

DR. WILFORD J REICHMANN

A Half Century of Dixie History

By Keith W. Reichmann

Life in St. George in the 1920's was not much different from that in most other small towns, but on Friday, May 13th, 1927, a little noticed event occurred in St. George that would influence the history of Dixie for the next fifty years and maybe, in a small way, forever. For into this land of Dixie, came a man with the uncommon name of Dr. Wilford J. Reichmann. He would stay forever.

The oldest son of German and Swiss immigrants, he wanted a military career. During World War I, he had been appointed to West Point, only to have the appointment withdrawn because of his German heritage. He then went to Officers Training School and earned a Regular Army commission. Once again it was withdrawn. Despite the problems, for the rest of his life he would be proud of his service during the war.

After the war, he attended the University of Utah with the hopes of attaining a Ph.D. in history. He swept floors at the old Saltair at night to pay for school. After talking with the President of the University, Dr. John A. Widtsoe, he was influenced to enter medical school. In those days he could complete the first two years at Utah, but would have to go somewhere else for the last two years. This would be the University of Cincinnati, but that would have to wait. To obtain funds he taught school at Gila Junior College in Arizona. While there he rented a room in the home of Andrew Kimball. He became life-long friends with one of the sons. The world knows that friend as Spencer W. Kimball.

After completing medical school, he interned at Staten Island Hospital in New York City. In 1926, New York was a long way from Utah and he wanted to return home. After a short stay in Panguitch and Coalville, he moved to St. George, where he was befriended by Dr. D. A. McGregor, another well-known name in St. George medical history. Here he established his practice and home.

Shortly thereafter he started to court a local girl, Helen Moody. A brother-in-law, June E. Moody, remembers, "It happened to be my brother Antoine and my job, to chaperone Helen when she went on dates with her boyfriends. We would stay back two or three blocks so she wouldn't know that Mother sent us. But when Dr. Reichmann came around, it was a different story. My brother and I lost our job. Mother thought Dr. Reichmann was wonderful. He was the only one she permitted to call her "Jane".

Wilford and Helen were married February 20, 1928, in the St George Temple which was then south of town. Helen would die six days before their Golden Wedding Anniversary.

A quick look at the heritage of this young couple is important. Wilford was the son of Gustav Adolph Reichmann and Louisa Maria Hofer. They were poor, but were not afraid of work. Every one of their children who lived to adulthood was graduated from a university. Although Gus spoke broken English and worked as a custodian, he had a reputation for honesty and hard work. During the World War I period, when many German-Americans were losing their jobs, he was able to find work. He conducted his personal life in such a manner that when he passed away, it was in the Salt Lake Temple in the arms of a prophet of the LDS (Mormon) church, Joseph Fielding Smith.

Helen was the middle daughter of Joseph Milton (Mitt) Moody and Jane Everett. Both sets of her grandparents had answered Brigham Young's "call to Dixie" in 1861 and 1862. One great-grandfather, Addison Everett, had entered the Salt Lake Valley with the first company on July 24, 1847. Three years before he was one of the men entrusted to go to Carthage and recover the bodies of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. Grandfather Schuyler Everett later carried the mail between Fort Carnie and the Salt Lake Valley.

Mitt himself is a part of Dixie history. He was the same Mitt Moody who killed "The Bear" in Pine Valley. Earlier, as a young cowboy in northern Arizona, he was a member of the posse that hunted the "Phantom White Stallion of Skull Valley", made famous by Tex Ritter. Mitt was a well-known outdoorsman. He still "got his deer" at 88. He loved to garden and for many years kept the garden in the backyard of Flo and Mary Foremaster. One grandson remembers when he and his mother, Helen, found Mitt at about the age of 85-88 up in a pecan tree. "Mother certainly told Grandpa what she thought of a man his age climbing trees." (Helen was always a kind and loving woman, but never failed to let people know what she thought.) Mitt was generous to a fault. He always gave away his last dollar if he thought someone needed it.

This is the type of background from which the young couple, Wilford and Helen, came. They would not be a disappointment to their ancestors.

A year after they were married, Wilford and Helen began their family of three sons and one daughter. They reared their children well and were always outstanding examples. Tragedy struck this young couple in 1935 with the sudden death of their 22-month-old son. For the rest of her life, Helen could never quite accept Dean's death. He was buried in St. George in the family plot.

