

CHAPTER XIV

WALSER MEETS HIS MASTER

J.P. Moore wrote:

"Mr. Walser died at this home in Catalpa Park, May 1, 1910, twenty-five days before his 76th birthday. Death was due to pneumonia, contracted from getting caught in a cold rain while walking home from town. He was ill only a few days. On the day of this last trip to town, Mr. Walser was a caller at my office, The Liberal News, and we have a pleasant visit. He brought some little item for publication in the paper."

In 1926, when Esther was documenting George's death, she went to Leta West of Lamar, Missouri. Leta said she was:

". . . in possession of all the funeral record No. 3026, at page 294, shows that George H. Walser died on May 1, 1910, at Liberal, Barton County, Missouri, at the age of seventy-five years; that the physician in charge was Dr. C.A. Smith, of Liberal, Missouri, and the cause of death was anemia; that he was buried in Lake Cemetery at Lamar, Missouri, in Vault Section No. 1, on the 4th day of May, 1910."

Leta's account was given to substantiate Walser's death in a failed attempt to qualify for a Widow's Pension. Her account did accurately prove the day of his death. The date of his burial in Lamar, however, is not accurate. This is evident from two sources of information.

First, J.P. Moore notes that while his funeral was conducted at Catalpa Park on May 4, 1910, his body was first buried in a temporary vault at Fort Scott, Kansas. He wrote:

"Soon after his father's death, Mark Walser brought legal action, seeking an order authorizing that a tomb be built in the Walser lot in the Liberal burying ground to receive the body of his famous father. But the then Barton County Probate Judge Paul Tucker ruled that the court had no jurisdiction

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in the matter. So the will of the widow prevailed, and the mausoleum was built in Lake Cemetery, Lamar.

The cost of construction of the tomb sought by Mark Walser was to be paid from the Walser estate which was ample to afford the expense. Mark's petition asked that the expense be held to not exceed \$5,000. In that day that sum would have paid for a handsome structure - much more imposing than the mausoleum at Lamar." (The Strange Town, p. 54.)

As I said before, Walser was nearly broke. Moore was apparently unaware of Walser's financial condition. Appraisal for Probate Court, dated March 25, 1910, stated that the total amount of his personal estate was \$1661.60.

The second source proving that Walser was not buried in Lamar on May 4th, is Marvin VanGilder, Barton County Historian. Marvin recalls some bizzare information, which, to the best of my knowledge, is not in print anywhere. It is published, however, with VanGilder's permission. Since Walser died suddenly, arrangements for his burial were made after his death. As we have pointed out before, his widow, Esther, and his son, Mark, disagreed about where he should be buried.

VanGilder states that he was buried first in Webb City, Missouri. Local residents were apparently unaware of Walser's recent "conversion." Their complaints caused his Walser to be disinterred and buried in another temporary grave in Fort Scott, Kansas. This is the one referred to by J.P. Moore. In either instance, a May 4 burial in Lamar would have been impossible.

VanGilder also states that when the mausoleum was completed in Lamar, some time later, an open casket service was conducted for him on the Court House lawn. I'm sure the body of the controversial Walser was not welcomed by everybody in Lamar either. At any rate, he was finally placed in his tomb. His widow buried him with his beloved books. He was, however, not totally "laid to rest." The mausoleum, according to VanGilder, initially was not sealed. His unlocked tomb proved an irresistible temptation to the local young people. Many dared their comrades to open the door and take a look. Finally, by order of the city officials, the hinges on the cement door were removed, and the tomb was sealed.

Walser published three volumes of poems, "Wild Rhymes," "Poems of Leisure," and the "Bouquet." His Poems of Leisure contain the following words, which he called "An

Honest Prayer.

Oh! thou invisible power
That moves the heart and stirs the brain,
Give sordid vice a transient hour
And let within thy bosom reign
A purer thought, a chaster love
That eye within my bosom move.

Thou motive force within my brain,
Let me invoke thee while I can.
Oh! let fraternal justice reign
And man become a friend of man;
For he alone, of all the train,
Can grace a saviour's proud domain.

EPILOGUE

The Bible book of Ecclesiastes describes King Solomon's search for happiness.

He sought for wisdom, only to discover that "in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow."

He tried wine, laughter and pleasure, but found that this also was vanity.

He built houses, and planted lush vinyards. He had orchards filled with wide varieties of fruit, and designed magnificent ornamental pools. Happiness, however, always eluded his grasp.

He accumulated silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings. Something, however, was still missing. Life to Solomon was vanity and a vexation of spirit.

He married many women, but even this did not bring him the gratification and fulfilment for which he was seeking.

At last, he arrived at the only conclusion to life that made any sense:

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Eccl. 12:13.)

George H. Walsler tried many of the same things that Solomon did, and apparently came to the same conclusion.

What about you?

Michael C. Pratt died in a plane crash on December 24, 1974. Shortly before his untimely death, he gave this wise advice to a group of graduates.

