

Later Workers

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Eldon Tenniswood

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Early Days in in Michigan

By Eldon Tenniswood

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Lillian (*Eldon's sister*) has asked me to write down what I could remember of the things Dad and Mother told us about the coming of the gospel to them in 1906. Uncle Lester Billings, brother of my father's mother, was the first of our family to meet the workers. He lived in the little community called Laurel, which is about 5 miles south and west of Sundusky, Michigan. Uncle Lester was a successful farmer, and along with his farming he raised bees and harvested honey. This past summer we visited the little community of Laurel and met an old gentleman who told us Uncle Lester gave the land and was responsible for the building of the Baptist Church there. He was a deacon and a very devout man who helped the minister visiting the sick, etc., and when the minister was away he often spoke to the people a message from the Bible.

Once Irvin (*Eldon's brother*) was talking with **George Walker** and he said that **May Carroll and Annie Edwards** left Detroit on the train going north and felt moved to get off at Marlette and walked out to Laurel. I think it was in 1905 when the minister went on his vacation and was to take in the Baptist convention that **May and Annie** came into the community, looking for an opening. They inquired of Uncle Lester if it was possible for them to have gospel meetings in the Baptist Church. Uncle Lester asked **May and Annie** what denomination they were representing. They told him they were not connected with any denomination but were teaching the New Testament, endeavoring to get people to live by the words of Jesus. Uncle Lester replied, "You may have the building as long as you teach the Bible, but if you teach anything but the Bible we're going to put you out." That was when they began their mission in Laurel, a little farming community. I think they were there about 3 weeks before the minister returned from his vacation. Hearing of the gospel meetings in his church building made him very angry, and especially that Uncle Lester had allowed these ladies to have use of the church building. He said to Uncle Lester, "You let those ladies in this church building, and now you are the one that must put them out." Uncle Lester replied, "I let those ladies in on the condition they only teach the Bible. That is all they have taught and if anyone puts them out, I'm going out with them" The minister refused to let May and Annie use the church building and he put them out. It was then Uncle Lester went out with them. It was this experience that helped Uncle Lester see through the churches of the world, and he went outside the camp to bear reproach with Christ and His servants.

Uncle Lester's wife and 6 children were very bitter against him, which only opened to him the truth of those words in Matthew 10:36, "A man's foes shall be those of his own household..." His passing through the hour of persecution helped the Lord to give him a clear revelation of His way and truth as it is in Jesus, enabling him to be such a help to others that decided later. **I understand that it was about this time that Mr. and Mrs. Ramaden and Mr. and Mrs. Shoemaker decided:** also a few others, but their names have slipped my mind. The Shoemakers did not continue very long, but Mr. and Mrs. Ramaden continued for about 20 years and then we lost track of them.

Uncle Lester's family remained bitter towards the truth and it was very difficult for him until the day he died. When he got sick and wasn't able to get to the Sunday morning meetings, friends went to visit him but his family told the friends he wasn't able to have visitors. It was quite a long ways from where we lived in the horse and buggy days, but my father went to visit him. He went in the front door and his family didn't know Dad was there. Uncle Lester wanted to know why the friends didn't come and see him and my father told him they did go to see him but his family wouldn't let them in. After this incident one of Uncle Lester's sons, William, wrote Dad a threatening Letter that if he ever came again only the best man between him and Dad would walk away. Mother didn't want Dad to go, but Dad decided to go anyway and see Uncle Lester. Dad was tying his horse up to the hitching post when William came out to meet Dad. Perhaps I could say that he was the one who was studying to be a Baptist preacher. He came up to Dad and reached out his hand and said, "How are you, Everett?" and was as friendly as could be. Not long before Uncle Lester passed away the family told him they were going to have the Baptist preacher preach his funeral service in the Baptist Church, the one he was responsible for building. Uncle Lester replied, "No, don't ever do that. If you do, I am liable to raise up in my casket." They did have the Baptist preacher preach the funeral service, but the service was in the home. Edgar Hawkins sat in the family room with Dad, at Dad's insistence.