Wilford's church was always a big part of his life. In 1930 he was called as Bishop of the St. George East Ward. For more than forty years he served positions of responsibility in the church as Bishop, High Councilor, Stake President, and Patriarch. Only when his health would no longer allow him to continue, did he slow down. Once he told a son that he had made a vow never to refuse a calling from the lord and that he

had never broken that vow. If an incident had brought about that vow, it is not known. One example of how true he was to this vow occurred when he was offered the position of team physician by one of Utah's major universities. Dr. Reichmann loved football and wanted the position very badly, but he was stake president at the time and felt that was where he should be. He declined this once-in-a-lifetime prize. Another story can now be told. In 1958 Wilford was in the process of being called as president over one of the missions in Germany. He was thrilled at the idea. The same illness that led to his release as stake president also cancelled the mission call. In his disappointment, Wilford swore his family to secrecy.

The 1930's saw the Great Depression and St George did not escape its effects. Dr. Reichmann seldom sent out bills or statements throughout his medical career. He said he never had the time, and if people intended to pay, they would anyway. He never wanted to take away a man's dignity. Many of his fees were paid in meat, chickens, nuts, vegetables, molasses, melons, wood, hay, fruit, and other produce. He also received labor, guns, and live cows, pigs, rabbits and chickens. He was offered land on several occasions, but he always refused. He said the owners would need the land someday and he didn't have the time to worry about it. Some of that land is now downtown St. George and the heart of Bloomington. Dr. Reichmann would have been a very wealthy man if he had been interested in that kind of wealth. A son said: "Since he didn't send a bill, we weren't rich – contrary to what many people thought, but we had enough to meet our needs."

The following is taken from Lawrence's eulogy of his father. "I know he wasn't perfect. I know he made mistakes. There is no way anyone can practice medicine or hold church jobs without offending someone. Those who liked him loved him. I realized this when I went to the Indian Reservation with him. He was tired so I drove the car. As soon as he stepped out of the car, I heard "President Reichmann!" "Dr. Reichmann!" Their arms around him; his arms around them. He wasn't too tired to talk to each person who wanted to talk to him. On the way home he uttered, "I love those people."

Dr. Reichmann's wealth was the love, kindness, and respect of his neighbors, friends, and patients. Too numerous to count were the times that his friends saw that the best tomatoes, peaches, melons, the biggest fish, pheasant, venison roast, fresh baked bread, pies, cakes homemade butter, and many other things found their way to the Reichmann home. A well-known St. George cattleman who was a frequent and welcome visitor to the Reichmann home, apparently once stole a look into Doctor and Helen's freezer. A few days later a side of beef, cut and wrapped, was anonymously delivered. This happened more than once. This kind of wealth cannot be measured in dollars.

June Moody relates: "I remember him distinctly telling about the man who brought him some string bean poles in payment for delivering a baby. He often remarked how sturdy and straight those poles were and what a good job that man had done to get those poles for him for his place in Pine Valley."

A former patient remembers, "My husband and I were at Dixie College when we had a baby. Dr. Reichmann not only didn't charge us, he gave us the same amount of money as a delivery would cost because we were out of food."

Such incidents were not uncommon. Often house or office calls were simply not put on the books.

After Doctor and Helen had gone on, the boys were going through a number of files and papers. They found many uncashed checks clipped to patient records. It was as if, even after his death, the doctor was still saying, "It's all right. They can use the money."

Despite being very busy, Dr. Reichmann seemed to be able to always find time to do things for the community. Maybe the most common service was that of giving hundreds of free physical examinations to high school and college athletes, boy scouts, and missionaries. He kept a large notebook which he had entitled "Football Heroes" in which he listed all of the athletes he examined. This notebook no longer exists, but if it did, it would probably find a place at the Dixie College Library.

One day several years ago, a brother and sister-in-law were having dinner in a Pacific Palisades, California, home where two full time missionaries were also dinner guests. The subject of medical expenses was discussed. One of the missionaries was from Mesquite, Nevada. He said, "We have a wonderful doctor in our area who never charges missionaries for examinations." He was speaking of Dr. Wilford Reichmann.

