

James and Harriet Chapin Clinger's

Search for Faith

1840-1880

In his autobiography, James Henry Clinger states that his parents, James and Harriet Chapin Clinger, heard the Josephite missionaries in Utah and "through their persuasions my father became discouraged and went east"¹. We know little of James and Harriet's motives and virtually nothing of their attitudes. The historical circumstances of the period and the available factual information are the subject of this memorandum.

After several years of effort by dedicated people mostly in Wisconsin and Illinois to organize Mormon remnants in Illinois and surrounding States who did not go west with Brigham Young and the main body of the Church, Joseph Smith III assented to accept the presidency of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) in April 1860. Soon after, in 1863 the RLDS sent Alexander McCord and Edmund C. Briggs as missionaries to Utah². McCord had been a member of the Mormon battalion and became disgruntled against Brigham Young³. RLDS members were called Josephites by the Utah Mormons, and RLDS referred to the Utah Mormons as Brighamites.

Over three thousand members of the Utah Mormon church were brought into the ranks of the Reorganization during the 19th Century⁴. From 1863-1870 inclusive, an average of 300 Josephite converts emigrated annually from the Territory. Over 1000, many excommunicated Mormons, travelled to California. Many of the latter joined the Josephites by 1875.

By the spring of 1864, there were over 300 Josephites in Utah. Most emigrated from Utah during the spring of 1864. Thomas Job, a local convert to the Reorganization led the work in the Provo area. "This man was one of the most persistent and

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¹Clinger, James Henry, AUTOBIOGRAPHY. Copy in Blake, Kathryn S. Compiler, THE CLINGER FAMILY, 1977, p 4. FHL-SLC 929.273 c616a, also film 1036670, item 4.

²Davis, Inez Smith, THE STORY OF THE CHURCH, P 481. Herald Publishing House, Independence, Missouri, 1981.

³Shipley, Richard Lyle, VOICES OF DISSENT; THE HISTORY OF THE REORGANIZED CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER DAY SAINTS IN UTAH, 1863-1900, p 24. MS Thesis, Utah State University, 1969. Copy in Brigham Young University Library, BX 8691.9 Sh64v.

⁴Shipley, Op. Cit., p97.

outstanding early missionaries in the Territory"⁵. By the spring of 1865 five of the 8 RLDS branches in Utah had been established in Utah County.

Nearly all the members of the Provo congregation of the RLDS church migrated in the spring of 1865, leaving only a skeleton branch⁶.

The RLDS records of baptisms in Provo Utah do not include the names of any of the Clinger family⁷. The records list some people whose baptisms before the death of Joseph Smith in 1844 were accepted by the Josephites. Some 18 or 20 members in Provo were cut off the Utah church for entertaining or housing the missionaries or attending the meetings in 1864⁸. We have no information on James' and Harriet's involvement at that time.

It was probably the next year when James and Harriet Clinger's oldest son James Henry stated that his parents left Utah for the east, but changed their route and went to Malad valley, Idaho⁹

They took along seven of their children ranging in ages from ca 6 months to 14 years. So far as is known, neither 17-year-old James Henry Clinger nor his 19 year old sister Martha Ann Clinger went with the family to Malad. An RLDS branch was established in Malad in 1866¹⁰

The Malad RLDS Branch was unique for its strength and its longevity. Converts and sympathizers, either from the spirit of rejection and animosity from their Utah

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⁵Shipley, Richard Lyle, Op. Cit. p31.

⁶Shipley, Op. Cit., p50

⁷Shipley, Op. Cit., lists those baptized in all the Utah and the Malad Branches.

⁸Shipley, Op. Cit.

⁹Clinger, James Henry, AUTOBIOGRAPHY, Op. Cit. p6. Quoting James' words, "In the Spring of 1865 my parents left Utah for the East. The Josephites came here preaching their doctrine as they had organized their Church, stating that the Lord had revealed His will to them, that Brigham young was a false prophet and a deluder and manyh other things, stating that the Lord wasd greatly displeased with His people here. They preached many false doctrines and through their persuasions my father became discouraged and went East. My parents changed their route and went to Malad Valley, Idaho where they lived for two years.....".

