

THE FIRE AND SUBSEQUENT BOYCOTT

On a bright summer day of July 1931, in contemplation of a vacation, I stood at the northwest corner of the big sawmill and lumber shed. This was our lumber yard at 229-24 Street, Ogden, Utah. From here a thirty foot-wide drive went around this shed to the south. There was considerable June grass on either side of the wagon tracks, some even along the dirt drive. I summoned our yard foreman, Gilbert Stuart--pointed the danger of fire in the June Grass or fire from the adjoining property on the west. I suggested that the grass be immediately removed.

Father had suggested that considering all circumstances that my vacation include a trip to the Canadian temple. If I would do so and take Della and Gladys with me that he would participate in sharing the gasoline expenses.

Della had recently served a mission in the North Western States LDS Mission. It was then customary for the Mission to conduct a temple excursion to the Cardston, Alberta, Canadian temple annually. Mother had passed away that May 21, 1931. We were all shocked, Della perhaps the most of all.

We travelled via Yellowstone Park to Cardston where we would meet the North Western States Mission Caravan--saints and missionaries. There we would attend sessions in the temple, attend the street meetings and see Glacier National Park. Thereafter we would travel to Spokane, Washington, cross over to Seattle, visit some of the lumber mills in the Northwest before returning home. I had letters of introduction to specific mills to pick up in Spokane.

We left Yellowstone Park at the Mammoth, North West entrance. I asked the ranger at the station for the speed limit in Montana to which he replied, "All you can make, brother." "Thank you," I said, "but what is the speed limit." "All you can make" was his further comment, then added, "Montana's roads are their own speed limit." We drove on soon learning that repairs, wash board roads, detours, etc. limited us to seldom over 35 miles per hour.

My wife, Mabel, our fourteen year-old son, Ralph, and my sisters Della, Gladys and myself were journeying along in my almost new black Model A Ford toward a vacation in Cardston, Alberta, Canada.

That night near nine o'clock we reached Great Falls, Montana. Next day we started toward Choteau, but after driving some ten miles we returned to Great Falls, because of a peculiar ping or knock in the engine. It was now noon hour. The garage foreman checked the car, found nothing, saying that in all probability it was a knock due to the bad gasoline they got in that area. "Go on", he said, "and if the knock persists stop at Choteau, about 55 miles away. They have a good garage, and can help you."

July 21st -- While waiting at the garage for service we heard the Ogden radio station, KLO, playing but heard nothing particular. We heard after that every few minutes the station announced that all people should shut off the water as the Smoot and Belnap Lumber yards were on fire, but we did not hear this.

We drove on. Our trouble must have been due to gasoline. That night we reached a little stopping place just short of the Canadian border called Bobb. Next morning we got our permit near the border to enter Canada. We located a motel then went directly to the temple to ascertain what time sessions would be held. Upon inquiring at the temple desk my name was asked. When I said, "Mr. Belnap", the clerk replied, "Mr. Belnap, there is a telegram for you at the telegraph office."

My heart sank, for I could think of nothing but misfortune. Could it be an accident, sickness, a death or what could it be? Mabel's sister, Luella, was at home with the children.

We hurried to the little telegraph office in the town drug store. The one clerk was typing. It seemed an eternity before she took up my telegram, typed it, folded it, and handed it to me, advising that if I wanted to reply that they closed at 6 p.m. It read as best as I remember, "Our yard and Smoot lumber burned today. Nothing remains but office building and east shed. No work left. Continue vacation." I hurried back to the car and blurted out, "No accident but the lumber yard burned," and read the telegram. It was a wonder we did not get this news at Great Falls when we listened to the radio announcing for everyone to turn off their water as the Smoot and Belnap lumber yards were burning and water was needed.

Stunned we just sat wondering what we could do next. Having until 6 p.m. to send a telegram, and it being early in the day we thought it best to drive to the park, try and recover from the shock, return before six o'clock and then send a reply telegram. We found the park most beautiful,

so much so that we continued as far as possible to Waterton Lake. This was delightful. Glacial streams coming down the mountain; deer and animals along the trails and beautiful trees and mountain peaks.

