

BISHOP'S FIRST MINISTER

By Lawrence E. Taylor

When we come right down to facts ... just about every-thing we have in life is a heritage ... from someone ... somewhere. We call it "our democratic way of life." Although this democracy is actually the sifting, selecting, and refining of principles of justice which have long been held by freedom-loving men.

And so it was with the Clark family. Andrew Clark was born July 14, 1832 at McKeesport, Pennsylvania to Thomas and Barbra (Kees) Clark. They were ardent supporters of the Baptist denomination and in 1850 Andrew helped his family build the Mars Hill Baptist Church on their farm.

In 1866 he became a licensed minister and was ordained in 1867.

In 1866 or 67 his father, Thomas Clark, who had settled in the Owens Valley in 1863, wrote Andrew that the Bishop Creek Valley needed a minister. Andrew talked with his fellow clergy but none were interested in coming to this far west land, so he accepted the call. To Andrew and his wife Rachel were born seven children. Martha Alice, John William (who was Leora Feige's father), Ulysses Grant, Ada May (the mother of Lawrence Taylor), Ira Otis (grandfather of Otis Clark) and two other children who died at the age of two.

Mount Tom was named for Thomas Clark, brother of Andrew, who was the first white man to climb that great peak to its summit. After the Civil War was over, two brothers of Andrew and Thomas came to join the family - William and Milton. Milton was the first teacher north of Independence. Three members of the Clark family, Thomas senior, William, and Milton homesteaded all of the land comprising the present city of Bishop, north of Line Street, a total of about 480 acres. Milton had been issued script, and as veterans, the boys were entitled to homesteads. Andrew Clark arrived in the valley October 3rd, 1867 and settled his family near Owensville, as Laws was called at that time.

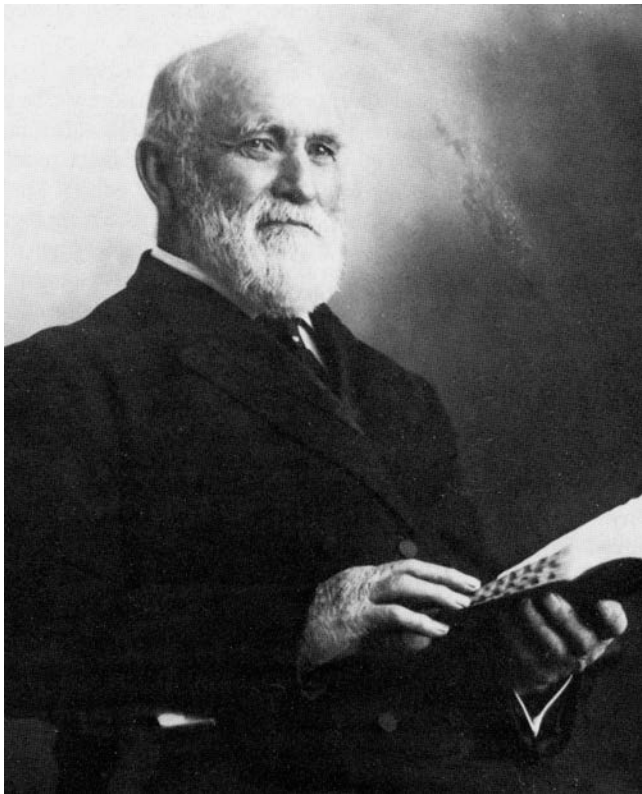
Andrew Clark was known as a "circuit rider" for he traveled by horseback from Bishop to Cerro Gordo, South, and to Lida, Nevada, North. He regularly carried the mail to these parts. On several hundred miles that one of these circuits entailed, he married couples, baptized the young and performed burial services. He held church service in the homes of friends in the early days. January 1, 1869 he organized the First Church Society in California, East of the Sierra. This was the Baptist Convention, started with seven charter members, all of whom were members of his family. Services were held in a school house, seven more were admitted to membership the following Sunday.

