

L.D.S. CONFERENCES IN UTAH'S DIXIE

Conference time in St. George was always a busy, happy time for Aunt Em and Uncle Thomas Cottam. Preparations were begun at least two weeks before the big event. The extra butter must be saved and stored in the cellar along with a couple of home-cured hams. Always the best of everything was used for these occasions. The house must be cleaned from attic to cellar and this took much effort since the two-story structure, on the south-east corner of the block where Tabernacle and Temple Street meet, contained seven large rooms besides two large halls, a pantry and a bath room. It had a big porch extending the full length of the southern side of the house and half way across the west side. There was also a deck directly above the porch.

The corrals also had to be cleaned by the men folks because the invited guests came in their wagons and buggies pulled by teams.

The household duties—washing, ironing, mending etc., must be kept up to date as conference lasted Saturday through Monday. All cleaning must be finished two days prior to the big event as final preparations were carried on and final purchases were made. Plenty of provisions were provided, it required two days for the baking of the bread as two batches of at least twelve loafs each must be made. All cooking was done on a large scale and included dried corn which had to be soaked and simmered to tenderness, baked beans, bottled fruit, rice pudding etc. On Friday at least twenty-five pies and three or four kinds of cakes must be baked and stored in the screened door pastry cupboard on the south side of the pantry. The deep shelves held pies three deep.

Guests began arriving on Friday afternoon and when the weather permitted, beds were made up on the porch and deck but if it was rainy weather, they had to be made indoors. Sometimes guests brought their own quilts but Aunt Em always had extra quilts and extra bed linen which was kept in the spacious cabinets along the hall stairway.

Early on conference mornings the family and guests arose early and the days activities began. Potatoes were peeled and covered with cold water until time to be cooked. Breakfast must be served, dishes washed and the ham sliced ready for frying when twelve o'clock came. After the ham was cooked a large kettle of milk gravy was made from the drippings.

One morning, one of the male guests, thinking he would be of help, grabbed the broom and began stirring up a dust from the rag carpet. Aunt Em said, "Dave, if you'll just put that broom down and go on to meeting, I'll get there."

Aunt Em joined the choir when she was fourteen years of age and was in it for over sixty years so she always went to the meetings and took most of the older children with her. She had a new baby regularly every two years but that didn't prevent her from going to meetings as she was a bit plump anyway and her appearance wasn't much the worse. In fact, when her eighth child was expected, she attended a party on Friday night and the game of "musical chairs" was played. She sat back in the corner. The group insisted that she play it with them. She said that she would rather not play. They coaxed until she consented to play. On Sunday evening her child, Ivins, was born and people opened their mouths in astonishment. Ten babies came to bless their home. The oldest child was a girl, Emma, and had to help a great deal with the children and preparations. She was sometimes left at home to wash dishes, tend babies, and see to it that the fire was kept burning so that the food would keep on cooking. When she was about nine years old, she remembered how her mother would say, pointing to some task well done, "My big girl has done this." She acknowledged that responsibilities were good for her and said that children will generally do as expected if we have faith in them and give them a little just praise.

When Emma was about thirteen, she also became a member of the choir and then always attended conference meetings. Annie, the next sister and seven and a half years younger, then had to take her place.

It was one grand rush to get to meetings but Aunt Em's policy was to never stay home to attend to cooking or housework. Sometimes the dishwashing was begun but had to be left and finished later. They were never late except when the fourth son, Walter-a great tease, interfered. He would sometimes go into the pantry, close the door and pull out the knife and fork drawer which would prevent the door from opening. There he would stay and laugh at his mother as she threatened to "shake the pants off him" if he didn't let her in so that she could go ahead with her preparations.

All meetings lasted two full hours and as soon as the morning meeting was dismissed the women would rush home to put dinner on the table while Brother Cottam waited around to see if any people were left without a place to go. He always rounded up a good crowd, even though the house was full already. Many times the long table extended the full length of the big kitchen and had room for fifteen or sixteen persons was set three times for one meal. At one time fourteen Bishops were seated around it at the same time. It was always understood that any member of the family, having friends, was always welcome to bring them home for meals any

time. Sometimes some members of the family ate in the pantry. Moroni, the sixth child, was always very bashful and would always take his plate, cup and spoon and sit on the cellar steps to eat

Brother Cottam held many positions of responsibility during his lifetime. Some of them being Bishop, Bishop's counselor, Assessor and collector, member of the City Council, Mayor, member of the State Legislature, counselor in the Stake Presidency, member of the State Board of Education, assistant and later President of the St. George Temple, and Patriarch in the St. George Stake. He was never arrogant or proud and while in the stake presidency said to President Edward H. Snow, "You take the authority." However, he many times entertained the authorities. Apostle Hyrum Smith, asked to stay at Cottam's as he said he felt a good influence there that he did not feel in all homes. Some of the best friendships were made at these conference times and have continued through the years.

Family prayers were participated in both night and morning by all present. When the chairs were set to the table they were turned with the backs inward so that all could kneel in a circle facing each other. The lead in the prayers was sometimes taken by the parents, sometimes by the children and at other times by the visiting brethren. When being seated at the table, the blessing on the food was always in order.

The speakers for the meetings were called at random. The people were warned beforehand to study the scriptures and be prepared to speak at any time and then to call upon the Lord for assistance. It was expected that speakers would not use notes. It was a privilege as well as a duty for all to attend conference. The church served for entertainment as well as for education. Picture shows were unknown for many years. The people had implicit faith in the counsel of the authorities and were always glad to have them come.

The sacrament was administered to and passed to the audience each Sunday afternoon. Wine was used and passed in ordinary tumblers. Each person took a sip and passed it on to the next person until a refill was necessary, at which time the tumbler was passed back to the deacon to be refilled from a pitcher which he carried for that purpose. Many times people took extra large "sips" and the glass of wine didn't go very far.

People came to these Quarterly Conferences from far and near for the St. George Stake took in a lot of territory in those days. They came from as far south as the towns in southern Nevada and as far north as Panaca and the White River country farther north in Nevada. They also came

from Springdale, Virgin, Rockville, Hurricane, LaVerkin, Toquerville, Washington, New Harmony, Enterprise, Pine Valley, Pinto, Veyo, Gunlock, and Santa Clara in Utah.

This information was told to Nellie McArthur Gubler by Emma Jarvis Cottam McArthur.

Nellie gave the material to Many Ann Miller who had it put in the book Histories and Stories located in the Dixie College Archives.