When **May Carroll and Annie Edwards** were having meetings in Laurel and that area, I understand **Jack Carroll and his companion, George Manning**, were having meetings in the Presbyterian Church building in Detroit. Some time after Uncle Lester decided he was anxious that his sister, Grandmother Tenniswood, my father's mother, and her family hear the gospel. He brought May and Annie to the little Settlement called "Sunshine" where my grandparents lived and our parents lived just across the road. Sunshine got its name from the ladies' aid, which was called "Sunshine Workers", and it was located about 4 miles southeast of the

little village called Peck. Grandma and Grandpa Tenniswood were very religious in the Baptist faith. May and Annie had interest in the Laurel area so May wrote her brother **Jack Carroll** in Detroit and asked if he would be free to come and have meetings at Sunshine. When he came it was in the sugar beet harvest, the latter part of September or first part of October. He asked if he could use the church building to have gospel services. The trustees said yes he could use the church building but the community was too poor and they couldn't afford to have a preacher. Whenever the Sunshine Workers (ladies' aid) could raise \$5 a preacher would come out and give them one sermon, and then they had to start to raise money so they could get another sermon for \$5. Jack told them he didn't expect any pay, he wanted to give the gospel freely like Jesus gave the gospel. One man spoke up and said, "But you must have a living." Jack replied, "Sometimes people ask me for a meal and others might ask me to spend the night, and that is all I need." Then they replied, "We would be glad to do that." That was when the mission began. Jack had meetings every night except Saturday and when they were not having some church doings, like a box social or some other entertainment to raise money for the preacher's salary.

At that time Dad happened to the Sunday school superintendent and Mother was the Sunday school teacher. Dad and Mother didn't get to any of the Gospel meetings at first, due to the beet harvest. After doing his chores, harnessing his horses, and pitching a load of sugar beets into the wagon, which had to be done while the frost was in the ground or he wouldn't be able to pull the load out of the field, he took the beets 7 miles to the sugar factory, and by the time Dad got back home and did the chores the meeting was over. Usually Jack went to the Sunday school, and when he was there, instead of having their regular routine of classes Dad suggested that Mr. Carroll bring a message for them, which he did each Sunday.

After about 3 or 4 weeks Jack didn't feel that anyone was very much interested so he closed the meetings and obtained the school at Peck which was about 4 miles away and invited people to the meetings. However, Jack was troubled in his conscience about one man in Sunshine that had come every night, and after he left he began to think about this man and he felt he hadn't given him a proper chance to understand the truth. He went around the neighborhood and told the people at the new place he would be back later as he was going to return to Sunshine and have a few more meetings there. When Jack returned the beet harvest was over and Dad and Mother began attending the meetings, along with other families who were hindered by the beet harvest. The man that Jack went back to help never came to another meeting. That was how close Dad and Mother came to missing their high calling in Christ, along with others in the church.

Dad and Mother attended about two weeks and each Sunday heard Jack bring a message to them from the Bible, which began to irk some of the congregation. One lady, who would like to have been the boss, and was quite forward in her mannerism, said to Dad, "Some people don't like to hear Mr. Carroll and I think we should go back to our old order in the Sunday school." Dad replied, "This is so much better than anything we have ever heard before. This is what we want," With this statement there seemed to have been a separation in the church group, some desiring to hear the gospel and others desiring to go back to the old form of worship. Jack continued the meetings and the following Sunday night just before meeting, while Jack was sitting back by the stove, three sleigh loads of people drove up to the building with a minister who marched in with his congregation. He went right up to the pulpit and started his meeting. After their meeting was over Jack stood up and made the announcement he was going to have a meeting and everyone was welcome to stay, which they did except the preacher and his sleigh load of people.

Jack often stayed with Dad And Mother even though their home was small, and not too much privacy. Mother said she often saw Jack on his knees praying. It was the first time in her life she ever saw a man on his knees. This helped her to believe that Jack was a true servant of God. About this time Dad and Mother were getting quite exercised about their own condition before God. They decided they would study the scripture to prove Mr. Carroll was wrong. The more they compared the scripture with what they were hearing, they were convinced that Jack was right and they were wrong. However, when they married they had decided not to discuss religion because often discussing religion broke up marriages. They never discussed the difference between the Baptist and Presbyterian because that's what mother's people were and she still believed in that doctrine. Now they could see both were wrong according to the scripture.