In 1870 he traveled by wagon across the Sierra Nevadas to San Francisco, attending an association meeting. At this time he received his appointment as missionary minister.

Andrew Clark was the only member of the Clark family who did not homestead. He purchased forty acres of his brother William's ranch from William's widow, Dorcas, for the sum of \$500.00, including the ranch home. This was recorded March 16, 1876. This land was near the northwest corner of Main Street and this area became the heart of Bishop. After this purchase, he traded, bought and sold other land in the northeast part of town, and in surrounding areas. Two months after his original purchase, on May 8, 1876, Andrew and his wife, Rachel, gave the trustees of Bishop Creek School, for the token fee of \$1.00, the first school property, located where the present city hall and fire station stand today. The deed is recorded at Independence.

As time passed, the old school became over-crowded and on December 29, 1913, Andrew Clark gave additional land to the Bishop School District - also for a token fee of \$1.00, recorded before W. L. Hunter, January 5, 1914. The first deed of record dated May 8, 1876, reads: "This indenture ... made the eighth day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and seventy six, between Andrew Clark and Rachel Clark of Bishop Creek, Inyo County, California, parties of the first part and C. W. Powers, W. G. McCrosky and Joseph Inman, as trustees of Bishop Creek School District, the parties of the second part, for and in consideration of the sum of one dollar, lawful money of the United States of America, to them in hand paid by the said parties of the second part, the receipt whereof is hereby acknowledged does, by their presence grant, bargain, sell and convey unto the said parties of the second part, and to their successors in office forever, all that certain piece of land located in the S.E. 1/4 of the S.W. 1/4 Section 6 Township 7 South, Range 33 East in Bishop Creek Valley, Inyo County, California and known as the Bishop Creek School House." This deed goes on to give the further legal description of the property. A like deed for the additional property was given to the school by Andrew Clark in 1913 (Rachel then deceased) and recorded in January of 1914, as an interesting old document.

Several generations of the family have attended these schools. Lawrence Taylor, grandson of Andrew, remembers that not only the students advanced, but teachers as well, as some had Miss Maude Truscott from the first grade through the eighth grade. With a church and school established, the land in Bishop sold readily. Through the efforts of Andrew and Milton, a permanent town began to grow on



Rev. Andrew Clark

these homesteads. Many early families, with descendants living in Bishop today, purchased land from these two brothers. Andrew sold his property for many of the businesses and residences.

The first record available of property sold for a business was the corner of Main and Line Streets, to John C. Mills in 1878 for \$25.00. He also sold this man property for a home north of the first school house in 1876. Andrew sold land to the Bulpitt family; first to Isabella in 1879, and the corner of Main and Church Streets to Fred Bulpitt, December 31, 1879, the token fee of \$10.00. A stone store was erected there. This property is now occupied by Joseph's Store. Many more transactions for business and residential property are recorded at Independence. "Gospel Swamp", as it was first spoken of in Derision, fast became the desired location for the heart of Bishop. These transactions show Andrew Clark was interested in progress, since so many plots were sold for a "token" price. He bought and sold land from 1876 until 1916 and owned property in different areas for miles around. It is safe to say that no other person ever handled so

many property transactions for the early pioneers. He not only established his own Baptist Church, but it was on his land that he gave a plot to the Methodist and Holiness Churches. For this he can truly be called the "Founding Father of Bishop".

Milton Clark did not have the opportunity to see the town prosper and grow as Andrew did, for on May 4, 1878 he passed away while still a young man. He is buried in the pioneer cemetery with a Grand Army of the Republic emblem marking his grave as a veteran of the Civil War. His widow, Rilla

Harness Clark exchanged property with Andrew and this same year built the Clark Hotel, first located on Main Street. Many years later, this old hotel was moved back on Warren Street, where it burned to the ground.

About 1880 Andrew built his family a new home, located south of the present Pioneer Hardware Store. The Academy Street property was his apple and fruit orchard and garden. The barns and pasture were where the present Coca-Cola plant is, with an artesian well that supplied sparkling water. It was near the present high school fountain. This new home was lived in by his wife and the four children until one by one, the children began to make a life for themselves.

