

# **CHAPTER IX**

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## **CLARK BRADEN**

Since I have quoted so extensively from Clark Braden, it is appropriate that you be more familiar with him.

O.E. Harmon knew Braden personally and provides this information on pages 17 - 19 of his book, "The Story of Liberal, Missouri."

"As the writer knew Braden before his visit to Liberal, a few words about the history of the man may not be out of place here. Clark Braden was a native of Ohio. He received his early education at Hiram College in that state. This is the same school President Garfield once attended and where the martyred President was at one time a teacher. In his younger manhood Braden was an infidel. Later he became converted to Christianity and entered the ministry of the Christian church. At the same time he was a teacher, and according to reports of pupils who attended his school he was a teacher of considerable ability. When the writer first knew him he was at the head of a school at Carbondale, Illinois, known as Southern Illinois College. About 1869-70 he came to Anna, Illinois, where the writer lived and preached once a month, delivering three sermons at each visit. Most of the time during his ministry he was a teacher and he organized the first teachers' institute ever held in Southern Illinois. He was a great controversialist, and not many months passed when he was not debating either with some infidel or some preacher of another denomination . . .

Braden was a fighter and sometimes an intemperate one. He seemed to glory in controversy, as the people of Liberal learned on his visit here. He debated with C.W. Steward ten times in Liberal, and there are some still living here who remember Braden's visit to the town. This was in February 1885. He was placed under arrest while here, and as the writer understands it, was arrested on a charge of embezzlement from a firm in Nebraska. Braden's pamphlet recites his arrest on a charge of libel, in which he was acquitted.

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**GEORGE H. WALSER**

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Braden's pamphlet is a severe reflection on the character of the people of Liberal. The writer does not express himself as to the truth or falsity of these charges. The fact is, the pamphlet was written and caused a big stir at the time."

J.P. Moore acknowledged the notoriety of Braden's pamphlet and tried to blunt its influence by pointing out errors.

When Braden visited Liberal, for example, people were leaving and property values were declining. Braden assumed this would continue. Based on his observations, he predicted that Liberal would fail and be swallowed up by the neighboring town of Pedro. Braden was wrong. Pedro failed, not Liberal. It should be remembered, however, that after Braden made his prediction, Liberal changed.

The Saint Louis Daily Globe Democrat had this to say about Braden:

"Preacher after preacher has been here and has been downed by Walser, whose sharp tongue, power of ridicule and invective have been too much for them. I must except one, though, a man named Braden, who is in Dennison now. Braden is a Christian preacher, who would just as lief fight as eat, and he lost no time after being interrupted in his lectures at the U.M.L. Hall in telling Walser so. Well, Braden is the only man who ever shut Walser up. Walser would just sit right down all through a meeting and never say a word. But Walser wasn't altogether defeated, for one day Braden was arrested and taken to Nebraska on a requisition. He has since returned and you may look out for something to drop before long."

Braden had this to say about Walser and lawsuits:

"The writer was interviewed in Lexington, Mo., April 22, by Sam Keller, a correspondent of the Globe Democrat of St. Louis. This interview was published in the Post Dispatch of May 2, a most damaging report of affairs in Liberal. The writer returned to Liberal April 23, and delivered six lectures in Liberal. In these lectures he ventilated Walser, Fishback, Yale, and the parties who had been covering him with defamation for months. He was arrested for criminal libel in his statements, published in the Post Dispatch, and was tried before Judge Hall in Lamar, May 18. After the prosecution had presented their evidence, the case was submitted to the jury without any

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**Liberal, Missouri**

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rebutting evidence by the defence, and the jury speedily brought in a verdict of 'No cause for action.' Then the Post Dispatch, R.F. Holland and the writer were sued for twenty five-thousand dollars damages, in a civil suit. Learning that the defence were thoroughly prepared to prove that Liberal was a den of infamy, and its hotels brothels, the prosecution asked that the suit be dismissed their own costs. Infidels are lying, claiming that the writer signed a libel. It is a lie made out of whole cloth. The writer defies the Infidels to face him in any court in the United States."

Braden concluded his pamphlet with this statement:

STATE OF MISSOURI, COUNTY OF BARTON ss.

Clark Braden, was tried before me, Justice of the Peace, in and for Barton County, state of Missouri, on the 18th day of May, 1885, for criminal libel, in certain statements he was charged with have made to a reporter for the Post Dispatch, a paper published in St. Louis, Mo., and which appeared in that paper of May, 2, 1885. After the prosecution had presented all their evidence, the case was submitted to the jury without any rebutting evidence by the defence, and Clark Braden was acquitted by the jury.

A. HALL - Justice of the Peace