A brief word about Dixie College. The college was Helen's second love, behind her family. The college could do no wrong. Doctor and Helen both had a great love for books. This love was passed on to their children. This is the reason they established the "Reichmann Library Fund" at Dixie College after the death of their parents. Some of the Reichmann books have also been given to the Dixie College Library.

Dr. Reichmann wasn't the only one who cared for others. One of Helen's favorite pastimes was doing something for someone else, especially if the recipient didn't know from whence it came. Hundreds were assisted by this unknown benefactor. At Christmas time Helen always purchased a little extra "just in case."

The following is a quote from June and Maida Moody. "Once we were talking about the most memorable Christmases we had had. It came Helen and Wilford's turn. They said that one Christmas Eve they received a call late in the evening from the Red Bluff Motel.

The man there said there was a family at the motel with a very sick child. At first the Doctor was a little wary because he didn't know but what it might be some kind of holdup to get his medicine bag for the drugs in it. Anyway he didn't hesitate very long. He went to the motel and found a destitute family with a very ill child Their car had broken down, they didn't have any food, and they were sick. The man had a job promised him in Los Angeles if he could make it there. His car had come this far. Anyways the Doctor told him that he'd be right back. He came home and he and Helen went to the icebox and took out the ham and other things they were going to have for Christmas dinner. They also took some of the presents they were going to give their children for Christmas and made up a box and took it to the family. Wilford paid for the medication for the child and the motel bill, and gave the man some money to help get the car fixed and enough money to buy gas to get to Los Angeles. That was their most memorable Christmas." That was also typical Wilford and Helen Reichmann.

Back to history. In 1938 the Reichmanns moved to the house on the corner of Tabernacle and Fourth East. The Reichmann house still stands in the memories of many. This was the perfect neighborhood in which to rear a family. (Note: Such a statement is known as "author's license" . Some readers may disagree and thin their neighborhood was/is the best.) Where else could one find so many wonderful boys and girls with which their children could play? Where else could the kids catch pollywogs where now is just a paved street? Where else could the kids play in "the old barn" where now stands a church? Where else could children climb onto old Christmas trees and roll down a small hill where today there is no hill?

Into this wonderful neighborhood Helen was able to bring her sister Virginia Boyack. Having Virginia next door was a great joy to Helen. Virginia and her son Alan were extensions of the Reichmann family. Whenever a picnic or such was planned, Helen would say, "Let me ask Virginia" or "I'll check with Virginia."

One cannot exclude Helen when thinking of Dr. Reichmann's accomplishments. His busy schedule of work, church, school board, and other activities kept him from home a great deal. For many years he was one of the few doctors within fifty miles of St. George. One son recalls making appointments more than once with Hettie Burgess, Doctor's long time office nurse, just so the son could talk to his father. Many times family outings or vacations were postponed or cancelled because of emergencies or one of the more than four thousand babies the Doctor delivered. Although she complained sometimes, Helen supported her husband in all things.

A few stories, some long-forgotten and some never before told, help define the man, Dr. Wilford J Reichmann:

He never went deer hunting. He treated so many injured hunters that he decided that it wasn't worth the effort. Sometimes he would figure the approximate cost of a hunting trip, and then purchase that much beef. He liked to go fishing. However, his busy schedule generally didn't allow for that. Once he and a son were fishing at Pine Valley Reservoir. He hooked a very nice sized trout. As he took it off the hook, the fish got loose and flipped back into the water. He went right into the water after it. He was determined not to let his "first" trout get away, but it did. In later years he got to fish a little more and thoroughly enjoyed it.

He had some special loves and dislikes. The University of Utah, University of Cincinnati, the Rotary Club, and trains were special. One of his pet peeves was Pres. F.D. Roosevelt and the New Deal as those who knew him could tell. One time in the early days of World War II he complained to Helen that someone had been through his safe at the office. Nothing was missing, but "the papers were messed up." He learned the answer years later. One of his cousins was being considered for a top secret military assignment. All known relatives were also investigated. After the war an FBI agent showed Dr. Reichmann his file. It was about two inches thick and contained copies of the contents of his safe. The official conclusion was "He didn't care for the President, but was a loyal American." As mentioned earlier, he was one of a very few doctors available in the area. During World War II local physicians gave the servicemen their physicals. For this and other long standing duties Dr. Reichmann received several citations and two or three medals. Because President Roosevelt had signed the citations, the doctor wanted to throw them out. Helen carefully saved them although very few ever got to see them. Apparently they are no longer in existence.