"Be selective in what you think and do! Our many experiences are as strokes of the artist's brush, shaping and tinting each of our characters in sometimes very subtle ways . . . Always remember that Jesus Christ, our

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Lord, Master, Savior, teaches us the true beauty of unselfish giving. Let us strive to pattern our lives after the One who has opened the door to life, and life more abundant. Jesus Christ - the Way of Fulfilment."

Liberal, Missouri

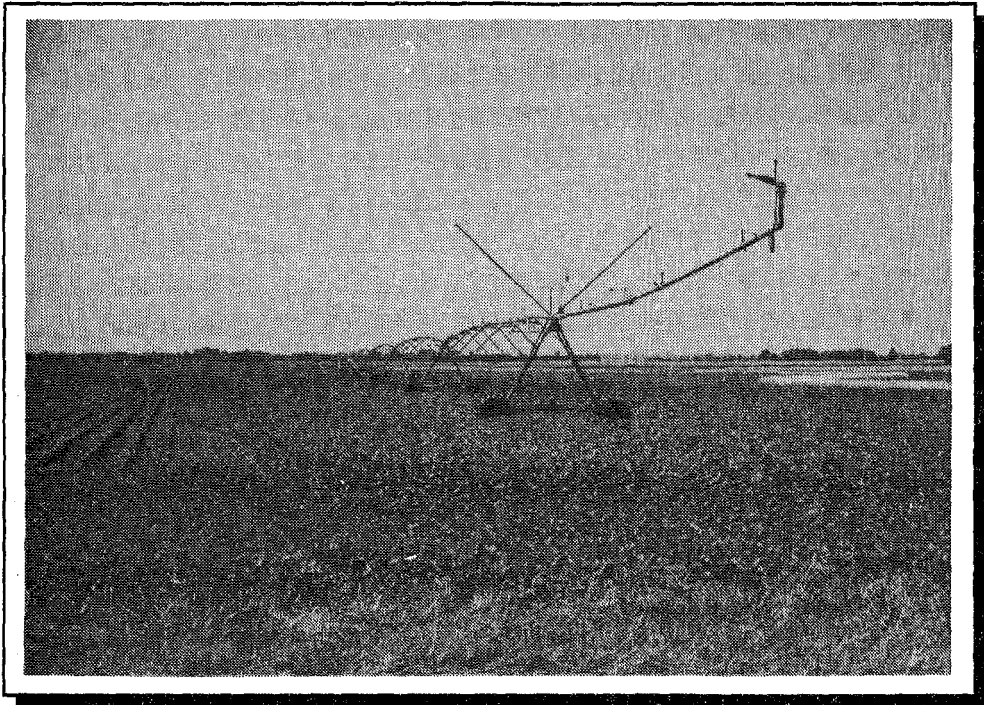
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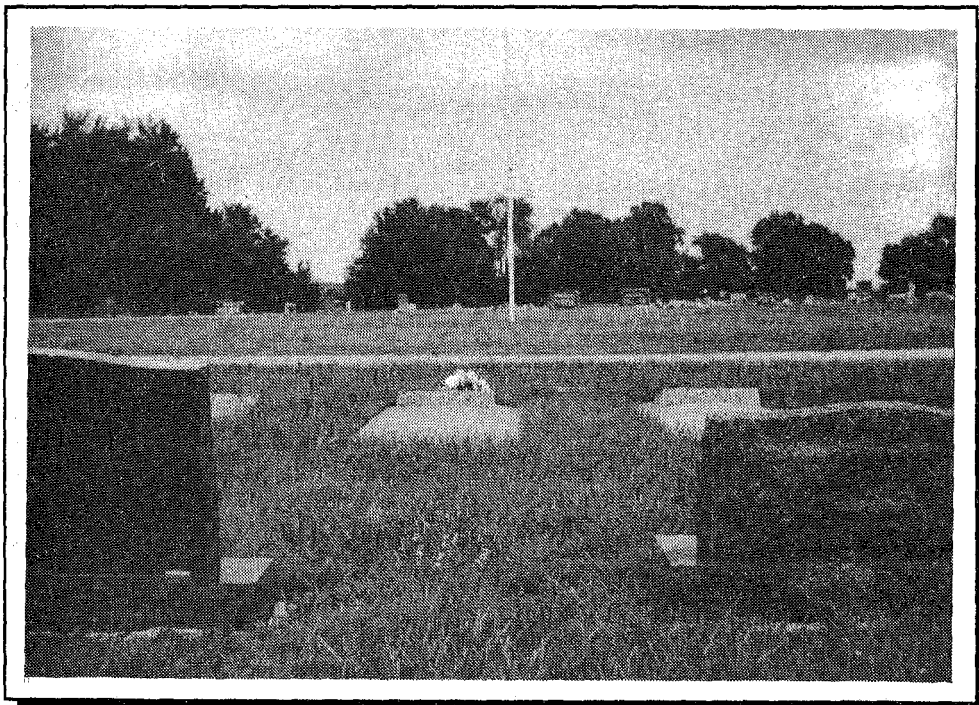
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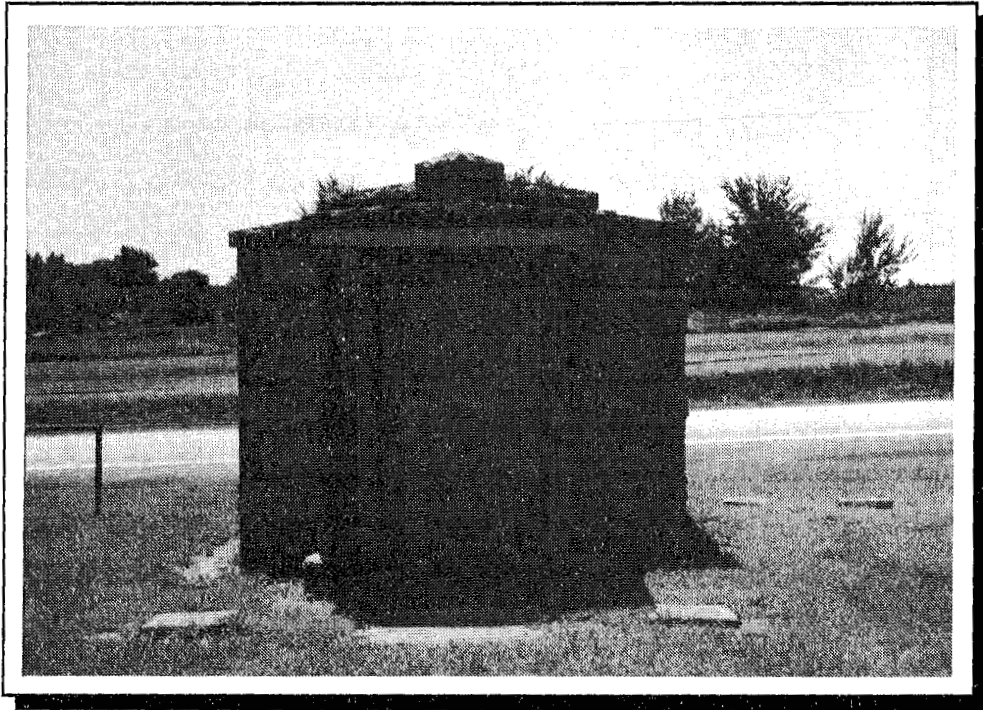
MRS. ESTHER J. WALSER.



