

St. George, Utah
July 17, 1962

Dear Leone,

I guess you think I have ignored your request for some experiences of grandfather Woodruff, but your letter with others and lot of other things, needed my immediate attention—so I will try now to give you some personal experiences that are not written in his life history.

My first experience with him occurred while but an infant. In the spring of 1878 grandfather had just been released as president of the St. George temple and had arrived home mother called him in to give me a blessing; I was a very sick child and she thought I could not live, but after giving me the blessing he told mother I would live to the full stature of manhood. I have often thought of this promise when confronted with danger.

When between the ages of 15 and 17 I visited him occasionally as the school I was attending was only two or three miles from his home. On one occasion I walked from school to his place to spend the night with him. I arrived at his home just before he came from his office. He drove a horse and buggy. This was his 86th year. He drove in the yard, put his horse in the barn, and un-harnessed them and fed them. Then we went around and through the barn, gathered the eggs which he carried to the house in his tall silk hat, stating that his hat was the handiest thing he had to carry them in. As we approached the house his daughter Alice was just getting home from school. She passed by us without speaking and he called her back saying, “Alice you didn't speak to Jesse.” Alice apologized and went on her way.

In the summer of 1885, I being in my eighth year, Mother came up from Mesa Arizona and brought her three children with her. While on a visit to Salt Lake we had the privilege of an outing up City Creek canyon with grandfather Woodruff. He and some of his sons-in-law did some fishing. Some of his sons-in-law wanted to fish on Sunday, but to their disappointment he told them we would keep the Sabbath day Holy. So there was no fishing that day. There were a number of us children there and we enjoyed ourselves very much in playing games to our liking.

My last personal experience with grandfather Woodruff was the day I left for my mission. Three hours before boarding the train that would take me to my field of labor (headquarters at Chicago), I went to his office and talked for half an hour with him. This was the 13th of April 1898. After spending a couple of days in Chicago I was appointed to labor in Missouri. While there I spent some time at Far West and would occasionally go to the temple lot and sit on the cornerstone where 50 years before grandfather Woodruff was ordained an Apostle.

Today is the 24th of July. Mom and I have been to a senior citizens party, listened to a fine program, and had a lovely dinner sponsored by the two stake Relief societies.

I have talked with a number of the old citizens of St. George who were acquainted with grandfather Woodruff—especially the Atkin family. They lived several miles South and West of St. George. They had a large pond surrounded by heavy cattails and rushes. This made a good hiding place from the marshals who were hunting all the authorities of the church and putting them in prison, and exacting heavy fines from them.

I will write you a page or two from a little book called, *The Story of Atkinville*, gotten up by the Atkin family and which includes some history of grandfather's activity while in St. George. Grandfather states that on August 7th 1886 “I arrived in St. George and slept in the home of John and Emma Squires, in the same bed where I slept for six months last year.” Emma Squires (Little) told the writers (interview, April 20, 1956) that when Wilford Woodruff lived at her place he had a room upstairs where he always retreated when someone knocked, before she opened the door. She had to be very careful not to let anyone know he was there.

The home was near the red hill and had orchards and vineyards at the rear of the house where Wilford Woodruff occasionally went hunting for quail in a disguise that Emma made for him (a sunbonnet and a Mother Hubbard dress). Despite the disguise, an inquisitive neighbor met and recognized him in the rear of the house as he was returning from the hill. He had to find a new place to live immediately.

This was the main reason that sent him to Atkinville. The reason why Wilford Woodruff visited or moved to Atkinville on given dates is not clearly revealed, although a few hints are given: For example, on February 23, 1887 “Marshall Armstrong arrived in the evening in St. George.” Three days later, February 26th, Wilford stated, “I took my bed and luggage with Brother Thompson and went to William Aitkin’s to stop awhile.” He stayed more than three months. Further light is shed by his statement on January 31, 1885. “I rode to Brother Atkins, visited his pond; two boys had set fire to his rushes and flags (cattails) all around his pond so there was no hiding places to get the wild fowl, or for any other purpose.” He did not visit Atkinville again until June 29th after the cattails had re-grown.

The best explanation for his visits and retreats to Atkinville is given by the Atkin family tradition. It was the safest place he could find in the region. He developed confidence in the hospitality, dependability and loyalty of the family. Besides, there were thickets of tamaracks lining the river bottom land and the tules of the pond into which he could quickly flee with little fear that the marshals could find him.

The saints in St. George were loyal and true to the harassed brethren. Emma Squires Little said that her father William Thompson regarded himself as Wilford Woodruff’s bodyguard and was especially vigilant in keeping track of the marshals.

An alert at Atkinville started a chain reaction. Nellie Atkin, a girl of ten, played an important part in the watch for the marshals; She would be seated at the top of the hill east of the house where she could watch the road, and if she saw the buggy of the marshals McGearry and Armstrong coming around the dugway, it was a signal for a quick move. They would rush to get Brother Woodruff his bedroll, food and water, his books, and fishing tackle—and put it into the large boat (15 x 5 feet) where Wilford would remain safely concealed in the heavy cattails and rushes. When asked if the marshals could see him from the bluffs above the pond, Wilford said “there were plenty of places to hide where neither the marshals from the hill, the devil from below nor the Lord from above could see the boat.” When the danger was past William went out to the pond made a noise like a duck and Wilford gave a signal quack in reply.

I have visited Nellie Atkin Nordine several times since I have lived in St. George, on one visit she showed me a letter “Grandpa Allen” as she called him, wrote to her. It was dated September 3, 1887, and was an answer to a letter she had written. He said “I read your letter to some of the apostles and a room full of people—and they were much pleased. They thought you were a brave young lady who was willing to do so much to defend the life and interest of the president of the church. But I don’t wish to put my little lady Nellie to so much trouble and danger. I have a large stout man who goes with me every where, night and day, carries two pistols and a double-barrel shot gun, and says he will shoot the marshals if they come to take me (don’t tell anybody of this)—so I am pretty well guarded. I miss you in buttoning up my shoes. I don’t stop at home any nights, so Alice can’t button my shoes, and I have to ask some big man that will weigh about 200 pounds to button my shoes. And he is so awkward about it I wish I had my Nellie with me.”

On his two to four-day trips to St. George, during his sojourn at Atkinville, he spent most of his time in the St. George temple in a room he had prepared for his own use. A story is told of

a Swiss Bishop from Santa Clara who said in a prayer in Sunday meeting, "...and bless the marshals that they may not bother he who is hiding in the St. George temple."

Charles L. Walker was night guard at the temple from the time of it's completion in 1877 until his death in 1904. He possessed a beautiful Colt revolver and was a good shot. His revolver was always at hand beside the bible in his hut at the temple. When Wilford Woodruff or other high authorities were on the underground in St. George, Charles' trusty Colt was always handy where he could grasp it quickly...and it was loaded.