Dad knew that this lowly way would be too difficult for Mother because she was proud, and if he decided he would have to go alone. Mother was thinking the same thing, that Dad was too proud for this lowly way and if she decided she would have to go alone. **When the meeting was tested they both stood up at the same time, Dad was holding Mabel in his arms; Mother was holding me in her arms. Soon after, Theron and Fannie VanScicle, Ira and Nellie Pearson, our grandfather And grandmother, and Uncle Frank and Aunt Maggie Tenniswood, Dad's brother, and a little later Dad's sister, Mrs. Mae Wark, decided.** There may have been a few others: but I cannot recall them at the present time. When Mother decided her best friend, I think her name was Mrs. Vanater, said to mother, after she made her choice, "Do you plan to leave the church?" Mother replied, "It's my purpose to follow Jesus and if this is what it means I'm prepared to do so." Her friend said, "If that is what you are going to do don't ever darken my door again." It was true, she never darkened her door again. However, just before Mother died she got a message from this woman saying she wanted Mother to come and see her because she was very sick, but Mother was too ill to go. They both died soon after she asked to see Mother.

Dad and Mother felt bad for what they had taught in the Sunday school which was not according to the scripture, so they spoke with Jack about it, and the next Sunday they stood up in the Sunday school before all the people and apologized. Then they told the congregation what they had received from the Lord, which was not received very well by those who opposed Jack. This made a definite separation in the neighborhood. Those who received the Truth had a great deal of reproach to endure. That winter **Jack Carroll** returned to the **old country** for a home visit and **George Walker** came for the baptism, which was held April 12th in a little ditch in the neighborhood, and it was necessary to break the ice for the baptism. Those to be baptized stood on one side of the ditch;

the unbelievers gathered on the opposite side. Some were making fun of those taking the step of baptism, which hindered one man from being baptized. A man by the name of Mr. German, when he saw Mother, who was very frail, going down into the water to be baptized, said, "If she doesn't die from pneumonia then I'll believe this is the Truth and I'll walk in this way," Mother didn't die, but he was too much of a coward to be identified with the lowly Jesus and go forth unto Him without the camp, bearing His reproach.

There was a convention in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, during the summer of 1907, and Dad went to that convention. The next year there was a convention in Sunshine on Dad and Mother's farm. That year, 1908, the workers dug a well on Grandpa Tenniswood's farm to provide plenty of water for the convention. I think the workers were **Jimmy Jardine, John Patterson, a Scotchman, who had been coal miners, Charlie Hughes, and their companions**. The well turned out to be a flowing well, and it is still flowing as far as I know today. There were 4 conventions at Sunshine. 3 were held on our parent's farm and the last one was held at Theron and Fanny VanScicle's farm. **In 1912 the convention was held at Rogerville, on Mr. and Mrs. Davies' property. The next year it was held on Fred Klaty's farm in Carsonville, where it has been continuously since 1913.** In 1908 Ernest and Sara Woodruff decided. They lived 3 miles east of Peck and 1 mile north. A short while after they decided Jim and Annie Burns purchased the farm adjoining the Woodruff's on the east.

In 1910 Dad and Mother bought and moved to the farm just east of Jim Burn's property. Our neighbors on the north, Mr. and Mrs. Stone, were not friendly, but rather hostile to the truth. It may have been because Sarah Woodruff ([Sara Woodruff?](#)) had been Catholic before she decided. I don't know. Anyway, they had a girl about 8 years old, I understand, who took sick. All the neighbors had a country telephone which was public for everybody to listen in if they wanted to, and some people wanted to all the time. The central office usually gave the country news over the telephone by ringing two long rings and everybody went to listen. Dad and Mother learned of the little girl's illness over the phone, and when her illness grew worse through the day Dad and Mother went and asked Mrs. Stone if they would like them to sit up at night with the little girl because they would be very tired by this time just caring for her by themselves. They appreciated the offer and Dad and Mother spent, nights with the Stones, helping them. Mr. and Mrs. George French lived a quarter of a mile north on the west side of the road from our home, and when they saw Dad and Mother going to help out at Stone's, they thought that was strange. I don't remember how long the little girl lived but Dad and Mother were with them when she died, and this spoke very much to Mr. and Mrs. French who lived halfway between our place and Mr. and Mrs. Stone's place.