The reply telegram read as I remember, "Will finish here. Send papers and details to us General Delivery, Spokane, Washington...will order lumber from here if need be."

We remained in Cardston two days, attended chapel meetings and three of us did endowment sessions during the day with large street meetings at evening. Ralph did baptisms for the dead. Some unusual things took place which are a separate story.

At that time there was no way over Glacier Park to the west side. They were, however, building a road on which we could go to the summit. This we did seeing beautiful scenery. We retraced our drive down the mountain along beautiful Lake McDonald, then south along the east side of the park to Glacier City. We were informed that from here a passable road was being constructed around the Park from the east to Belton on the west side. Contractors told us it would be slow but we could make it saving us many miles of driving. We took the drive--it was slow all right but we made it safely, where we bedded down in a motel at Belton--the west entrance to the park.

In the morning, a Saturday, we set out for Spokane which we should reach early enough to get our mail. We consulted our map which took us by Flathead Lake, south to Kalispell, on to Missoula where we would connect with Highway 10 going west. Believe it or not the highway was poorly marked and shaped. More than an hour later I noticed the names of towns which I thought were shown on the map as going East to Butte, Montana. Sure enough, on consulting the map we were headed East. Disappointed we turned around taking the right course west toward Spokane. It was now obvious that our goal for the day would not be reached. That night we stopped in Kellogg, or Wallace, Idaho.

Sunday was a beautiful day. Our objective was to obtain mail if possible in Spokane. In the city we first located the Post Office. Ringing the bell at the window lettered "Supt. of Mails", a gentleman answered. Having explained our plight, the attendant located a quantity of newspapers and two or three explanatory letters. These we eagerly read--located the meeting place and attended sacrament meeting. With no job now remaining we decided to cancel the trip across the state to Seattle and return home. We felt that the money to be spent had best be saved for coming winter. Also fire insurance, creditors were waiting to see what would be done. Letters of introduction to lumber, door and plywood mills we now put in the suit case and returned home via Lewiston, Idaho. Here was located a small, but very new lumber mill and box factory. Upon inquiry we were permitted to go through the plant. We saw the logs in the pond--washed, pulled into the mill--sawed to timbers, boards, plank or dimension lumber. All graded--kern-dried-loaded onto cars, etc. This mill also had a box factory for our inspection. All was a valuable experience.

A couple days later we arrived home safely to learn the details from my brother, Volney and others.

Children playing with matches started a fire inside a storage building of double garage size located against our west fence. A Mr. Pierson of the Forestry Service saw the fire start from his office window in the Forestry Building and turned in the alarm. A member of the Fire Insurance Underwriters Association from Chicago was in Ogden on inspection. He was walking along the east side of Grant near 24th when he saw the smoke rise in the air. He inquired of a passerby what was located in the block but received no satisfactory answer. He heard the fire department sounding their alarm as they came along Grant Avenue. He ran to the corner of 24th and Grant, caught the back of the fire truck which stopped at the corner to connect the fire hose and rode the truck in the 24th street entrance to the lumber yard laying the hose as they went. This was to a point directly between our yard shed and the building on fire. This also was the point I had stood when I saw the possibility of fire.

The fire engine and men signalled they were ready for the water, again and again they signaled but no water came. The fire engine turned around returning to the fire hydrant at the corner only to learn that the coupling on the hose had broken at the hydrant. The truck had to return the $1\frac{1}{2}$ blocks to the station for another length of hose. They were there in ample time to prevent a fire. Another fire engine went to a hydrant at 24th and Lincoln and came to the fire from the west drive. The chief remarked, "How's that for getting to the fire." The by-stander replied, "you haven't seen the fire yet," as the fire had leaped to our sheds.

Mr. Pierson, who turned in the alarm told how he saw the fire first

star, turned in the alarm, watched the fire, the fire engine arrive and remain helpless without water. The lumber yard shed by this time was not ablaze. The fire was hot--the temperature was 104 degrees. He saw the back of our wooden sheds steam, then smoke, belch out time after time then burst into flame. In ten minutes the fire raced across our sheds, and were in Smoot Lumber Co.--main brick building facing 24th street. The fire spread rapidly as the sheds housed lumber stacked in bins one above another. The reason our main building and shed on the east next to Smoots did not burn was because of the open space and Smoot brick building the entire length of our small shed. The other sheds and lumber were a total loss.