¹⁰Shipley, Op. Cit. p43.

neighbors and the Church, or in the spirit of gathering moved to Malad from all over the Territory in the 1870's. The RLDS branch there prospered for over 60 years. "Since the late 1920's the Malad branch gradually fell apart. Members moved away or their children joined the Utah church. In August 1968 there were 35 members on the branch records. The average age of membership was over 66 years old. Regular church services are not held by the Josephites in Malad"¹¹.

The Clinger family remained in Malad two or three years. Their daughter Laura Catherine Clinger was born there October 1, 1867. Meanwhile in Salt Lake City their two oldest children, daughter Martha Ann Clinger and James Henry Clinger had been married, Martha Ann to Joseph Smith Boren in February 1867, and James Henry to Pauline Mary Williamson in February 1868¹².

Sometime in the spring of 1868 James and Harriet Clinger took their family and travelled eastward to Nebraska. Only Martha Ann and James Henry remained behind¹³. Harriet's parents had already returned to Nebraska a couple of years earlier.

James and Harriet Clinger and their children over 12 years of age, daughter Jane Mary and sons William, Carlos and George, were received into the Columbus RLDS Branch from the Malad Idaho Branch by letter August 27, 1868¹⁴. Harriet's father Adolphus Chapin, her stepmother Laura, their daughter Rhoda Ann and son

Charles Chapin were received from the Provo Branch August 23, 1868. James and Harriet Clinger and the above-named members of their family were baptized into the RLDS Church 28 June 1869 by William Woodhead, and were listed in the membership records of the Columbus, Nebraska Branch in the RLDS Branch Report December 31, 1871¹⁵. Adolphus Chapin was ordained an Elder in the RLDS Church 2 December 1866 by William Summerfield¹⁶. The Clinger family was listed in the 1870 Nebraska census as living in Monroe precinct of Platte County.

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The Clingers quickly made friends with their new Nebraska neighbors, the Murie family. Of Scotch descent, the Muries had joined the LDS and later the RLDS Church. Theirs was

¹¹Shipley, op. cit., p100.

¹²Family Group Sheet, THE CLINGER FAMILY, Kathryn S. Blake, 1977

¹³James Henry Clinger, AUTOBIOGRAPHY, op. cit.

¹⁴RLDS Columbus Branch, Northern Nebraska District Report, Packet 364-1, RLDS Archives.

¹⁵Early Reorganization Records, Columbus Nebraska Branch Report, December 31, 1871, pp 830-833.

¹⁶RLDS Archives, Packet 364-1.

also a family of split Church loyalties. Brothers Peter James Murie (1821-1875) and David Murie (1818-1857) had come to America about 1840. David was a scout for the first Mormons into Utah and he settled in the Cedar City Utah area. Peter Murie was one of the first settlers in Platte County Nebraska¹⁷.

The Muries helped James Clinger "by giving him a place to farm and what he needed to do with as my Uncle Jim who was Captain of the Pawnee Scouts was unable to do anything with his place for he got sun stroke while fighting on the plains"¹⁸. "The Muries give (sp) him a place to farm, a couple good horses wagons and what he needed till he got started again"¹⁹.

Peter Murie's wife, Annie Allen, had been converted to the LDS church in Scotland and came to America. "At the break of the Church they (Peter and Annie Murie) stayed with the other side. Grand Father wanted to go to Utah but Grand Mother would not go. After the Reorganization which was in 1860 they stayed with that branch, and Grand Father was appointed on a mission but did not go"²⁰.

Not surprisingly, James and Harriet Clinger's oldest daughter Mary Jane Clinger (1853-1926) married Peter James Murie jr. in 1872 in Columbus, Nebraska. After the birth of two children in Columbus, Nebraska, she and Peter moved to Lafayette, Boulder Co. Colorado where 8 others were added to their family. One son, George W. Murie and his wife moved to Provo, Utah in 1942 where he died in full faith and activity in the RLDS Church in 1965²¹. Mary Jane Clinger Murie's granddaughter, Alein Murie Morris, living in Arkansas, joined the LDS Church

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September 1, 1991²².

¹⁷Alein Leonora Murie Morris unpublished family history, copy in my possession. Alein descends from James and Harriet Clinger's daughter Mary Jane Clinger (1853-1926). An adherent of the RLDS Church, she was baptized LDS 1 September 1991.

¹⁸Letter from George W. Murie (1887-1965) to his cousin, Lillie May Clinger Sumsion, dated November 28, 1941. Copy in GRB file.