After the funeral the Frenches became very friendly with Dad and Mother, and it was about that time **Dave Christie** and his companion had meetings in Poverty Ridge. **That was where Mr. and Mrs. George French decided, and also George and Lula Brown. It would have been about 1911 or 1912.** It made a fair sized meeting with all the children, I think it was in 1913 the meeting was moved to Ernest Woodruff's place.

Things went in reverse for our parents after 1912, due to three crop failures and sickness in the home. Lillian wasn't sick long, but Irvin and our baby brother Clayton were sick quite a long time, and little Clayton died in August, 1915. After that Dad went to Detroit to seek work. Howard was born in 1916 and we moved to Detroit. That is where us children grew up.

I have forgotten the year, but it must have been about 1908 or 09 that **Charlie Hughes and Jack Jackson** had a tent mission in Port Huron. They didn't have stakes to put up that tent so they asked Dad if he could bring some stakes to Port Huron for them. He took them on the train and ordered a delivery wagon to deliver the stakes to where the boys were living. Charlie and Jack weren't home when Dad arrived, but he found their little bach. He looked around in the place and there was nothing to eat. Dad had brought a basket of food, lunch, and he hid it under the bed and layed (sic) down to take a rest. He was awakened when the boys came home. and after visiting with Charlie and Jack for a while (both were very good at teasing), Dad said, "It's been a long time since breakfast for me and I'm ready for about two meals. Which one of you men are cooking today?" They looked at each other and said nothing. Then Dad said, "I'm hungry. Which one of you fellows is cooking today?" Dad knew they didn't have anything to cook. They just looked at one another and after waiting a little while Dad pulled out the basket of food which he had hidden. This will help you to see a little of the love that prompted the early workers to lay down their lives so we can enjoy the riches of His Kingdom today. It was in Port Huron that Mrs. Clark and her two daughters, Flossie and Mae, decided. Flossie Clark married Harold VanScicle, and they also lived in Poverty Ridge.

Mother and Dad often told us about the reproach that the workers suffered, and often with very little to eat and the only transportation they had was to walk. Usually, when they reached our home they were dead tired from long walks. Once they told us of **Jimmy Jardine** and his companion who had walked a long distance on muddy roads, without much to eat, and it grew dark. His companion wanted Jimmy to go on and let him lay by the roadside and sleep on the wet ground, but Jimmy kept encouraging him on by saying, "We are almost there." which kept him on his feet until they reached our home. Only a deep love for the Lord and lost souls would motivate such sacrifice.

One of the deep impressions I have of Uncle Lester was his sincerity for the Truth. When he came to our place, which he often did to peddle honey to his customers, he took me with him to drive his pretty horse he used to pull the buggy. His favorite song was #167 in the old hymnbook, "The Waves Rolled High, Fierce Raged the Angry Deep." The second verse always reminded me of the storm that was usually raging in his home when he was there, "Be of good cheer when storms around you rise; Should threat'ning clouds appear upon the skies; Our Father's hand shall guide through storm and sea, His guarding grace shall lead to victory." The last time I was at the Carsonville convention in 1972, I felt so lonely. All these older warriors who had kept true were missing at the convention. God had called them to His eternal home. They were the ones that had born the load of responsibility when we were young, were not ashamed of Jesus or His true servants, and this has helped us enjoy the rich heritage of being in God's eternal Kingdom today,

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

From Eldon Tenniswood's Letter dated January 20, 1983 written from Buenos Aires, Argentina to My dear family, fellow-workers and friends: *"While here at the Goodridge home, (home located in Buenos Aires) I was surprised to learn that **Annie Edwards**, who was **May Carroll**'s companion when our great-uncle Lester Billings decided at Laurel, Michigan, in 1905, was a sister of Geoff Goodridge's mother. Geoff labored in Kentucky and Arkansas before he came to Argentina."*

Notes from Eldon Tenniswood: *"My father and mother went through difficult times when I was about seven to twelve years of age. They were misunderstood in our church. The meeting was taken out of our home and put in another home. My father and mother never told us those things. I learned it after I went into the work. They suffered twenty years and the truth came to light. They told me about their disappointments just two years before I was misunderstood. I knew that in years to come things would be brought to light—and they were."*

For Additional Notes by Eldon Tenniswood:

1982 California Young People's Meetings

1975 California Elders Meetings

1977 A Family Counseling Meeting at Santee CA

1964 Outline to California Workers re Divorce & Remarriage