. It proved to be a good one. I did not wear it until I arrived home, as all the missionaries wore the same pattern and style of suits, a white shirt, black tie, and black derby hats in the winter and light colored straw hats in the summer. Our suits came from the same shop in Chicago.

I advised the Elders to learn something about the city, state, and activity of the people with whom they were laboring. Such was the object when I took a young missionary with me into the Council Bluffs pumping plant. He reported to other missionaries about like this: "Today I learned how President Clark gets rid of his Books of Mormon. He pretends to be a mechanic, then an engineer, then a chemist. Then he tells an Indian story, and finally leaves a Book of Mormon." It was not quite that simple. However I did ask a lot of questions; in fact, so many that the operator of the plant asked why I wanted so much information. I told him I was from Idaho where we dipped our drinking water from the running mountain stream and that when I returned home I may teach school and the information would be helpful. (After I said "teach school" I thought to myself that I had never told a bigger lie.) My comment, "from Idaho" called for an explanation of why we were in that area. The rest of the story is easy to fill in. The man was not interested, at that time, in the Gospel.

On another occasion we were on the banks of the Missouri RIver when the turn bridge (which had been turned so a ship could pass) was being turned back so a train could cross the river. We walked out to the pier and could hear two men arguing about the difference between Catholic and Luthern view, so I climbed up the ladder, followed by my companion. When the operator saw me I said, "Pardon us. Are we trespassing?" He replied, "Yes," but added, "Come on up." We talked about the apostasy. The Luthern operator remarked, "I wish my wife who is Catholic could hear that." An appointment was made, and we went to his home one evening. A few minutes after we were seated the man turned to his wife and said, "You know why these men are here." If ever I was inspired, I was then. I replied, "We did not come to find fault with the Catholic, Luthern, or any other religion –but to tell the story of the restoration of the Gospel which, if you both accept, will bring unity, love, and peace to your home." We made several calls. One of the best meals I have ever eaten was in their home. I did not know if they joined the Church.

When I hear a command given with authority, and see obedience rendered, even if it be unwillingly, I think of an experience in the mission field. A pair of Elders and I decided to try an experiment of distributing the series of tracts, "Rays of Living Light" early in the morning, placing them under the newspaper previously delivered by the newsboy. (We never touched a mailbox.) This we intended to follow by a personal visit. About the third morning, as I intended to tract under a newspaper, I heard a door open in a near-by house. As I looked up, two or more large dogs were bounding towards me. I screamed, "Get out!" with the volume of a cannon shot. The dogs dropped their tails and slunk behind the house, I can, in a like manner, visualize Satan and his loyal followers obeying the command of the Priesthood, or the elements obeying the command of the Savior saying to the unruly sea: "Peace be still."

The Trumble family were members of the Church in Morningside, a suburb of Souix City. Three of the daughters, Helen, Ellen, and Alice, were very attractive. One night Elder Erickson, who labored in Souix City, woke me swinging his hands and saying, "You take Ellen and I will take Helen." He told me we were sleighing and he was whipping the team with the lines. Later, Elder Erickson was reporting

at a Conference on the organizatin of a Sunday School and used the expression, " A woman and another man." It amused President Ellsworth, and he whispered in my ear, "The Dutchman siad, 'My Alice will make some man a good husband.'" My first thought was, is there an attraction between Elder Erickson and Alice Trumble, and President Ellsworth knows about it and I have not even had a suspicion? It worried me. At lunch President Ellsworth said to me, "You do not joke in you family." I was relieved, but made no comment. (Elder Erickson was corresponding with a cousin of mine and married her.)

On one occasion a very intelligent young woman made the charge that the Mormons did not teach loyalty to the government. I immediately recalled leaning on a hoe in a garden west of the railroad in Farmington watching a passenger train decked in national colors speed to Salt Lake City where president Theodore Roosevelt would see a "living flag" formed by children in costume. I described the situation and asked, "How can children be dressed and trained to for our national flag for the President of our nation to view without being taught patriotism?" It was remarkable how a young man who had talked as little as I and who was so shy could talk so freely and think of so many appropriate examples. All summer before leaving for my mission I had hoped for a blessing that I would be able to meet and talk to people. To my joy, President Seymour B. Young, while setting me apart, told me my "tongue would be loosed." Interesting conversations, faith promoting experiences, new friends and assistance were weekly occurrences. It would take pages to record all I remember after sixty years.

