

# **CHAPTER I**

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## **BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS**

Thank you for your interest in George H. Walser. Reading about his remarkable life can be a very positive experience. The inscription on his grave indicates that he was born at Aurora, Indiana, May 26, 1834. He was raised in the Christian faith, but early in life rejected much of orthodox Christianity. After a lifetime of struggles, he returned to the faith of his fathers.

Not much is known of his family. A document dated, March 7, 1895, offers some limited information. The document was certified by John G. Todd, a Notary Public in Barton Co. Missouri. Todd was Walser's son-in-law. He married Lena Walser in 1888. They had six children, four sons and two daughters. Todd said he had examined family records and mementoes in a bound drawing tablet and discovered the following entries.

G. H. Walser's father, Mark Walser, was born on March 21, 1802, and died February 13, 1882.

His mother, Sara Gray Walser, was born July 5, 1808, and died August 19, 1902.

They were married February 1, 1824.

Rannals Walser was born February 7, 1825.

Barbara Walser was born November 5, 1826, and died February 6, 1840.

John Walser was born December 28, 1828, and died April 16, 1847.

Liddy Walser was born April 5, 1831, and died December 20, 1836.

George H. Walser was born May 26, 1834.

According to these records, George was the youngest of five children. He was born

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the same year that Cyrus Hall McCormick received a patent for his mechanical reaper. On December 1, of the same year, President Jackson announced that the national debt would be paid off by January 1, 1835.

### **Robert Owen**

Not too long before Walser's birth, an event was taking place in Indiana that may have impacted his life. An infidel by the name of Robert Owen was establishing an experimental community at New Harmony.

Owen's theories were bold and outrageous. He wanted to abolish religion, marriage, and the private ownership of property. He reasoned that without marriage there could be no immorality, and without owning, there could be no stealing. Finally, he felt that the removal of religion would eliminate mental and emotional problems produced by guilt.

Mr. Owen purchased property belonging to the Rappites in 1824. This included the village of New Harmony and 30,000 acres. Several thousand people were attracted to his theories. Owen was so arrogant and confident that he predicted that within three years the city of Cincinnati would be depopulated.

Owen was a man of great wealth and benevolent intentions. Inspired by the notion that his plans would revolutionize human society, he submitted his ideas to the governments of Europe and America. He visited foreign countries and communicated directly with men of prominence. He was privileged to present an explanatory memorial to the Congress of sovereigns at Aix la Chappelle, and had extensive interviews with Prince Metternich of Austria.

Back home, the government of Mexico offered him a district one hundred and fifty miles broad to try his experiments on a grand scale. This grant would have included that part of California where gold was later discovered. Fortunately, the California project never materialized.

Some feel that Owen's theories were dealt a death blow by a preacher named Alexander Campbell. Campbell refuted his theories in a famous debate in April 1830. Robert Richardson described the debate in his book, "The Memoirs of Alexander Campbell." On the last day of the debate, Mr. Owen ran out of material, and Mr. Campbell spoke for twelve hours. Richardson felt it was a brilliant defence of Christianity. He wrote that it presented a "cogency of argument, comprehensive reach of thought and eloquence,

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(that) has never been surpassed, if ever equaled."

At the conclusion of his remarks, Campbell asked those who believed in the Christian religion to rise to their feet. There were over twelve hundred people present, and they rose as one man.

Next, Mr. Campbell asked all who were doubtful of the truth of the Christian religion to stand. Only three persons arose.

The acid test of Owen's theories, however, was not to be found in a partisan vote at the conclusion of a debate. The futility of his ideas was best exposed in the laboratory of life. New Harmony, Indiana, did not develop into a great country to rival the United States of America. His theories, which looked so good on paper, utterly failed in the real world. His grandiose proposals which sounded so good in the classroom, produced only havoc and confusion in real life.

Many years later, a preacher by the name of Clark Braden, would also prove a nemesis to G.H. Walser. Braden came to Liberal, Missouri, conducted a series of debates, and attacked liberalism with bull dog tenacity. Perhaps it is not by accident, that Braden was a disciple of Alexander Campbell.

### **Move to Illinois**

At some point in his early life, Walser moved to Illinois. Walser's friend, J.P. Moore, said that he studied law and was admitted to the bar by the Supreme Court of Illinois, and began practicing at Middleport in about 1856. Moore also believes this was the year that Walser married his first wife, Harriet.

Clark Braden, the preacher, was less complimentary about Walser's life in Illinois. He charged that Walser spent time in jail there. He wrote:

"G. H. Walser, the founder and proprietor of Liberal, first achieved greatness in Paris, Edgar County, Illinois, where he was running a store, on which he secured insurance far beyond its value. It mysteriously got afire and was saved several times. The last time Walser was found in bed sound asleep, and hard to wake, though the wick of the candle in his room was still smoking. He was watched, caught in the act of setting fire to the building, and spent three years in jail, part of the time in irons, for an attempt to break

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jail, and escaped the penitentiary by the chicanery of D.W. Voorhees, his attorney. He was dismissed from the army in disgrace for crime and misconduct, and although he has made desperate efforts to be restored he has failed . . ."

At this time, I cannot verify either the affirmations of J.P. Moore that Walser practiced law in Middleport, Illinois, or the charges of Clark Braden that he was in jail in Paris, Illinois. I do have documentation, however, proving that he was dishonorably dismissed from the military, and will present it in a later chapter.

Based on the information available to us today, it seems that George H. Walser was born in 1834. This would mean that he was twenty-two when he got married in 1856. Military records indicate that he was mustered into service on June 13, 1861. This would mean that he was twenty-seven when he became a soldier. I have no idea where, or how, he studied to become a lawyer.

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