

# **CHAPTER IV**

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## **THE FOUNDING OF LIBERAL**

The original plat for the town of Liberal, Missouri was dedicated and entered into county records on October 26, 1880. This cite had the advantage of being located at the convergence of two railroads, the Frisco, and the Missouri Pacific. The property was originally purchased as "patent" land on June 10, 1859. Twenty-one years later, Walser purchased it, and other lands, from W.C. Davis and W.H. Parker, for \$5,650.

Information obtained from the Western Historical Manuscript Collection in Columbia, Missouri, provides the following perspective.

"George H. Walser, a lawyer and prosperous business man, had lived with a colony of free thinkers at Paris, Illinois and at the close of the Civil War moved to Lamar, Missouri. Land was cheap in that territory at the time and he bought up several sections, paying as low as 12 1/2 cents an acre for some of it. Walser gradually organized a settlement about 15 miles west and four miles north of Lamar and called the new town Liberal. The original motive for the town was announced as follows: 'To give an asylum for those noble men and women who are willing to sacrifice the comforts of life and joys of social intercourse, rather than live a life of deception and falsehood, was the incentive which actuated us in starting the town of Liberal, where we could enjoy the full benefits of free American citizens without having some self-appointed bigot dictate to us what we should think, speak, write, print or send through the mails.' "

Streets in the new town were named for men whom Walser admired, like Ingersoll, Darwin, and Paine. It needs to be remembered, however, that Ingersoll, Darwin, and Paine had never seen the havoc which their social theories would produce. These men lived, wrote, and died in the midst of Christian influence. They never really tested their theories. They founded no cities or countries for liberalism alone, as Mr. Walser did. They were only theoreticians!

Walser sent out advertisements for his new community with this bold and optimistic

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**Liberal, Missouri**

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**GEORGE H. WALSER**

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proclamation:

Liberal now has such an impetus that it can smile at the combined powers of priest, preacher, church, saloon, God or hell; and they are the happiest and purest people on earth. The only fit home for liberally disposed persons. Liberal is in a good country, rich in all the needs of life usually found in good countries.

Address G.H. Walser  
Liberal  
Barton, County, Missouri

Charles Darwin, for whom Walser named a street in Liberal, was not totally opposed to Christian influence. In fact, he presented this compliment to Christian missionaries in his Journals of Research (pages 414, 425, and 505.)

"They forget, or will not remember, that human sacrifices and the power of an idolatrous priesthood - a system of profligacy unparalleled in another part of the world - infanticide, a consequent of that system - bloody wars, where conquerors spared neither women nor children - that all of these have been abolished; and that dishonesty, intemperance, and licentiousness have been greatly reduced by Christianity. In a voyager to forget these things is base ingratitude; for should he chance to be at the point of shipwreck on some unknown coast, he will most devoutly pray that the lesson of the missionary may have reached thus far . . . The lesson of the missionary is the enchanter's want. The house has been built, the windows framed, the fields plowed, and even the trees grafted by the New Zealander . . . the march of improvement, consequent on the introduction of Christianity through the South Seas, probably stands by itself in the records of history"

Walser, however, seemed determined to avoid the influence of Christianity. Sadly, at this very time, his marriage with his first wife, Harriet was falling apart. The Scriptures teach that God is a very present help in time of need (Ps. 46:1.) Walser, however, would not admit that need. Both he, and his family would suffer because of his unbelief. Many years later, Walser's fourth wife, Esther, would write that his marriage to Harriet P. Cunningham was "consummated in 1880." Since Walser already had two children by Harriet at this time, I am assuming she meant that their marriage ended in 1880. They may

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## GEORGE H. WALSER

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have stopped living together in 1880, but divorce papers were not filed until March 17, 1883. The divorce was granted on October 20, 1884. Their son Mark was twenty-three at the time. He was born March 30, 1861. Their daughter, Lena, only fourteen. She was born September 14, 1870. There is an old saying: "When momma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." Obviously, Harriet wasn't happy. I am assuming that nobody else was either.

Their family problems may have impacted the life of their son, Mark. Clark Braden charged that Mark . . .

"Spent a part of his promising youth in a house of refuge, for crime. In Lamar he ran in debt, wheedled friends into going his security, and ran off in the night with his goods, and left them to pay \$4,000 for him. He forged the names of two friends, as securities to the notes, on which he borrowed money at the bank, and his illustrious sire had to buy him off to save him from the penitentiary. His last exploit as far as heard from, was to draw out of the bank in Ft. Scott between five and six thousand dollars, as his father's clerk, and use it - overdrawing his father's account and embezzling the money . . ." (The Fulfillment of a Dream, p. 5)

Someone has observed: "If your philosophy of life does not work at home, don't export it." At this time, however, Walsler was in the "export business." No matter how many personal problems he was facing at home, he was confident that his philosophy of life could solve the problems of the world. When the blind lead the blind, however, both fall into the ditch.

Walsler's personal frustration with religion must have been intensified by the presidential elections of 1880. James A. Garfield, a Christian minister, became the twentieth President of the United States. As you know, Garfield was killed by an assassin in 1881.

1880 was also the year that Thomas Alva Edison was granted a patent for his incandescent electric lamp. Unfortunately, George H. Walsler was still walking in darkness.

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## Liberal, Missouri

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