

MINI-BIOGRAPHY No. 47

Frank William Rodgers was born 4 November 1898 at Genesee, Idaho--a small town in north-western Idaho near the Washington-Idaho border. His parents were John and Emma Rickerd Rodgers of Scottish and English-German descent respectively.

John Rodgers was what was known as an "extra gang" section foreman on the Great Northern Railroad. He and his crew went wherever they were required to repair railroad beds and tracks. It just happened that the Rodgers family were living at Genesee when Frank was born.

By the time Frank was old enough to go to school, the family were living at Spokane; and Frank got one year of schooling there. But family moves came so thick and fast that it was not until 1910 that Frank got another opportunity to go to school. This was at Collins, Montana--a very small town between Great Falls and Shelby. There he got two more years of schooling--up through Grade III. This was the sum total of his formal education. What he got after that as a young man, he was self-taught.

The family homesteaded eight miles east of nearby Dutton. Frank and his mother lived on the homestead while John carried on with his railroading from Collins. (Frank drove the first team and wagon from Dutton to their homestead with a load of household effects and machinery.) He also drove a team to break up the first ten acres of sod in the Dutton district. He stood on the doubletrees to hold the plow in the hard, dry ground while his brother-in-law held the handles of the walking-plow.

About 1912 John left the railway and started frieghting by team and wagon from Dutton to Choteau--a distance of some 25 miles--before the railroad was built to that town. Frank often went with his father and learned the art of "jerk-line" driving a team of 12 horses hitched in two's and controlled by a single rein from the lead team to the driver. Every horse was so well trained that it knew its place in the string as soon as the leaders were put in their place. Each team was tied to the doubletrees ahead of them, and all followed the lead team that were guided by the single "jerk-line".

In February 1914 the Rodgers moved to Stavely, Alberta, where Frank's uncle had a farm six miles south-west of town. The uncle welcomed the family but warned Frank in particular about a colony of Mormons that lived a few miles south of town on Willow Creek. They were alleged to polygamous, grew horns on their heads, etc., etc. But worst of all, their young girls were known to be out to catch eligible husbands wherever they could find them, by fair means or foul.)

Frank farmed at Stavely on rented land for three years. At that time his father bought a farm one mile west of town, and Frank bought a farm south of town on Willow Creek. Besides farming, Frank hauled gravel from his farm for gravelling the north-south road to Calgary. He drove six horses on a dump wagon and was paid \$3 a yard for gravel delivered. In the winter time he hauled bridge timber from John's saw mill in the mountains to be used on the road.

But sure enough, Frank was becoming interested in the L. D. S. Church through a young lady, Leah Smith, daughter of Harry and Emily Smith who farmed west of Stavely. Frank and Leah met at a country dance at Pine Coulee School House about five miles west of Stavely. Leah was only 16 at the time (1919), but their friendship ripened rapidly. Soon Frank was attending Leah's church and liking what he saw and heard. The Stavely Bishop, Joseph S. Brown, recognized their growing interest in each other, and saw the sterling qualities that Frank possessed. He proposed that Frank teach one of their junior Sunday School classes. He countered Frank's pleas of illiteracy by promising him that if he undertook the teaching assignment he would not only improve his reading deficiencies but would succeed in his teaching and find great satisfaction in the work.

Frank rose to the challenge. Although he nearly ruined his eyes poring over lesson and reference books, he achieved what he had been promised. When a vacancy occurred in a teenage Book of Mormon class, the class asked for Frank; so he was transferred to them. Many of his class members honor him to this day for having taught them so well. The best part of it all was that Frank was learning the Gospel. And mind you, he was not yet a member of the Church.

But Frank's interest in the Church was not without opposition. A dozen of his male friends warned him that if he ever joined the Mormon Church they would never speak to him again. Frank joined the Church in July, 1920, and his fair weather friends kept their word--some for many years; some to this day. Two of them later relented and actually joined the Church after some 20 years. Another, although he was a Catholic, asked that the only speaker at his mother's funeral should be Frank Rodgers; and Frank was happy to oblige.

Frank married Leah Smith 6 Oct. 1921 at Stavely. His erstwhile friends were at the railway station to abduct one or both of them as they were about to embark on their honeymoon. Friends and relatives thwarted this scheme. But, not to be outdone so easily, they were waiting for the train when it arrived at Claresholm. The conductor allowed the newlyweds to move into the washrooms and lock the doors. The bad guys were foiled again when they could not find their quarry aboard the train.

Shortly after the Alberta Temple opened in 1923, the Rodgers were sealed for time and eternity, along with their small son, Wesley--now a Customs Officer at Sweet Grass, Montana. A daughter, Lois, was the next to bless their union. She is now Mrs. Joe CZech of Conrad, Montana. A second son, Wayne, was born at Stavely. In 1929, when this child was two years old, the Rodgers were preparing to move to Hartley. Wayne fell out of a high chair and broke his collarbone. Pneumonia developed, and his parents despaired of saving his life. The Elders were called in, and they administered to the child. They promised him that he would live to move to their new home and be a joy and a comfort to his parents. Amazing as it seemed, the child did just