¹⁹Letter from George W. Murrie to his cousin Lillie May Clinger Sumsion dated November 6, 1941. Copy in GRB file.

²⁰Letter from George W. Murrie to Lillie May Clinger Sumsion dated 28 November 1941.

²¹The Provo DAILY HERALD, Friday November 14, 1958 accompanied by a photograph gives an account of George W. and Edith Cook Murie's golden wedding anniversary reception at the RLDS Church in Provo, Utah.

²²Letter from Alein Murie Morris to Areta Sumsion Blake dated January 15, 1992.

James Clinger's sister Martha Ann married Joshua Helser in Nauvoo, Illinois in 1841²³. She had joined the LDS Church in Allegheny Penna²⁴. She and Joshua had two children in Nauvoo, another in Quincy Illinois in 1847. Joshua was ordained an Elder after Joseph Smith's martyrdom²⁵. The family shared in the hardships of the evacuation of Nauvoo in 1846 and the trek across Iowa where they resided in Council Bluffs. There they added two more children.

About the time James and William Clinger crossed the Plains to Utah in 1852, Martha was faced with a dilemma. Could her aging mother Ann Ashcom Clinger Hayes, for whom she was responsible, and who was then in her mid-sixties survive the wearisome trek? We do not know if that is the reason that the Helser family did not go further west. Soon thereafter, the Helsers affiliated with other Mormons under James J. Strang²⁶ in Burlington (Voree) Wisconsin, following him to Beaver Island in Lake Michigan where their sixth child, Martha, was born. At Strang's death in 1856, the Helsers returned to the Milwaukee area where they affiliated with the RLDS Union Branch at Grafton, Ozaukee County, WI²⁷. They added their 7th, 8th and 9th children while in southern WI. In 1874, probably at the death of Martha's mother Ann Ashcom Clinger Hayes, the Helsers moved north to Outagamie County WI where they permanently settled.

Adolphus and Laura Chapin remained in the RLDS Church until their deaths in 1880 and 1888 respectively²⁸.

The Clinger family apparently had a change of heart about their faith, for they

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returned to Utah, possibly in 1872, and rejoined the LDS Church²⁹. The RLDS Columbus Branch Record shows that James and Harriet Clinger and their family certificates were

²³Unless specifically noted, information about the Helser family is contained in THE HELSER FAMILY OF WISCONSIN, compiled by George R. Blake, 1990. Copy in the Salt Lake City Family History Library (FHL-SLC) 929.273 H369bg.

²⁴Martha's obituary, the RLDS SAINTS HERALD, 33:319. 1886.

²⁵Obituary of Joshua Helser, the RLDS SAINTS HERALD, 51:606, No. 26, June 29, 1904.

²⁶For a biography of this colorful figure, see Roger Van Noord, KING OF BEAVER ISLAND, University of Illinois Press, 1988.

²⁷Early Rorganization Records, 1862-1871, p205 and ditto Minutes, p762.

²⁸Obituaries, THE SAINTS HERALD 27:276 1880 and 35:272, April 1888.

²⁹James Henry Clinger AUTOBIOGRAPHY, op. cit., p5.

removed from the Branch by letter March 29, 1874. In addition, the record shows that George F. Clinger was expelled for apostasy³⁰.

James Clinger was rebaptized into the LDS Church 18 July 1880.³¹

Part of the lure to return to Nebraska must have been the fact that both James' and Harriet's families were in the midwest. James' aged, 64 year-old mother, Ann Ashcom Clinger Hayes and his sister Martha Clinger Helser had not undertaken the trek to the west. In fact, they had moved eastward, first to Michigan for a brief period, and then had settled in Wisconsin.

We shall probably never know the various emotions that tugged at the Clinger family in their decision to return to Nebraska. What was the relative importance of family ties, the disaffection from the Utah Church, or possibly their enthusiasm for the Reorganization on that decision? Concomitantly, we cannot know the dominant emotional motivation that caused them to switch their allegiance from Brigham Young to Joseph Smith III.

Revulsion of polygamy caused many faithful members to hesitate following Brigham Young, and they preferred to remain in the midwest. Others were unsure what the the Lord's intended true line of authority was. Whatever the motivations, Martha Ann Clinger Helser had an additional problem to factor into her decision, namely whether her mother was physically able, in her advanced years, to undertake the migration to the west.