This narrative would not be complete with the omission of a tragedy that happened in our Conference. It was during my third Christmas in the mission field, and it involved an Elder (I shall call him Bob) whom I had met when I attended Fielding Academy five years earlier. As a missionary he was agreeable and cooperative but not enthused. Bob left his company one morning, stating he was going from Council Bluffs to Omaha to meet an uncle who was bringing livestock to Omaha for sale. He did not return that night. The next day four of us Elders, in pairs, attempted to examine the register in every hotel in Omaha without success. I notified President Ellsworth that "Bob" was missing. In a few days I received word from President Ellsworth to meet Apostle James E Tamage at the Council Bluffs railroad terminal to discuss the case. Elder Talmage approved of what we had done but had no suggestions to offer. I was 26 years old and had mature judgment, so I was left to decide a course of action.

President Ellsworth notified "Bob's" parents in a few days received word that one of "Bob's" checks have been cashed at a certain Omaha bank. I went to the Omaho police department for help. A policeman accompanied me to the bank. We were told the man who had deposited the check had left word he would be out of the city for some time and had not left a forwarding address. I wrote down the man's Omaha address. I do not now remember if I copied from looking at the bank records or whether the bank clerk orally told the policeman where he lived –most likely the latter. The policeman dismissed the case and went his way. I went to the address I had copied.

I knocked at the side door and was invited in and asked to be seated, but I remained standing by the door by which I had entered. Several young men, not well groomed, were in a large, untidy room. It was about 11 a.m. I asked if they knew a young man by the name of "Bob." They said they did and asked me to be seated. My impression or feeling was to leave immediately. I thanked them and left. I returned to the police department and reported my findings. The policeman asked a plain-clothed officer and me to accompany him. As we approached the house the policeman commented, "I know what the situation is." and directed the officer to go to the side door and he took me with him to the front door. This time young women seemed to outnumber the men.

They reported "Bob" was in the insane asylum. I went to the Mental Hospital and verified the report. I sent a telegram to President Ellsworth: "Bob is located. A letter will follow." The first words

President Ellsworth said when he next saw me was, "Why did you not tell us in the telegram where 'Bob

was?" I answered, 'Should I have advertised one of our members was in the insane asylum." He replied, "I guess you did the right thing, but we were surely worried." I went to the hospital about 10 a.m. and spent the next three hours with him having dinner at the hospital mess table along with many feebleminded but harmless individuals.

Bob was irrational in his talk. I did not learn a thing about his experiences. He looked haggard, depressed, and seemed glad to see me. The only act of violence was when he tried to slip his hands in my side pocket where I carried a pocket knife. I was on my guard and he did not succeed.

Not long after, President Ellsworth wrote me a letter stating that a released missionary would accompany "Bob" to Utah, and for me to have "Bob" at the Omaha railroad station at a certain time. President Ellsworth accompanied the Elder to Omaha and met "Bob" and me. The hospital authorities put "Bob" in a straight jacket (a jacket with long sleeves that tie behind the back) and turned him over to me. He had an overcoat over the jacket. We arrived at the station about half an hour before train time. I felt "Bob" had been drugged. The fact that the straight jacket was removed before the train arrived in Salt Lake City seemed to confirm that theory.

It was later revealed that "Bob" had left his companion some time before this. If true, it should have been reported. Perhaps someone is carrying a responsibility for failing to report. A mistake, unless repented of, leads to other mistakes of graver nature. I often wished I could talk with "Bob's" mother and assure her he had been a good missionary. I guess I hoped against odds that "Bob" would reform his life.

Some years later I read the same name in the obituary column with the comment that the body had been held while a search was made for relatives. I do not know whether it was he. Just recently I asked Elder Erickson if he knew anything about "Bob." He told me "Bob" had come to his Ogden place of business several times and asked for help. At first he gave "Bob" money to buy clothes. Later he gave him clothes, but finally, Elder Erickson told me, he had to refuse to help.

