



GEORGE H. WALSER
and
LIBERAL, MISSOURI

An Historical Overview

by

Boyce Mouton



WELCOME TO LIBERAL

LIBERAL, MISSOURI IS A DELIGHTFUL LITTLE COMMUNITY IN SOUTHWEST MISSOURI ABOUT THIRTY MILES NORTH OF JOPLIN. IT WAS FOUNDED IN 1880 AS A SHOWCASE FOR LIBERALISM. THE EXPERIMENT, HOWEVER, WAS A FAILURE. THE LIBERAL THEORIES, WHICH SEEMED SO PROMISING ON PAPER, TURNED OUT TO BE A DISASTER IN REAL LIFE.

THERE ARE LESSONS WE CAN LEARN FROM LIBERAL, MISSOURI

Table of Contents

<u>CHAPTER</u>	<u>Page</u>
INTRODUCTION	1
I. BIRTH AND EARLY YEARS	6
II. WALSER AND THE MILITARY	10
III. FOLLOWING THE MONEY TRAIL	13
IV. THE FOUNDING OF LIBERAL	16
V. WITH ALL HIS MIGHT	19
VI. WHAT KIND OF PEOPLE CAME?	22
VII. EDUCATION IN LIBERAL	25
VIII. FREE LOVE	31
IX. CLARK BRADEN	34
X. THE FAILURE OF LIBERALISM	37
XI. SPIRITUALISM	41
XII. A MILITARY PENSION?	45
XIII. THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF JESUS	47
XIV. WALSER MEETS HIS MASTER	52
LIST OF HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS	57

INTRODUCTION

A rose by any other name, does not smell the same. Vance Packard in his book "Hidden Persuaders," relates an interesting experiment. Identically the same soap was placed in three different boxes. One box was predominantly yellow. The second was predominantly blue. The third was designed with a mixture of blue and yellow. Women were asked to test each sample. Most said the soap in the yellow box was too strong, and that in the blue box was too weak. Though identically the same soap was in all three boxes, most preferred the sample in the yellow and blue box.

Al Ries and Jack Trout report a similar experiment in their book "Positioning." They said that blind taste tastings of champagne have often ranked California brands above French ones. We taste what we expect to taste. Inexpensive Gallo tastes much better when poured from a bottle you believe is fifty year old French Burgundy. Our perceptions of reality are influenced by our own prejudice and preconceptions.

The same is true of history. The "facts" of history are constant, but our perception of them is not. Americans celebrate July 4, as "Independence Day." This happy occasion commemorates our victory over England in the Revolutionary War. Englishmen look at this same celebration in a much different light. July 4, is not a happy day in England.

The same truth applies to the story of George H. Walser, and the history of Liberal, Missouri. Though the facts remain the same, our perceptions of them may differ.

My first exposure to this remarkable story came through the writings of two men, the Rev. Clark Braden, and J.P. Moore. Their views of Liberal, and their opinions of its founder, G.H. Walser, were quite different. Several things help to explain these differences.

First, they wrote at different times in history. Braden first published his pamphlet, "The Fulfillment of a Dream," in 1885, and revised it in 1886. This was a particularly trying time in the town of Liberal. During that period, people were leaving Liberal, and property values were declining. There was some speculation that the city may even cease to exist.

Liberal, Missouri

The fabric of liberalism was starting to unravel. Rancor and bitterness abounded. This was the Liberal that Clark Braden encountered and wrote about in 1886.

J.P. Moore did not even visit the town of Liberal until 1896, and did not move there until 1899. By this time, the situation in Liberal was much more stable. The passing of more than ten years brought many dramatic changes. For example, Walser had reversed his position on churches. In Braden's day, he opposed them. In fact, Walser even bragged that Liberal was "the only town of its size in the world without a priest, preacher, church, saloon, God or hell . . ." By the time J.P. Moore arrived, however, Walser welcomed churches. The town had also changed. In 1899, Liberal was not as liberal as it once was. The cutting edge of militant liberalism had been dulled, and the radical nature of the great social experiment had been greatly reduced.

