

However, when there was a little progress, there was also backlash. He noted, “Wherever we work the devil is on his toes.” The same evening that he gave his lecture at the Pansky Club, “several people [had] stood outside . . . and passed out anti-Mormon literature to all who had been in attendance.” In typical optimistic fashion, he said, “It may do us more good than harm. I never fear such things.”⁴⁹

Though both the quartet and Wally’s work in the clubs received some favorable attention, Wally met with several elders back at the mission home to discuss why missionary work was not progressing faster in other areas. It seemed to Wally that they were continually “undertaking a process of gleaning” and that few were accepting the message. He asked the elders, “What can we do to improve our methods and our efficiency?” Wally admitted that the question burned in his heart “most of the time. How can our brethren become more zealous in the work?”⁵⁰ He spent much of his time over the three years that followed working on that question.

49. Toronto, journal, December 5–11, 1937, 172; and Toronto, journal, July 11–17, 1937, 125.

50. Toronto, journal, October 24–30, 1937, 158.

6 MAKING THE CZECH PEOPLE “MORMON CONSCIOUS”

Wally’s efforts to refocus missionary work and open new areas were boosted by a visit from the prophet, President Heber J. Grant, and President J. Reuben Clark Jr. in July 1937.¹ Throughout that summer, Wally spent a great deal of time preparing for their visit by distributing news articles among a number of newspaper editors. During their stay there, forty articles appeared about them and their visit in various publications. Wally also wrote articles for the *Deseret News*, such as one he titled “Czechoslovakia Welcomes the President,” and sent them home with a number of photos of President Grant.² And Wally was sure that the visit of these great leaders would never be forgotten by the missionaries who clustered about them and received their inspiration and blessings.

When the prophet arrived, everyone was impressed with his appealing and fascinating manner and keen intellect. He and his associates in turn voiced their

1. Mehr, “Czech Saints: A Brighter Day,” 48.

2. Toronto, journal, July 4–10, 1937, 121; and Toronto, journal, July 25–31, 1937, 131.



President Heber J. Grant's visit to Czechoslovakia in July 1937. Marion Toronto, with President Grant, Elder Richard R. Lyman, and Wallace Toronto (centered). Courtesy of Church History Library.

appreciation of the work of the Latter-day Saints in Czechoslovakia and of the quality of the missionaries. As they traveled from village to village, President Grant enjoyed the journey greatly. He sang, as was his custom, a number of hymns along the way, including "A Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief" and "O My Father." In recent years, some thought that President Grant was tone deaf, but he delighted in singing and often referred to being able to sing as his single greatest accomplishment. Wally made mention that never in the mission had they had the opportunity to meet and listen to so many General Authorities at one time. He thought, "This visit will go down in our history as one of the fine events which helped renew our courage and faith, and which assisted in making Czechoslovakia 'Mormon conscious.'"³

3. Toronto, journal, July 4–10, 1937, 122.

President Grant told the elders of his own mission to Japan and of the discouragement he had felt when they only baptized three people, all of whom were later excommunicated. On the other hand, he also referred to the marvelous work still to be done in the world and to the successes he had experienced in Great Britain, parts of Europe, and the Hawaiian Islands. President Grant was emphatic that the Lord's work cannot be stayed. He "stressed the fact that missionary training is better than a college education. . . . [He also] repeated his favorite saying that that which we persist in doing becomes easy to do—not that the nature of the thing changes, but that our power to overcome it increases." Wally felt it was a great and glorious opportunity to come "to know President Grant intimately to feel his warmth, his spirit, his kindness and his love."⁴

Wally was equally excited to become acquainted with President Clark. Describing him in his journal, Wally wrote: "What a keen mind; what a level head; what a vast variety of experiences. The government officials almost bowed and scraped to him. And yet how humble and delightful he was all of the time. The more I see of the Church leaders and the more intimately I can observe them, the more humble I feel in their presence. I know that they are men chosen of God, for they stand far in the lead of ordinary men. They radiate humility and inspiration and their testimonies of this great work are unshaken." Wally felt "blessed beyond measure" to have had the privilege of meeting with the General Authorities of the Church and humbly wondered if he was worthy of those blessings.⁵