Also where water did come it was sprayed on our buildings to keep them from igniting. These buildings which housed cement, hardwood, doors, windows, nails, wallboard, etc. and one ton Ford truck out on delivery, escaped burning. Office furniture and the company records had been carried by people across the street to prevent burning. After the fire, the insurance underwriter came into the office and told Volney further that this was a needless fire--one that was bungled.

The next 3½ years was a struggle to survive. The Belnap Lumber Co. was a closed family corporation. Only Volney and I were unemployed by reason of the fire. The question, what do we do now? All stockholders but us wanted to take the loss and forget about it. To top it off, the depression was on, and the Ogden State Bank where many of our customers banked, closed Aug. 1st and never again opened. Fortunately we had previously transferred our funds to another bank (CSB). Our customers generally sympathized with us and wanted to pay their accounts so that the closing of the bank was a tremendous loss. However, within a month we were able through collections and the insurance, we were able to pay our creditors except one and a loan at Commercial Security Bank which we covered with assignment accounts receivable.

Previous to the fire most of the combined lumber dealers of Ogden proposed to increase the volume of business by the elimination of the number of lumber dealers in Ogden. This was to be done by their purchase of a small and a larger dealer. We were the smaller selected. They sent a delegation to discuss this with Volney and I. We discussed this proposal with our stockholders, but had not given an answer prior to the fire. Briefly the proposal was that they would purchase our stock and equipment plus a \$2000 bonus if we would remain out of business for 2 or 3 years. We were to pay our outstanding obligations and collect our own accounts receivable.

Approximately ten days after the fire I arrived home. Much had to be done. Insurance adjustment, especially adjust inventory of loss of merchandise using inventory January 1, 1931 plus purchases since that time less cost of sales since the first of the year. Creditors had to be considered and assurances made. Determination of future possibilities of operation. Answer to dealers on their proposition, etc.

The dealers had already made a deal with the Smoot Lumber Company along the terms made to us. Thus they had the large yard eliminated through the fire. Although Volney and I were the only one now without an income the other stockholders seemed unwilling for us to receive the \$2000 bonus to remain out of business two or three years. However, they finally agreed. It was then up to us to notify the delegation who made us the proposal to sell. We communicated with the spokesman of the three man delegation. After days of long delay two of them returned saying, "The dealers have all been consulted and they have bought out Smoot Lumber and Brown Lumber Co. We have had difficulty in collecting from all the dealers so they feel they cannot purchase your yard."

A few days later while going to the bank, I met the absent member of the delegation who was a good friend. He asked me if we had been given an answer. Assuring him that we had, he asked what they told us. Repeating the answer he said, "That's what they were told to tell you but that's not the answer." He said that the group met and in the discussion it was pointed out that you had burned out. You were already out. The Ogden State Bank had closed and tied up Hyrum Belnap's money so he can't help the boys. Many of their customers banked at Ogden State. That will hurt them. They owe money at Commercial Security Bank and our bank (First Security) will see that Commercial Security Bank will demand payment, no longer giving them a banking outlet. Where you bought much of your lumber, nails, hardware, doors and windows, they agreed to no longer supply you. So they said, we can fix it so that they can no longer operate, they will be out permanently and we won't have to put up any money. "That", he said, "was the real answer."

Volney and I felt that if Earl would go along with us we could continue to operate on a cash basis until we could collect our accounts, pay our note at the bank, and accounts payable to a creditor we had not paid awaiting

terms of settlement. One night we drove to Montello, Nevada where Earl lived and talked with him. He consented to our plan. We drove home--phoned our creditor what we intended as we needed that support for future merchandise. He agreed--however within an hour two of their men were in our office demanding payment of the \$4000 check they already had and refused us further credit. The bank run on the banks was on. I went with them to the Commercial Security Bank, identified them and they drew the \$4000.00 in cash. It was further evident that the boycott or freeze was on against us. Volney and I were now in a desperate position. What could we do? Yes, we could fold up, try for a job with one of the rascals or someone else. Or we could try to stay in business with practically little to work with. September was now here, we had to do something.