To my grandchildren, for whom I am writing, consider this advice: Do not tattle, gossip, or betray confidences, but have the courage to report that which should be reported. Be careful not to commit yourself to keep secrets. If asked to keep one, reply by saying: The only way to keep a secret is not to tell it. If asked for information you do not wish to divulge, just ignore, pretend not to hear, or ask: "Can you keep a secret?" The answer will most likely be, "Yes." the answer is easy then –just reply: "So can I." Have a ready answer; anticipate situations, and be prepared for them. How easy for the young lady who is asked for a date she does not desire to accept to answer, "I have other plans." That leaves her free to do as she likes. The more important thing is not to do little wrongs, for if unrepented of, they inevitable lead to grave wrongs.

Six years after my father was released I followed him as Conference President in West Iowa. I baptized children he had blessed. I was entertained in homes he had been in. He was loved and respected everywhere. He covered more area, as he did more country work. Three weeks is all I labored in the country, two in Michigan and one in Iowa. In Iowa I accompanied by Elder Jensen of Star Valley, a light-headed well built Scandinavian. One morning our host put a Bible at thee side of one of the plates and with his hand indicated that Elder Jensen was to take the chair. Elder Jensen did not observe the motion so I slipped into the chair. After we left I asked Elder Jensen if he had in mind a text he could have turned to, and I added, "I will not come to your rescue another time." But I now firmly believe had I not observed the situation or had the host directly asked Elder Jensen to read a text, the Elder would have been inspired to do the right thing.

We collectively made several trips to Omaha, once to a Western States Conference. On July 24, 1914,

the Council Bluffs saints and Omaha saints and Elders celebrated in Florence, Nebraska. I was asked to give a talk. In the afternoon we had a ball game. In Omaha we saw the play, Ben Hur, and heard Helen Keller. Her teacher gave a talk; then Helen Keller recited the 23rd Psalm in a monotone and answered questions.

On March 8, 1916, a letter from President Ellsworth stated my successor, Rolla V. Johnson, would arrive March 12. On March 18th we "locked horns." His weekly report and mind did not agree. He had been in the Chicago office and felt he knew how the reports should be made out. He had reported more hours of visit, conversation, etc., then I had. He wanted me to up my report. I refused and replied, "that is the kind of reports I have been sending in, and I will not pad the last two. After that, you are in command." A few days later he told me he had come out determined to make a better report than some of the other Conferences, and added, "I have changed my mind. I now understand what President Ellsworth meant when he referred to the spirit of the West Iowa Conference." I had my reward for hard work without exaggeration. To me, reports have always been a question mark. As a youth, a teacher told me that if I did not answer to the roll she would mark me absent. I imprudently answered, "I do not come to Sunday School for marks on that roll book." To me an exaggeration report is not the truth and the maker is afraid to face the facts.

On June 6, 1933, my wife and I stopped at a tourist camp in Council Bluff. I went to the telephone and called the local presiding elder, who was baptized while I was in the mission field. I spent my last evening in the mission field, March 22, 1916, in their home. He and his wife drove to the camp to meet us. The mirror was placed before my eyes when Mrs. Holmes told my wife I used to be so enthused that I would start explaining the Gospel before I even got into the house. It made me wonder if I had been too enthusiastic; if I had to study my listener, vary my attack, and discuss a variety of subjects, and make a somewhat different approach at each home, and not to continually talk on the same theme.

The purpose of a mission is to let people know of the restoration of the Gospel, the priesthood, living prophets, and the Book of Mormon. If the missionary's energy is devoted to that cause, with conviction, then growth in knowledge, confidence in God's promises, and love for people will increase, and he will experience "JOY." I experienced it for twenty-seven months. I thought it could not be equaled, but found marriage, children, temple work, and especially my Stake labors just as rewarding.

Chapter X

YEARS OF DESPONDENCY AND A BLESSING

From the time I left Fielding Academy in early June, 1910, until the time of my departure for a mission in December, 1913 were, with a few exceptions, unpleasant years. In Paris I had lived with Aunt Emily Richards and her husband Wilford. Of their children, Laura was a grade above me and Wilford a grade below. They were both popular and I, being a cousin, had the advantage of the association of their friends, but I was shy and lacked self confidence in social situations.