While accompanying the prophet, President Clark was interviewed by a number of journalists for several papers. A long article that included his picture appeared in the *A-Zet*, as well as in other papers. His arrival in Czechoslovakia was announced over the radio because, apart from being a member of the First Presidency of the LDS Church, he was also a former undersecretary of state. He, along with the group, also visited the American Consulate. They met with

4. Toronto, journal, July 11–17, 1937, 123, 127.

5. Toronto, journal, August 8–14, 1937, 136.

a Mr. Jan Broz, who was a former member of the Foreign Ministry of Czechoslovakia and a Czech official in Mexico. It became an unexpected reunion when he saw President and Mrs. Clark, for he knew them when they served in Mexico in government service.⁶

Wally was amazed by the stamina of the eighty-one-year-old prophet.⁷ Wally recorded his feelings about the events that had occurred. “We have been unusually blessed by the presence of the President of the Church and his party in Czechoslovakia.” He knew that no one would ever fail to remember “the memorable missionary meetings in which we had the marvelous opportunity” to listen to so many General Authorities of the Church. “It was an occasion which comes usually but once in a life time.” Wally believed that the visit of President Grant and his party’s visit to Czechoslovakia had “done more than any other single thing to make the Czech people ‘Mormon conscious.’”⁸

Right after President Grant’s visit, a satirical article appeared about Mormons, specifically about Brigham Young, accompanied by ugly caricatures, in a Czech magazine named *Světazor*. Wally visited the editor, Dr. Altscule, and expressed his dislike of the article and his disappointment that Mormons were made the focus of such satire and irony. The editor apologized and agreed to print an article, with pictures, to compensate for any damage done. Wally gave him an article on polygamy and the Mormons with some photographs. He noted, “If he doesn’t print [then] we have recourse to the courts and the press law, which demands the printing of a counter article when requested by the offended party.”⁹

When negative articles such as the one in *Světazor* were written, Wally often reminded the editors of the 27,000 crowns that the Mormons had given them to help the “starving German children in Czechoslovakia.” One such editor was chastised through the Foreign

6. Toronto, journal, August 8–14, 1937, 135–36.

7. Mehr, “Czech Saints: A Brighter Day,” 48–49.

8. Toronto, “Mission President’s Message,” *Hvězdička*, August 1937.

9. Toronto, journal, August 15–21, 1937, 138.

Office Bureau for a story that was without foundation. Wally told him that he would be “glad to have them print an article about us [the Latter-day Saints], of our own writing, and call the matter settled.”¹⁰ Indeed, Wally made great strides with the Czechoslovakian press.

Under Wally’s direction, the mission formed a tradition celebrating Pioneer Day, which was also the day when the Czech mission was formed in 1929. Since then, an ever-increasing group gathered at Karlstejn, the dedication site, every year on its anniversary to express gratitude to God for the blessed privilege of being able to hear and accept the gospel in the Czech language. They commemorated the young, courageous men, including Wally, who had made that day and their progress possible. And, of course, they also remembered the faith and courage of the Mormon pioneers.¹¹

Wally established another tradition: publishing a monthly mission newsletter. In many of these newsletters, he often reminded the missionaries of the importance and value of fasting. In August 1937, he wrote, “No brother should deprive himself of the spirituality which comes from an occasional day of fasting and prayer, and of the added blessing which follows the payment of a fast donation. This kind of thing will help to put you in spiritual tune for the work you are attempting to do.”¹² Wally frequently asked both missionaries and members to pray and fast. He once fasted for two days straight. He believed that it would “humble [him] a little more to carry the responsibility of leading the mission” during distressing times. He received “considerable spiritual strength” from his fast.¹³ He asked the brethren of different branches to fast specifically in behalf of his missionaries and the troubles they faced. Some of those troubles, at times, were physical, not spiritual. For instance, one missionary struggled with a bad back. Wally urged the Prague brethren to fast and pray in his behalf. The very next day, the elder was able to sleep for ten hours undisturbed,