John W. Andrews oldest son, homesteaded 80 acres east of town in 1883 while still a single man. Another son, Grant, helped with the family farming. Late in his life he married his old childhood sweetheart, Emma Shannon Willis, who had become a widow and they lived in Independence where Grant was a tax collector for many years. He was a kindly man and was well thought of by many early pioneers.

In 1886 Andrew sold twenty acres of his farmland, for \$1500, north west of his home, to the Inyo Academy Association. The same day the Association sold Andrew for the same amount, their land of twenty acres, less one. The Inyo Academy Association obtained their land from the estate of Milton Clark, whose interest was education. The high school was built on the property obtained from Andrew Clark.

In 1888 Rachel Clark, wife of Andrew, passed away and was laid beside her daughter Alice, and others of the family, in the Pioneer Cemetery. After her death, Andrew sold the ranch house, and about ½ acre remaining of his farm to Ellis H. Sterling for \$1500, who moved the house to High Street, just north of where the new church was to be built. The Sterling property was where the Pioneer Hardware Store now stands.

For the next twenty years Andrew Clark turned his full attention to his church work and saw the third and fourth generation growing up, and also watched the town firmly plant its roots and become an incorporated city on April 24, 1903.

During this time Andrew Clark was still the possessor of land in the new town. He had sold most of his land on the west side, and began selling land east of town, where new buildings were going up. He gave two lots to his son Will Clark, and one lot for a wedding present to his granddaughter, Leora Feige. Also several lots to his son Ira, on Willow St. He bought land near Laws at the turn of the century, and by 1903 he owned a large ranch of 480 acres. Here he built a home and the land was farmed by his son Ira.

After his brother Thomas returned from a sojourn in Lake County, he gave him 40 acres, and sold an additional 120 acres. This ranch at Laws was one of the finest in the valley, producing potatoes and wheat of superior quality. There were fine water rights which more than supplied their needs. His son, Ira Clark, acquired his ranch at Laws in 1909, and it was sold to the City of Los Angeles in 1924 for many times what Andrew had paid.

Bishop Creek officially became Bishop, January 21st, 1889. At this time, Andrew Clark was the only member of his family still living in Bishop, as Thomas Jr. and his only sister, Catherine Schick, were settled elsewhere. The town was beginning to change and older landmarks were moved to make way for new and finer buildings. One of these was the church that Andrew and his family had built. The first old church building was moved to Willow Street. The Fred Bulpitt Store occupied a place in

front of the old church site. The old church continued to be used until a new one was built next to it on the corner of Willow and High Streets. The old church was used as a parsonage and finally, in later years, as a residence. It is now on the former Harry Matlick property on Highway 395, north of Bishop.

On November 6, 1910 the new church was dedicated, and Andrew continued to serve as pastor for two years, then he retired in 1912. He was eighty years old. Upon this occasion, the townspeople honored him with a reception. With his retirement, the Bishop Baptist Church lost a great force. After his retirement in 1912, Andrew Clark moved to the ranch, visiting among his children. By 1917 he was the remaining member of the pioneer families. He is remembered today by his grandchildren, as sitting and rocking, singing the old hymns that were the symbol of the past life that he loved so well. He died in February 1918 and was buried beside his wife and other members of his family in the Pioneer Cemetery.

When the church, built on Willow and High Streets, was no longer in use, Ada Clark Taylor, then a widow, bought the property from the Nevada Baptist Convention. She had it taken down by her son Elworth and Mr. George Patten, and a home built from the lumber. Mrs. Ada Taylor spent the rest of her life there, until her death February 4, 1949. She, also, is buried beside her husband Austin Taylor, an old pioneer, and her son Elworth, who died in May 1938.

Reverend Andrew Clark had unlimited faith in himself, and in closing this story of his sojourn on this earth this tribute is given: Count only that man lost who has lost faith in himself. Until that happens, no game is over, no score is final. The biggest success stories are of men who came back after the rest of the world forgot.