Georgetown had one girl with refinement that I admired. To return from church in the dark of the night we would have to walk on a dirt street past our house. To take the part of a gentleman I felt I should and would like to have asked for the privilege of accompanying her home, but could not utter a word.

At Fielding I met a young lady I very much admired. It was a one-sided affair, or at least I thought so. Two years or more later, I was in her home at a welcome home for a return missionary, and I assumed she was engaged. I was disappointed, but accepted defeat.

Before my mission, as an M.I.A. worker and the chairman of the Amusement Committee I was associated with young ladies, but had no interest in any of them. The last year or more of my mission I corresponded with a young lady and I stopped at

Provo to see her on my way home. I felt she was disappointed in me, as well she could be, for I was still an uncouth (not vulgar, just unpolished) individual and I returned to Georgetown with a wounded pride and a tongue that seemed no longer "loose."

I overworked and was tired and discouraged. The next three years I tried to work myself to death. As I approached thirty, my mother worried that I would never marry.

I attended General Conference and Mission reunions. There were girls who offered me encouragement, but I had little interest. One young lady asked if I had a place to stay and asked if I would go to their home in the suburb of Salt Lake City. I declined, and stayed in Farmington. I did exchange a few letters with a return missionary in the Ogden area. In fact, I joined her and friends on a picnic in Ogden Canyon on the 24th of July. She let it be known she had killed and dressed the chickens we were eating. The words President Ellsworth had whispered in my ear entered my mind with force: "My Alice would make some man a good husband." (For the story, see Missionary Experiences in Iowa.)

I can not explain why I had such a violent reaction to her comments. My thought was: Do I want a wife who can do what I can't? It was very hard and still is for me to kill an animal or fowl for food. I lost all interest in the girl. As I look back I must have been looking for refinement.

I called on another young lady in Paris several times. Then a widower accompanied her to church one Sunday. I never asked for another date. She and the widower married and have appeared to have a pleasant life.

I wrote to an exceptionally fine young lady who had been in the Northern States Mission and asked if I could call. She granted me the privilege. January, 1919, enroute to her home in Richmond, Utah, I changed trains at McCammon, Idaho where a young man in a soldier's uniform was pacing the platform. He asked if I was from Idayo, and asked me my name, and where I was going. I did not answer the last question. I though he was getting too personal. That evening, in Richmond, Utah I learned the reason for his curiosity. The night before this same young lady, with whom he too had corresponded, had let him know he was disappointed in him, and they had decided to go their separate ways. I only visited her this once. She soon married a widower, a Bishop. I think he had no family.

From Richmond I went on to Farmington and to Provo to visit Herald R. Clark and family. On the way back to Farmington, February 4, 1919, I stopped in Salt Lake City and went to the Presiding Patriarch, Hyrum G. Smith, and asked for a blessing. He had previously given me my patriarchal blessing the day I left for the mission field six years earlier.

I had given up teaching, thinking I was a failure; I detested farmings; and I had no prospect nor desire for marriage. I doubt the patriarch had ever seen a more discouraged man. In part, the blessing reads, "Therefore, be not discouraged nor allow the spirit of melancholy or despondency to come into thy soul, for these are only tricks of the adversary to place barriers in thy pathway." It changed my outlook on life. As a side remark he added: "A faint heart never won a fair lady."

When I returned to Farmington, a letter awaited my arrival, requesting that I return to Georgetown and complete the teaching year of a teacher who had not returned after the Christmas holidays. It was the flu year and very little school was held. The board only paid me for the days taught.

In 1919 I went to June M.I.A. Conference and as usual, stayed in Farmington. Uncle Amasa invited me to accompany him to Davis County High School commencement exercises in Kaysville. Adam S. Bennion was scheduled to give the address. As I approached Uncle's home to leave I noticed his wife, Aunt Susan, drive off in the automobile. When she returned, a young lady, Violet Christensen, was in the car. When the four of us returned from Kaysville to Farmington, Uncle Amasa was nearly "out of gas" –so he said. My ford was

very close. I drove the young lady home, and nine months later, March 3, 1920, she and I were married.