Part of his childhood training was to be thrifty. His father tried to save every silver dollar he received and so did Wilford. More than once Dr. Reichmann purchased an automobile with silver dollars.

Once when his car was being repaired, he was allowed to drive a "loaner". Something went wrong just as he was turning into his driveway. The car sped forward and, to avoid hitting the garage, he swerved to one side. He went through Helen's prized rose garden, across a lawn and through a hedge, through the kids' steel swing and slide set, over a three foot retaining wall, hit Virginia's car, crossed her lawn, jumped a ditch, and finally stopped in the middle of Fourth East Street. People came running from all directions knowing that he was surely seriously injured. He climbed, unhurt, from the car and said, "The Lord was with me all the way, but if He has as much sense as I think He has, He will never do that again."

He served many years on the school board. When he could get to basketball games, he enjoyed them immensely. Although he was generally a small, quiet man, he would yell as loud as the rest. One time he had to stand on a bench to look a man in the eye

while they “discussed” a very important point. This man had committed an unpardonable sin. He had questioned one of Leon Watson’s calls and Dr. Reichmann felt it was important to set this poor man straight.

As already mentioned, Dr. Reichmann’s church was very important to him. During the time when he was stake president, David O. McKay was President of the Church. President McKay, a lifelong friend, would frequently drive to St. George to relax and stay with the Reichmanns for a few days. Helen always kept one bedroom ready since President McKay did not always give them much warning. The family called this bedroom “President McKay’s Room.”

One time when President McKay was visiting, one of his counselors, J. Reuben Clark, was visiting his brother, Gordon, who lived across the street from the Reichmanns. Stephen L. Richards, President McKay’s other counselor, was visiting his son, Max, who also lived across the street, but in another direction. The First Presidency of the Church therefore met in the Reichmann living room. This incident will long be remembered by the family.

Dr. Reichmann retired from his medical practice in 1970. The day he closed the door of his office, hundreds of people gathered in the street to honor him. This group included busloads of students, a band, singing groups, and church, city, and school officials. Visitors thought it was a riot, but it was a “riot” of affection. The speeches made that day can be summed up with “Men like him, we do not forget.” Dixie College further honored him in 1974 with its “Distinguished Service award.”

He always wanted to die on his birthday. On June 8, 1982, just a few hours before his 84th birthday, this great man’s heart, which was so big that it had love and time for everyone, quit. Upon hearing of his death, a long time neighbor and friend, Hy Thomas, expressed the thoughts of many with “I’m sure Dr. Reichmann was the most loved man in this town.”

A few days each year, a Dr. Reichmann walks the streets of St George, but it is just a younger imitation. Presently none of the Reichmann children – Lawrence, Keith and Judy – live in St. George, but they still have red sand in their shoes.

(The author would like to thank his wife - Lu, his brother and sister – Lawrence and Judy, several aunts and uncles, and numerous friends for their help and contributions. The author also invites anyone to contact him with further comments, and thoughts and stories about Dr. Reichmann.)

Excerpts from Health Care in Utah's Dixie by Douglas D. Alder, PhD

P. 20 The McGregor-Reichmann Era

In 1925 Dr. Wilford Reichmann arrived in St. George and continued his family practice until 1975. He was trained to do surgery and initially did some major operations but with the arrival of Dr. Donald McGregor's sons, A.W. and L.W. McGregor, he concentrated on family practice, including delivering many babies. (about 4000 babies) There are numerous fond memories about him still circulating in Dixie, some almost the level of folklore. The community adopted him as the family practice hero because of his kindness. In return he adopted the community, serving in many civic and ecclesiastical positions including LDS Stake President and Patriarch. He is reported not to have sent bills to people for his service. His nurse, Hettie Burgess, would prepare them but the doctor felt that people would pay him if they could and otherwise there was no charge. When he retired, the community organized a tribute to him, assembling a large crowd of people on Main Street in front of his office. They chose this way to express their high respect for this servant of the community.