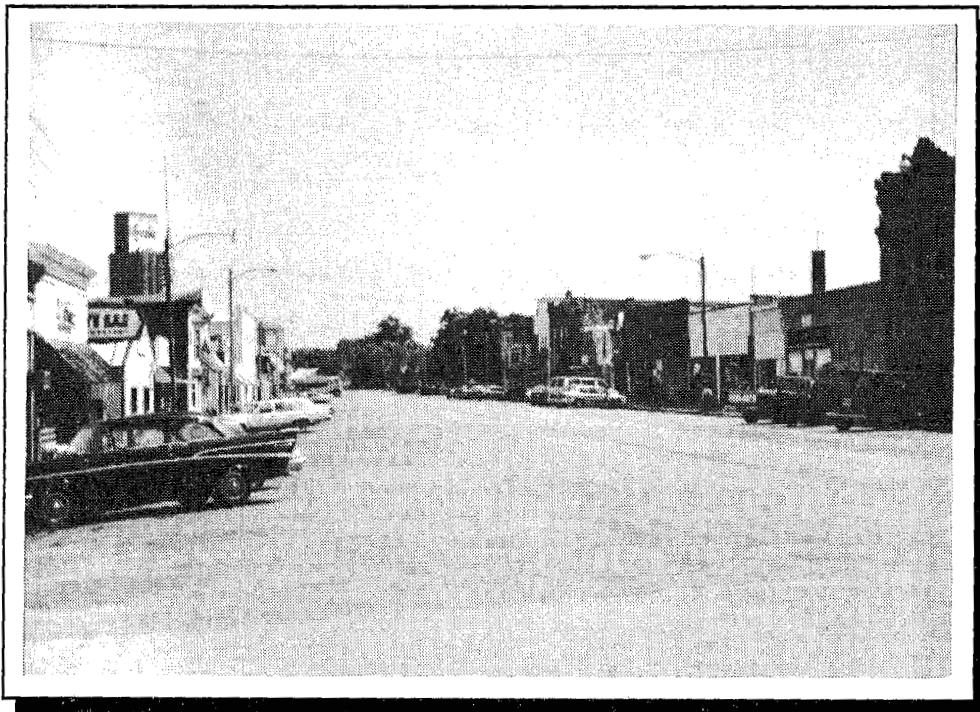
Land like this was purchased from the U.S. Government as swamp land



Liberal's circular cemetery where Walser planned to be buried



Walser's mausoleum in Lamar, Missouri



Downtown in modern Liberal