10. Toronto, journal, November 21–27, 1937, 166.

11. Toronto, “Our Ninth Anniversary,” *Hvězdička*, July 1938.

12. Toronto, “Mission President’s Message,” *Hvězdička*, August 1937.

13. Toronto, journal, April 16–22, 1939, 353.

which was unusual for him. Wally thought, “If there is any place in the world where faith and administrations ought to be effective it seems to me it ought to be in the mission field, where we are working closely to the Lord.”¹⁴

One of the most important teachings Wally shared in the newsletters was of the truthfulness of the Book of Mormon. The reprinting of the Book of Mormon in the Czech language helped the Church to grow in that nation. The original translation, published in 1932, had been done by a translator who was not a member. The Czech Saints kept copies of the new translation all throughout the German period.¹⁵ Wally frequently wrote in his journal about his study of the Book of Mormon. In one entry, he recorded, “I utilized the rest of the day in study—particularly of the Book of Mormon. Although I have read it, I find so much that is new and inspiring every time I pick it up. I cannot see how anyone with a sincere heart could read it and then deny its divinity. Martha is also reading it. Then too, we are attempting to read each day from it in Czech.”¹⁶

Wally wrote about a lot of different things he did and related the events back to teaching about or reading from the Book of Mormon. He wrote about the meetings that they held where people were really interested in hearing its message. He wrote about an event where everyone participated in “community singing, devoured two dishes of delicious soup, read from the Book of Mormon, and then played games.”¹⁷ He talked about a time when he “sent off a leather-bound Czech Book of Mormon to Dr. Alice Masaryk, together with other material, to be placed in her father’s library at Lany.”¹⁸ When meeting with officials, he would give them leather-bound copies of the Book of Mormon that President Grant had signed upon Wally’s request.¹⁹ At one point, Wally

14. Toronto, journal, June 13–19, 1937, 115.

15. Ed and Norma Morrell, interview, May 8, 2013, 18.

16. Toronto, journal, August 2–8, 1936, 22.

17. Toronto, journal, March 28–April 3, 1937, 93–94.

18. Toronto, journal, March 27–April 2, 1938, 211.

19. Toronto, journal, July 11–17, 1937, 124.

had more than 2,000 copies in his garage and was anxious to sell them to investigators.²⁰

Although the Book of Mormon was extremely important to the Czech Mission, another volume also found prominence: *Articles of Faith*, by James E. Talmage. Early on, Wally wished to develop a two-year study course for his missionaries based on Talmage’s *Articles of Faith* that involved some memory work, chiefly of passages of scripture but also of all the Czech pamphlets. He felt incapable of undertaking such a work; thus, he wrote to President Richard R. Lyman of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and asked him to have some of the best heads of the Church work up a study course on *Articles of Faith* for all the missions of the Church. He asked if it could possibly include examinations and assigned papers that students at Brigham Young University could correct. He “even suggested that college credit be given for such a course, if properly worked out and approved. Maybe it is a ‘pipe dream,’ but I believe it could be made a vital part of our work.”²¹

Even though Wally felt incapable of writing such a course, he at least wanted to make sure that *Articles of Faith* was translated into Czech, and by February of 1939, the translation was completed.²² When he first saw two bound copies of the Czech *Articles of Faith*, he noted what “a beautiful book” it was and had over a thousand copies printed for distribution.²³ Wally sent 140 books to various public libraries in Bohemia, Moravia, and Slovakia. Some were returned, but scores of libraries sent letters of thanks and appreciation for the gift. He was pleased that 130 books were in the libraries of Czechoslovakia and its neighboring nations to spread the message of the gospel to those who would be led to seek it out.²⁴ He desired to have the Pearl of Great Price and a new Relief Society handbook published and translated into Czech as well. He hoped that the Relief Society handbook in

