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MY MEMOIRS

RECOLLECTIONS OF PIONEER LIFE

IN BEAR LAKE VALLEY

Written by Walter Edward Clark

Chapter VI

THE ONE ROOM SCHOOL

My first recollection of school was attending for a few weeks one spring in the one room log building that served as a school, church, recreation and business center. A new chapel on the public square was completed in 1894 and the new school building soon thereafter, if not at the same time. The old school building was moved west and across the street, and became the Relief Society hall, and now houses pioneer relics collected by the War Mothers.

The first teacher I remember was Miss Morgan, later Mrs. Nephi Skinner. She taught in the west room, ground floor of the new two story, three-room school building, painted white as was the tall new chapel. The school was not graded, but went by "readers." I was in the Fourth Reader at least three years, but only two years in the upper four grades. The textbooks for reading had First Reader, Second Reader, etc. printed on the front. One's ability to read determined the group one recited with. In upper classes there would be a great variation in age. The three R's were the important subjects. Boys attended only when there was no work for them to do at home.

The spring of 1905 the most advanced students took the State tests for graduation. The group included one boy, Marion C. Clark, and Emma Dunn, Leona Stoddard, Laura Richards, and perhaps others, but that group went to the Fielding Academy. I was graduated in the spring of 1906 in the second graduating class. For many years, passing a state test was necessary for graduation.

Cheating was a general practice. A State examination for graduation was given both in the spring and at the end of the school year. The county superintendent said she could prevent cheating and a teacher challenged her. Two boys who had passed the first test asked for the privilege of taking the second exam to try and raise their grade. They copied the first questions, excused themselves saying they were satisfied, and left the room. They then copied dates and other information and shoved the information under the window. A boy inside asked if he could raise the window, and he picked up the information. (This was not in Georgetown.) The methods of cheating were numerous. In arithmetic the teacher gave an oral speed problem. We were to write answers. I saw a number on a loose sheet on his desk. I substituted it for my answer and received a top grade.

I was guilty of my share of mischievous acts. Some of the students were in the east room pouring water through the transom onto anyone who tried to enter the room. When my turn came I poured the water on a teacher who boarded with Mother. I do not think Mother even knew about the incident.

At the commencement of the noon hour one day

Joe Robison and I were running up and down the stairs. As one went up, the other came down. After one of the trips Joe did not come down, so I went home for dinner. On my return I was asked why I did not come in the room when the teacher called. I explained I did not hear him. He told me to remain after school. I still insisted I had not heard. I was told to go get a branchy willow. The limbs were braided, my coat removed, and the stick raised. He believed he was right; I knew he was wrong. He did not strike me.

I recall another incident under the same teacher, Alma J. Hess, that nearly created a crisis. The class was seated on a long bench in front of the seats, as was the custom during class recitation. Mr. Hess was drilling us on the quick response by pronouncing a word which was to be used in a sentence. The word presented was "fool;" the pupil, Lewis Robison; and the sentence: "You are a fool." Silence prevailed. The teacher's face turned red but he controlled his temper and replied, "If I thought you meant that I would flog you." This was in a day when physical punishment was not only tolerated but thought necessary.

When I started teaching I remembered a mistake a beginning teacher, Beatrice Hoff, made in asking pupils to formulate the rules of government. They were so numerous and stringent they could not be enforced. I may have gone to the other extreme. I had one basic rule: Act as gentlemen. Then I added rules to correct a situation. The first year I taught, I had 20 pupils in the fifth grade and 15 pupils in the sixth grade. It is hard to convince me a teacher cannot handle 35 pupils. I guess every teacher has five too many and they would like to designate the five they would like to see go. Years later, the standard school room in Idaho was for forty pupils.

Subject matter is not hard for me to remember, but the exact wording is very hard to memorize. As a disciplinary measure, several of us were required to memorize a poem after school. All were dismissed but me. I took the attitude, "I can remain as long as you can." Finally I was asked to come to the desk and try again. The book was placed in a position where I could read the words. I think the teacher was more anxious to get home than I was.

At this time each local school district made its own tax levy, employed its teachers, and purchased its own supplies. Because Georgetown area, District #12, had along mileage of railroad, it had a large tax base and could pay larger salaries and attract many superior teachers. Among the list were Oliver Dunford, Roy A. Welker, Nellie Osmond Hart, and Eugene Hart, all of Bloomington. Later, Lenora Hess and Rose Painter Dunn came from Bloomington which was the "Cambridge" of Bear Lake County.

To me, two of them, Oliver Dunford and Roy Welker, were more than instructors; they were teachers. I still have a mental image of Mr. Dunford pacing across the room marking off the distance of space with his hands and ending up saying, "and on and on and on with no end" to make us realize the immensity of space. He was the most dramatic teacher I have ever known. Two of his sons, Stanley and Rao, taught in Georgetown and Rao made his in Georgetown. Both were friends of mine.

I learned that words have more than one use or meaning from Mr. Welker. He announced, "Tomorrow we will draw a vessel." At home I said, "We are going to draw a ship tomorrow." Instead, we drew a bowl the shape of the one I ate my bread and milk from.

This use of words was made emphatic by Oliver Dunford when I attended an M.I. A. convention in the Bear Lake Stake Tabernacle. At the beginning Oliver proposed a critic be appointed. The presiding officer responded by appointing him. I wondered during the meeting why Mr. Dunfor wanted to "find fault." At the conclusion Mr. Dunford analyzed and evaluated the proceedings so well, it was by far the best part of the program. To this day a critic, to me, is one who can intelligently and fairly analyze and evaluate, not a fault finder. I must have learned early that many questions are controversial, and I developed a liking for debating or arguing. I debated in elementary school, high school, and college. I have learned four "W's" as a lifetime standard to be applied to everything I

hear of read: Who said it? Why did they say it?
When did they say it? And What did they say?