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Article revealing how John Alexander Clark's death inadvertently played a role int he construction of the BYU Jerusalem Center.

BYU Jerusalem Center

Local boy from Farmington, key to building the BYU Jerusalem Center in Israel

Little did we know as we were boarding the Delta 767 at the Salt Lake International Airport April 24 of this year, that 7 days and some 9,000 miles later we would be standing in front of a memorial in Haifa, Israel honoring John Alexander Clark, of Farmington, Utah. John was an integral part in bringing the BYU Jerusalem Center into existence.

As Paul Harvey would say, now the rest of the story.

In an effort to strengthen the relationship between the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and the State of Israel, in the late 1960's and 70's, the Church sought a parcel of land suitable for building a center for a BYU Educational program. Where students could come and experience for themselves the Near East, Israel, the Holy Land. Leaders of the Church and of BYU had spent years looking for property but none was available. One of the problems was that the State of Israel made it virtually impossible for outsiders to purchase any part of their land.

In 1979, President Spencer W. Kimball was in Jerusalem to dedicate the Orson Hyde Memorial Garden located on the hillside across from the Old City of Jerusalem, near the Garden of Gethsemane. He had asked Jeffrey Holland, then Commissioner of the Church Education System, to show him some of the sites that he was considering for the center. At each proposed site, President Kimball would say, no. As the group surveyed one site which was on the opposite side of the hill where the center was eventually build, President Kimball and a few others walked over to the other side where the Old City of Jerusalem came into full view. He paused, then said, "This is the place where the Center should be build. All in favor raise your right hand."

Easier said than done. In fact, it would take a miracle, not just one but many to bring about the actual building of the center. There were obstacles at every turn.

This particular parcel of land was acquired by Israel as part of the 6 Day War in 1967, it was previously part of Jordan. As such it was kind of in a "no mans land" location. And there were already two Israeli groups that had their first dubs on the property but nothing was progressing to be able to build anything anyway.

Teddy Kollek, the Mayor of Jerusalem, who was a major support for building the center, was receiving insurmountable pressure form all sides to not allow the "Mormons" to build on the property. But he supported it because in his words, "I was fighting intolerance and obscurantism and I won."

In construction, if anyone discovered a tomb or even one bone of a skeleton, the project would stop. What was the possibility of this not happening, in Jerusalem, a city that has been built then destroyed, then rebuilt again some 20 times, what are the odds. There

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again behold their dutiful and affectionate son he may be wearing a martyr's crown.

Resolved further, That a copy of these resolutions be sent to the Deseret News and also one placed on record in the Young Men's Association.

W.W. Richards

Davie Thomas

E.F. Richards

In behalf of the Young Men's Association.

Elders Hess, James T. Smith, Abraham H. Cannon, Franklin D. Richards and James E. Talmage were the speakers, and in their respective remarks they offered the greatest comfort and condolence to the parents of the young man, and each paid a glowing tribute to the merits of the departed one, as he had always been a young man of the highest morals and strictest integrity, and his loss will be deeply felt by those who had the pleasure of his acquaintance during his short but well spent life.

Z.

Letters and copy compiled by Anne Clark Heiner

Cover designed by Lanetta Maxfield

Addendum added by Antone Clark

xvi. John Alexander, b. 28 Feb. 1871; d. in Haifa, Palestine, 8 Feb. 1896. He was teaching school in Minersville, Utah when he was called on a mission to Turkey. He landed at Liverpool in February, met his coworkers in Leipzig, Germany, and in the summer started to work among the German population of Beirut, Syria while starting to study Arabic. In August he went to Haifa where he started to work among the Arabs. He contracted smallpox and was buried in a cemetery at the foot of Mt. Carmel, Palestine.

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Actual newspaper clipping of the ViewPoint section of the Davis County Clipper, May 27, 2010

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Reverse side of the newspaper clipping