Volney and I lacked \$1000 of having control of the company. The stockholders would let us remain on the premises and allow us a percentage of collections of the outstanding accounts and thus help us to work our way out. This seemed the better way at the moment. With a backyard full of rubble, an office building and a shed with some stock therein, a truck but no capitol or lumber we started out. We could no longer use the corporate name of Belnap Lumber Company.

Some Ogden Valley farmers owed us some money, but with the bank closed could not pay their bills. Three of them let us have cows on accounts. These we put in a pasture father owned at 33rd and Jackson. Ralph, my son, primarily milked these in the morning and Volney milked in the evening. Near us was a resident with some 200 chickens. We arranged to trade them milk for eggs. In the winter we brought the cows to the lumber yard in the south end of the long shed that did not burn. Hay we had from father's land at 32 from Gramercy to Liberty.

In the spring of 1932 we planted a garden on the land west of Liberty Ave. on 32nd.

At first we purchased a rubber stamp "Belnap Bros. Successor to Belnap Lumber Co." stamped the stationary with it and were on our way--cash and carry. Telephone orders we accepted--merchandise we did not have we purchased at the other dealers on a jobbers rate payable at the end of the month. The difference between our cost and sale was our partnership profit which was not very much.

Pick up orders on lumber we had to turn down, or if time permitted we ran out the back door--through the yard and out to Burton-Walker on Lincoln--purchased the item and sold it to the customer. One of us stayed in the office and the other handled deliveries. Sometimes we had to call on hel--a cousin, Gilbert A. Belnap had a truck jobbing service and we sometimes had to hire him.

The 20th Ward in 1932, was then under construction. We had that business. We purchased from Charlie Robinson, a broker, part of a carload of rough red oak for the trim for the halls, classrooms and chapel. We purchased part of a carload of maple flooring for the chapel floor from Morrison and Merrill both of Salt Lake to be shipped in at the first opportunity in cars coming to Ogden or Salt Lake.

Another Ogden Valley farmer who also owed us money also had a large truck, and he did some hauling of lodge pole pine in the Kamas, Utah area. They in turn owed him. We arranged with him to help pay his bill with lumber. Using some 2x4's we made small bins in the 50 ft. shed east of the main office building so as to hold an assortment of sizes. These bins we built in our spare time hoping we could find a way to buy some lumber.

I had a small insurance policy on which I could borrow enough to pay freight on a carload of lumber. We went to Salt Lake to make the purchase going to our friend, C. S. Robinson. We thanked him for getting us the oak--then told him we would like to purchase a car of lumber. Whereupon he replied, "I wish you hadn't asked that. You know that I am a small broker selling to what few independent lumber yards are now in existence. The depression is on and there are few sales. I'm barely existing." We thanked him again for getting the oak for us. He said, "I'm glad you gave the maple flooring to another large firm; it's all that saved me with the other dealers."

The order of Oak came in a pool car to Salt Lake City. The broker was also interested in the McFarland Retail Lumber Yard. He called us to say that the order on the bottom could be shipped on to Ogden or they would put it on two of their big trucks and deliver it direct to Ogden for the freight price. This was much to our advantage and the oak came to Ogden by truck via 24th street viaduct to our 229-24 Street office.

Robinson told us "the next sales trip I made to Ogden, I first called on Mr. B--at yard A-- His first greeting was "Did you sell Belnap the oak for the 20th Ward. My reply was, "Yes", whereupon he turned on his heel and walked into his private office. I followed him in and asked him what was wrong with that. He replied, 'Nothing--only if you sell to Belnap you can't sell to me'. We argued the point that Belnap had been in business many years, that he had an established place of business, their office was open, that they had always paid their bills, but to no avail, he said the answer was still the same. The broker said that he then went to three other dealers that day and their question and answer were the same. He argued with them. "So you can see my predicament--no sales, no living for me and my family".

