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MY MEMOIRS

RECOLLECTIONS OF PIONEER LIFE

IN BEAR LAKE VALLEY

Written by Walter Edward Clark

Chapter XVII

CHURCH ACTIVITIES

Like most Mormon boys in the community, I attended most of the Church meetings, and was advanced in the Priesthood. (See appendix) Before even reaching the age (14) to enroll in M.I.A. I was called as assistant secretary. Immediately after my graduation from Fielding Academy I was ward assistant M.I.A. superintendent to Orson Sorenson who was employed out of town most of the time. In addition, I was chairman of the Amusement Committee, a very demanding position as there were no automobiles, not even good roads, and no commercial entertainment. For the winter months, which ran from the first of November to the first of May, we tried to provide a weekly entertainment. An important school teacher, Miss Pyoit, was resourceful. I would call for committee members with a sleigh and we would meet at a home to do our planning. For several years, I carried a whistle and a list of activity games in my pocket. I was M.C. for many programs.

My introduction to dance problems came when I attended Stake Priesthood Meetings as a student at Fielding Academy. That subject occupied most of the time. Only two round dances during the entire evening were allowed, and the "swing your partner" part of the square dance created worries. Georgetown had still another problem. The Georgetown hall was one of the largest in the valley and was popular, so we had more dancers than room. Each ticket purchaser received a number. Only boys purchased the tickets, which cost 35¢. Numbers were called as 1-35, then 36-70 (the largest number I remember being sold.) This separated the cliques but left the unpopular girls as wall flowers.

Soon after we returned from the mission field I had the same responsibility thrust upon me, as I was selected as a YMMIA Stake Board member in the Bear Lake Stakee. Then I was called as the Stake Assistant Superintendent in the newly organized Montpelier Stake. I served there until I was selected as second counselor in the Georgetown Ward Bishopric. I visited Liberty, Geneva and Alton in the Bear Lake Stake all before we had an automobile.

Bishop Harrison P. Tippetts selected June Freeman and Ernest P. Hoff as counselors. June soon left the community and in 1919 I was selected as second counselor. I was still single. Two experiences I will relate. For many years –month after month–the Montpelier Stake (and many other stakes) reported 100% ward teaching completed. The visiting high councilman was responsible for the completion of the visits in the ward he visited. No Bishop wanted a High Councilman to complete the visit and no Teacher wanted the Bishop to complete his district, so promises to do the teaching were accepted and recorded as completed acts. On a certain report Sunday the Bishop and first counselor were absent. As usual, a few districts were not complet-

ed. I did not promise to complete the teaching. After the first of the next month I was asked if the teaching was completed. I replied, "I do not know. I will contact the non-reporting teachers." I reported back: "It was not completed." For several months I was made to feel I had been a traitor to the Stake, but it was a good feeling to know I had been truthful, and others followed my example, for in the future the reports were under the 100% point.

Fifty years later Phillip Hume offered to ride us unicycle from Montpelier to Georgetown if the Georgetown Ward would get 100% ward teaching for the month he was to visit. He rode his unicycle the twelve miles. I asked our home teachers when they had come, and they said they had seen my wife and I in a car the evening they made their visit, so they knew we were well. The ward clerk told me he knew of one other family not visited. A month later a visiting High Councilman made a significant statement, "There are three types of lies: The black, the white, and the secretary reports."

Bishop Tippetts was out of town when Horice Hayes' wife passed away. Earnest Hoff had recently lost his wife and was upset, so I was asked to take over the responsibilities of presiding and conduction the funeral. It was the days before the printed program. James L. dunford of Bloomington was the first speaker. His talk seemed lengthy. After discussion of religious themes, he said, "Will Hayes, that great salesman, chairman of the National Republican Party..." knowing he liked to talk politics, I pulled his coat tail. When he turned I said, "We have other speakers." Alma Hayes suggested hereafter we put a watch on the pulpit.

My next call came unexpectedly, as did many others. I was met at the church yard gate one Sunday by John M. Bee, successor to H. P. Tippetts, and he told me he had selected me to be his second counselor. In my "acceptance speech" I said, "I think my selection was an after thought." E. E. Pinckney, the ward clerk, told me those who had declined to accept the appointment and added, "I think you were the only one who was inspired." I was released when I entered college, September, 1923.

February 12, 1928 I was sustained as Bishop of the Georgetown Ward, but not ordained until Stake Conference time December 16, 1928. Milton G. Smith, a man with excellent judgment, and Roy H. Robinson, a man with lots of enthusiasm, were counselors. Not one of us could sing. Before it was known I was selected for approval as Bishop and before I knew of the assignment from the Stake to provide for classrooms, I had decided to propose completing the excavation under the meeting house. After formal instruction came for the Stake Presidency, a building committee, headed by Wilford W. Clark, was named, and a plan was approved to add a wing of classrooms onto the side of the existing building. In a private conversation with Uncle Wilford, I told him of my proposed, still unannounced plan. He presented it to the committee with the result that I was sent to Salt Lake city to meet with the First Presidency. The request for a change of plans was granted.

The building was on a high foundation on an elevated ridge, so providing windows was no problem. Logs were placed under the building, protruding where the windows were to be. It was a narrow, long, tall building, with a raised stage in one end. Excavation was made under the stage for storage of stage equipment at time of construction. Later a hot air furnace and coal bin were installed under the building. We soon had a trench dug the length of the building. We then used a horse and scraper to remove the dirt. With this improvement the building served for over thirty more years.

I was released as Bishop in 1930. I had a sick wife, a farm and school to care for. In later years, Enez Hoff, in referring to the main contribution of past Bishops, listed mine as being interested in the Aaronic Priesthood and the young people.