20. Toronto, journal, January 9–15, 1938, 183.

21. Toronto, journal, July 24–30, 1938, 249.

22. Toronto, journal, January 1–7, 1939, 321.

23. Toronto, journal, February 5–11, 1939, 329.

24. Toronto, journal, June 18–24, 1939, 376.

particular “would stimulate the work of the fine women and give them a more definite idea as to the organization and program of the Relief Society.”²⁵

In visiting the wards and branches over which he presided, Wally found that marriage was frequently a topic that came up in his conversations with the singles. Many young Czech converts wondered if they would ever be married in a temple. It truly broke his heart. He, too, wondered if it would ever happen. One particular sister asked him if “not being married in the temple would hold her [back] from the blessings of celestial glory.” Wally replied, “This is a great question among the members here, who have no opportunity to marry in the temple, and oftimes [have] no opportunity to marry at all.” He made the sister a special promise. “A just God would take all of these things into consideration. . . . In the millennium such adjustments would be made.”²⁶

A young LDS couple went to the mission office one day to talk about some of the problems with their marriage. He “warned them of some of the pit-falls, and urged them to live the marriage bond as though it had been performed for eternity, telling them that some day they would be eternally joined by temple ceremony.”²⁷ However, when two sisters got engaged to Church members on another occasion, he remarked that the “Brodil girls are going to enjoy all of the blessings of the Church, including marriage in the temple—a thing I have secretly prayed for during many months. They are wonderful girls.”²⁸

Wally found that weddings were quite different in Czechoslovakia compared to what he was used to in Utah. In January 1939, Wally attended the wedding of two members. He watched as six couples got married at once in an unimpressive ceremony performed by the state. Afterwards, he became even more thankful for his temple marriage. In his journal, he recorded:

25. Toronto, journal, February 5–11, 1939, 329–400.
 26. Toronto, journal, July 31–August 6, 1938, 250.
 27. Toronto, journal, January 22–28, 1938, 325.
 28. Toronto, journal, January 1–9, 1937, 65.

My heart went out to our young members here, who do not have such an opportunity. However, I am sure they shall have it someday. We wished them well on their journey of matrimony, and of course they beamed all over, but were so wrapped up in one another that they didn’t know what it was all about anyway. They are our first Mormon couple to marry in the Czechoslovak Mission field and we are proud of them. There are other prospects now though, for Brother Dlouhy and Sister Baštova are thinking seriously of it, providing finances work out and in event that her mother doesn’t oppose it too vigorously, which she has done up till now. Marriage is a real problem among young people here.²⁹

Wally often visited with members and tried to stay in touch with “lone” Latter-day Saints scattered throughout Czechoslovakia. His ministry understandably involved giving blessings: baby blessings, blessings of healing, and blessings of comfort. He was frequently required to “pour oil [of counsel] on the troubled waters” during those blessings. Counseling members often, he helped straighten out their quarrels. At the same time, he took to finding amusement with the members, whether it was playing volleyball with them or playing with the members’ children. He thought, “We won our way a little closer into their hearts by playing with them. They saw that we were one with them, and sensing this poured out their hospitality to us.”³⁰

Wally was also determined that his missionaries would have “more spirituality than any other age of missionaries has ever possessed.” To meet the challenge, he felt that the missionaries needed to sharpen their tools, be guided by the promptings of the Spirit, and be stimulated by a genuine love and affection for those among whom they labored. He was determined that missionary life should be based on deep, sincere spirituality and heartfelt love. If the missionaries could cultivate those two things, Wally believed they would find themselves

29. Toronto, journal, January 15–21, 1939, 324.
 30. Toronto, journal, August 7–13, 1938, 252; February 12–18, 1939, 331–32; May 28–June 3, 1939, 364; February 26–March 4, 1939, 336; July 23–29, 1939, 390; July 16–22, 1939, 386; June 21–27, 1936, 9.

unknowingly polishing up tools for spreading the gospel.³¹ He outlined his teachings in one of the mission newsletters:

First, a knowledge of the Gospel is of utmost importance. Under the proper stimulus, you will thrill with each page of it. You will desire to know it so thoroughly that you can make it perfectly clear to any thinking and willing mind.