Why? Why did James and Harriet take their family east? We do not know the complete answer. Their son James Henry states they became discouraged. Could homesickness have been part of it? James' mother Ann Clinger Hayes and his sister Martha Helser remained behind at Winter Quarters and were in Wisconsin by 1865. Harriet's father and stepmother moved back to Nebraska. (Since her mother died when she was just over 3 years, she probably had a motherly attachment to her stepmother). Also, her brother Luther Chapin lived in

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Nebraska at that time³². The desire to see loved ones left behind must have been a potent magnet. According to Shipley³³, many of the RLDS converts planned a trip east even before

³⁰RLDS COLUMBUS BRANCH RECORD, Packet 364-1, RLDS Archives.

³¹Family Group Sheet, Kathryn S. Blake, THE CLINGER FAMILY. Presumably his wife Harriet was rebaptized at the same time.

³²Nebraska, 1870 Census, Platte Co. Accelerated Indexing Systems International, p082.

³³Shipley, op. cit., p42.

their conversion, but the Clingers had possibly been baptized into the Malad RLDS Branch before their trip east³⁴.

In the very year the Clingers left Utah for the east, a neighbor, William Woodhead in Malad was quoted, "We want to get back to 'America' where we can get a stick of timber without climbing up a mountain for it, and where we can raise our bread and potatoes without going half leg deep in water and mud to irrigate our crops"³⁵. In the 12 years the Clinger family had been in Utah, they had been beset for 5 years by crickets in their first farming effort in Ogden and were reduced to eating sego bulbs and greens. Moving to Provo, they found the Indians a troublesome menace. There were no schools for Harriet's children to even learn to read or write³⁶.

Were they Discouraged? Were they homesick for family and green forests? I guess so! These were reasons enough. Shipley adds others, concludes as a generality that, "Discontent with Mormon leaders and polygamy, acceptance of the doctrines of the Reorganization and the desire to leave the Territory all were factors that must be considered as contributing to the yearly migrations"³⁷. The relative importance of these many possible reasons for their departure from the west cannot be accurately ascertained.

During their lives, James and Harriet Chapin Clinger wandered from their homes in Pennsylvania and Illinois 2000 miles to Zion in the desert for a place to practice their faith. Underway they were privileged to see the great prophet Joseph Smith, shared the privations of being driven by murderous mobs from Nauvoo, and ultimately from Illinois. They camped as refugees in the forced migration of the Saints on muddy roads across Iowa. They lived in cramped and

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temporary quarters in Council Bluffs under the direction and guidance of another great prophet, Brigham Young. Still they braved the strenuous, weary trek across the endless plains and mountains to the inhospitable Utah desert.

They returned east again after 16 years to continue their search for their "promised land". Though it was nearly 900 miles by wagon to Nebraska, they had a joyous reunion with family there. Along their journeys, through the years, they had twelve children, three of whom died

³⁴RLDS Archives, Columbus Nebr Branch Report, December 31, 1870 p482; also EARLY REORGANIZATION MINUTES, 1852-1870, p486 indicate they were received into the Columbus Branch by letter from the Malad City, Idaho Branch.

³⁵RLDS SAINTS HERALD, 13:78 (May 13, 1868) quoted by Shipley, op. cit., p43.

³⁶James Henry Clinter, Autobiography, op. cit.

³⁷Shipley, op. cit. p43.

in infancy, one on the first trip west across the plains of Nebraska.

James was 59 years old, Harriet 44 when they made their last great decision to return to Zion, even though it meant another 900-mile wagon trip. Sadly they left their daughter Mary Jane Murie behind, but happily they were reuniting again with their two oldest children and their families in Utah. The even more decisive and pivotal aspect of their decision was that they were again reuniting with their brethren and Sisters in the LDS Church.

On the western slopes of the Wasatch mountains James and Harriet's long life's journey ended. About ten years after their return they were laid to rest in the Provo City cemetery, with their son James Henry's proudest accolade, that they died "as faithful Latter-Day Saints".

Foregoing written by George R. Blake from family records, and from other sources indicated in the footnote references. I am particularly indebted to my daughter Carla B. Paul for her search of RLDS records in Nauvoo, ILL, and to Areta S. Blake for making her files and letters pertaining to the Murie family available to me. September 1993, with corrections January 1995.