Secondly, their historical perspective was different. Braden was an opponent of Walser, and Moore was his friend and former employee. At one point, Mr. Moore even lived with the Walsers. Moore's book, "The Strange Town," was not completed until 1963. By this time, Liberal was just like every other little town in S.W. Missouri. A blazing inferno loses much of its intensity when you are eighty years removed from the heat.

Here is an example of the way Moore's friendship with Walser may have affected his historical perspective. On page 151 of the Strange Town, Moore wrote that Walser ". . . entered the Union army . . . and attained the rank of Lieutenant Colonel . . ." This was apparently what Walser told him, and he had no reason to doubt it. He should have. Walser obviously lied about his military service. His friends believed him, but his enemies did not. In this instance, his enemies were right.

Walser was not a Lieutenant Colonel, he was only a Captain. Furthermore, he was dishonorably discharged from the military. On May 4, 1865, Captain Walser was dishonorably dismissed from his position as Provost Marshal in St. Joseph, Missouri. The charge against him was "malfeasance in office." Clark Braden knew about this and mentioned it on page 4 of his pamphlet, "The Fulfillment of a Dream." Moore claimed to have read Braden's pamphlet, but obviously did not believe the charges.

Walser apparently never told anyone the truth about his military service, not even his wives. In the course of his life, Mr. Walser was married to four different women. His last wife, Esther, obviously thought he was a Lieutenant Colonel. She proudly identified her deceased husband on his mausoleum as "Lieut. Col. George H. Walser." She apparently did not learn the truth about his military service until 1926 when she applied for

GEORGE H. WALSER

a Widow's Pension.

Walser died on May 1, 1910. We must remember, however, that early in his life, the liberal Mr. Walser did not believe in God. Consequently, he had little or no incentive to tell the truth about anything.

I have written these remarks to warn you of my own biases and preconceptions. I believe in God, and the Bible. The story of Liberal, Missouri, is a therefore a beautiful story to me. It confirms my preconceptions. It is like a parable of conversion. Liberalism turned out to be a failure. That's what I would have anticipated. The town of Liberal changed, just like I hope all liberals will. It is a fact of history that Liberal is no longer liberal. Touche! The story of Liberal is a positive example. Furthermore, Mr. Walser, who once was an unbeliever, came to describe himself as a "converted infidel." Wonderful! This is what I hope will happen to every unbeliever. Some of history's most godly men were also "converted infidels."

I see myself, therefore, as a friend of Liberal. This is, to me, a marvelous story. I wish I could have known Mr. Walser personally. I hope someday to meet him in heaven. When I point to some of his sins, I do not do so in a belligerent manner. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God. Everyone needs grace and forgiveness. I hope that nothing written here will bring pain to the Walser's family, or anyone else. This is a positive story! May it encourage everyone to faith in God. The great heroes of Scripture, like George H. Walser, were also sinners in need of forgiveness and grace.

I am firmly convinced, however, that Liberalism is wrong, and that Walser was wrong for promoting it. Walser's liberal theories should not be judged by what he thought, or wrote, but by what his teachings produced. It is undeniable that his liberal theories produced a mess. That is at least one reason, why he changed.

Jesus said: **"Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" (Matt. 7:16)** The value of a teaching or philosophy is easily evaluated by its fruit. You may be confused by conflicting religious books, and the clash of differing philosophies. Fruit, however, is not confusing. Jesus taught his followers to consider fruit. You may be fooled by the writings of Mao Tse-tung, but you should not be confused by China.

Our pilgrim forefathers believed the Bible. They had the words "In God We Trust," inscribed on this nation's currency. It is impossible to understand the United States of

Liberal, Missouri

GEORGE H. WALSER

America apart from its rich biblical heritage. This country is the product, or "fruit," of what they believed and taught. Every nation is a showcase for its own teaching and philosophy. Those who do not like the Bible, should perhaps be as honest as Mr. Walser was. They should emigrate somewhere and start their own country.

Thank you for taking time to read these words. May this fascinating story be helpful and instructive in your life. The older and wiser Mr. Walser said it like this: "I write from the standpoint of a converted Infidel! I have patiently investigated without bias all sides of mental and spiritual philosophies. All I desire is the truth, whose footprints I will follow wherever it leadeth; for what is truth for me is truth for all, whether that truth be divine or secular."

Boyce Mouton

Liberal, Missouri

Page Number 6