We went to another jobber who told us the same story but he did accept an order for the doors and other material he had estimated to finish the 20th Ward building.

We had bid for the U. S. Forestry service on forms to be made for campfire stoves that they could pour one form--lift it off and use over and over again. We constructed a sample which they approved and we got the order. Construction called for 1/8" hard prest board for an oiled lining. Our next visit was to Mr. S. W. M. who was a broker for Presto Board also lumber jobber. This man was a good friend of father but we did not purchase much from him although his son had started calling on us. This order he readily accepted. When we asked him about a car of lumber we got the same story, "If you sell Belnap--I'll not buy from you." He did say that if he were able financially he would like to help us.

He suggested that we see broker, Gray Cannon, who had a similar situation when a little yard in Salt Lake opened up. The other dealers told him, "Sell them and we won't buy from you." Gray Cannon sold him because the dealers were not buying from them, the broker informed us, "And that firm now gets considerable business, and they might help you."

We went around the corner to Gray Cannon. Mr. Cannon said they were having a financial struggle, that they would like to get an opening in Ogden. He also said that their salesman came to Ogden on Tuesdays and they would consider our request, and if they could the salesman would bring us the answer.

Tuesday came--so did the salesman. The answer was yes, and he took our order. The car of lumber arrived. Volney and Gilbert (our cousin) began unloading the lumber while I stayed at the yard and placed the lumber in the bins as each load was hurriedly placed in position of binning. From the freight yard our truck came up 24th by a lumber dealer. After the first load arrived so did an employee of that yard. The visitor handed me a statement for items purchased from them amounting to about \$50.00 for last month's purchases, and requested payment. I told him, "Sorry but today is not pay day." He hung around for a while then left. When another load of lumber arrived he was soon back. This time he said he was sent back for payment. Again I reminded him that today was not pay day. He said, "They told me at the office 'if you could buy a carload of lumber you could pay them'". I assured him that he would get his money but not today. He said, "They sent me back and told me this time to stay here until I got the money." I said, "You may stay as long as you want, but I've told you today is not pay day." He stayed. Closing time came and he was still sitting in the office. We got ready to close the door and told him we were leaving and he could stay if he chose, but he would have to sit outside. He left, neither did he return the next day or thereafter. They got their money when we got it the month following.

For awhile things got tougher. Yard A or No. 1 when our truck went for merchandise we did not have, sent word back with the driver that we would have to have cash and at retail prices. This seemed the final decision to force us out completely.

Next day or a day later I was in town and met my friend, Bob, manager of one of the yards, he it was that had told me they were to force us out. We discussed how things were going and he did not approve. In the discussion I told him that they were pressing too hard and that before we would be forced out through their tactics, that I would take my case to the State Attorney General, give him facts and figures of their dealings and their joint purchase of Brown Lumber Company so they could control prices and trade--a venture we had refused to join.

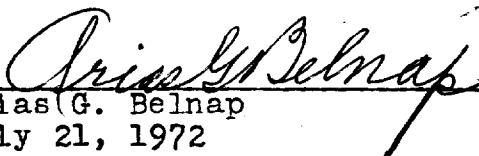
The word must have got around quickly for there was no more cash at time of purchase nor purchase at retail prices. Another friend, Fred, manager of one of the retail yards volunteered that we could have anything from his chain yard at jobbing prices if we would pay by the 10th of the following month so that the account would not have to show on his accounts

report to the Salt Lake City home office. This was the break we had been needing.

The maple flooring for the 20th ward job arrived in a pool car load to his yard. The broker from his head office came with the bill to collect before we could have the goods. We did not have the money available. Again our friend, Fred, came to our rescue. He said that he would load the flooring on one of their big trucks and when we could pay he would deliver the material to the job at \$1.00 per thousand board feet which he did a few days later.

Thus we were gradually overcoming the obstacles so that we could continue through the next two depression years, 1933 and 1934. Volney continued on in business until 1938 when he sold to the Associated Investment Corporation continuing with them as manager.

It was then what started as a joke took me into politics which became a lifetime of public service.


Arias G. Belnap
July 21, 1972