Most of my church work has been on the stake basis. I was Stake Sunday School Board Member when Lela and I were married, and shortly thereafter she was also a Sunday School Board Member. At a later date she was a Primary Stake Board Member. Walter Hunzeker, Elmer Burgoyne and Winslow Swensen were the Sunday School Super-

intendency under whom we served (they were later the Stake Presidency). They divided the board into three groups to visit the wards. My assignment was with Superintendent Hunzaker.

November 30, 1941, at Stake Conference, my name was included among those to be sustained as High Councilmen. I had no advance warning. It was always taken for granted that members would accept responsibility willingly. Communication was difficult in rural stakes.

Just before or immediately after my call as a High councilman, President Silas L. Wright asked me to assist Landon Pugmire, a High Councilman in the Bear Lake Stake and the County Agricultural Agent in planning a three day convention. (Brother Pugmire and I were given the title of Stake Agricultural Representatives.) It was at a time when the use of gas was limited and Church headquarters discovered travel, yet intellectual and social activity was at a low ebb and the Stake leaders felt a need for such a gathering. Stake speakers were available at the county agent's request. In addition to local talent, we invited Professor Ira Hayward of U.S.U. a native of Paris, to lecture. The meetings were held in the Stake Tabernacle at Paris.

Brother Pugmire, the county agent, and I were to take turns conducting. My turn came first, and at their persuasion, I continued to conduct all the meetings. When I arose at the first meeting I discovered we had not provided for an invocation, so I just announced it would be offered by Bishop W. W. Clark. (He was always called Bishop.) A student relates that I was asked what they should call me, and I replied, "At school, Mr.; at church, Bishop; at home, Walter." The "Mr." stuck.

My next assignment as a high councilman was to recommend a farm for purchase as a Stake Welfare Farm. I suggested a farm, but because it had a low productive record in the A.A.A. office, it was not considered. Wayne purchased it and it proved better than the 320 acres dry farm south of town that was purchased. (Both had some water rights.) The stake farm was purchased from an Eastern Finance Company at a nominal price. It proved to be a heavy soil requiring heavy, large machinery, and was soon leased with rent collections divided among the wards to apply on their assessment. Ezra hulme was work director and we worked in unison and disced and seeded a crop of wheat. While it was a poor method, we still harvested a good crop. Roy Robinson soon carried the load both Ezra and I had had. It was Roy who made the welfare farm a success.

At one of the first High Council meetings I attended the Stake President announce that the choice for a Bishop had been narrowed to two men and asked us to vote our choice. I inquired about the younger man's wife, then voted for the younger man, who received eight of the fifteen votes. The decision was made anonymous, not as a matter of policy, as at political meetings, but by united agreement. In spite of that, I felt responsible for his selection, and it made me aware of the importance of being unbiased and fair in a decision. It also impressed me with what I already knew –that men are expected to be informed and to use good judgment as well as to attempt at all times to be guided by the Spirit.

At times I felt embarrassed for fear other of my coworkers would feel I was exerting undue influence. Often President Hunseker would ask me to summarize a discussion, by saying, "How do you feel Brother Clark?" At times my summary was different than my first expression. Instead of restating my suggestion and making it his own expression, the President would just ask for approval. Some years later Parley Lloyd, who was a high councilman in our stake and then a high councilman in another stake, told me of a recreational problem they were having in the second stake, and added, "I wish you could have been there. I do not think the proposition would have been approved." I am not imaginative, and do not propose drastic changes. I think my best service has been in keeping a balance and avoiding extremes.

I enjoyed the company I had in making the monthly visits to the various wards. At one time when I was younger, I was junior companion to Nephi Skinner. The assignment was no doubt made be-

cause I needed the influence he could have in shaping my attitude and desires. I in turn have had companions who needed activity. I have had experiences that influenced my subsequent tingling and actions. One Sunday I asked a young man to accompany me to a Montpelier Ward. The theater and confectionary store were in the immediate neighborhood. After the church service I asked my companion to accompany me to the confectionary store. We were seated in the front, as the back seats were filled with many who had witnessed the first running of the film. I heard a voice I recognized say, "I guess it is alright for us to go to a show on Sunday if Walter Clark goes. Since then I have not been in a confectionary store or very seldom any kind of store on Sunday.

I have had people tell me I answered a question for them or gave an encouraging thought, to which I reply, "If you get a message it was because you desire it and I was in tune with the spirit." On one occasion a man, a recent convert, who wanted to upload his thoughts on a sympathetic person, wrote me a six page letter after I had talked in his ward.

I am quick on the trigger and sometimes too confident, but more often, doubt has been an opportunity killer, both for service and growth. I went to Bern to give a lesson to a single senior Aaronic priesthood holder who had missed the class in Montpelier. The Bishop attended and after class said, "You would make a good sacrament meeting speaker." I would have enjoyed the invitation to come, but said, "You can find better speakers than me." Had I said, "I will be glad to come," it may have placed him under a feeling of obligation to invite me. I once commented to a friend whose wife was in and out of the hospital, "Surely there is a blessing in store for your wife." I felt there was. He replied, "I may call on you." Instead of saying, "I will be glad to assist you." I answered, 'I was not hunting for a job." I am independent. I was once asked why I was not campaigning for a position. I replied, "If it takes my vote to elect me, I do not want the position."

For fourteen years I served on the High Council, after which I served as second assistant to Lewis Munk, Stake Sunday School Superintendent, with Eldon Cook as the other assistant. Then I served as a Board member in charge of teaching training. At different times I was a teacher in High Priest Quorum, High Priest Group, MIA, Sunday School, Teacher Training, Temple Project, (a class to prepare married couples to go to the Temple), and Stake Adult Aaronic class. I have no idea at how many funerals I have offered a prayer or been a speaker.