Secondly, is a knowledge of the language of those among whom you labor. The Gospel message is of little use to you as a missionary, unless you can express it in plain, forceful language which all can understand. With spirituality as a guide and love as a stimulus, nothing will be able to prevent you from learning the language.

Next, perhaps, is a knowledge of the people among whom you labor. You will seek to learn of them through the experiences of others as found in books of custom, tradition and history. But better still you will have the urge to learn of them first-handed, to mingle with them, study them and their habits, and appraise their accomplishments.³²

Wally also believed that tracts, articles, and booklets would help elders if they got them into the hands of their investigators. He became aware of a new media that the missionaries could use: lantern slide machines, and he wanted them used at least once a week. Apart from the slides, he also utilized what he called “all . . . means of propaganda,” including bills, posters, newspapers, and the radio. In short, he asked his missionaries, “Are you using all such to the best of your ability and to [the] best advantage?”³³

He then told the missionaries that teaching by example was not enough. They needed to make sure that they were in the homes of friends—members and nonmembers alike. Then hopefully, those nonmembers would want to inquire about the plan of life.³⁴ Preaching at its best lacks the warmth of personal contact, he said, and is always one-sided. “Preaching, with rare exceptions, is never so effective in warming the heart, inducing the mind and strengthening the soul, as is

31. Toronto, “Lord’s Help Indispensable,” *Hvězdička*, July 1938.

32. Toronto, “The Missionary Tools,” *Hvězdička*, July 1938.

33. Toronto, “Other Implements Furnished You,” *Hvězdička*, July 1938.

34. Toronto, “Converting Friends to the Gospel,” *Hvězdička*, March 1938.

personal contact.”³⁵ His message was always that faith was a principle of progression and power.³⁶

Wally was well ahead of his time in putting genealogy research immediately into the hands of investigators. Two of his missionaries once spent two hours talking about the mechanics of genealogy work. Wally’s goal was “to have every member of the mission secure his genealogical information for at least three generations back.”³⁷ He was determined that the whole Czech Mission be devoted to the stimulation of genealogical work among the Church members. Wally knew it would do immeasurable good among them.³⁸ He organized genealogical classes and spoke on the gathering of records by the government in Germany and of photo work that was going on the record near the border. “It does seem as though the ‘spirit of Elijah’ is certainly working among the people,” Wally observed. He noted the prophetic words of one brother who said, “‘The Lord is far ahead of us. He has many missionaries and servants in the work—although many of them do not realize it.’ It is a revelation to see all of these wonderful developments, which some day will be used to complete our temple work.”³⁹

Czech convert Gad Vojkúvka remembered Wally’s “love of people. Strong faith, knowledge of the doctrine, scriptures and acceptance of inspiration, joyfulness, kindness and empathy for all.” Wally had “intelligence, courage and incredible optimism with a constant smile. He was not weary of any work or labor. He was respectful to people—regardless of their position in life.”⁴⁰ Wally’s sister, Norma Morrell, said that “he was optimistic and had a wonderful sense of humor, and

35. Toronto, “Preaching and Teaching,” *Hvězdička*, March 1938.

36. Toronto, journal, January 1–9, 1937, 65.

37. Toronto, journal, July 3–9, 1938, 241.

38. Toronto, journal, July 24–30, 1938, 250.

39. Toronto, journal, January 16–22, 1938, 185.

40. Vojkúvka, “Memories of President Wallace Felt Toronto,” November 9, 2013.

was always just very upbeat and positive.”⁴¹ Those qualities were a great boon for him as he served as a mission president.

Johann Wondra observed that Wally “was different from many other people from America. He had a feeling for the people there. . . . This was his personality. And it was his Christ-like love.” Wondra described him as the people’s friend, “and therefore, they responded. . . . [He] expected that the people act as he [wanted] them to act.” Wondra explained that like Christ, Wally “went about doing good. . . . He understood that each person is different and that his approach must be different. . . . This is what his missionaries learned.”⁴²

Wally was brave and bold in his approach. Part of Wally’s bravery existed because of his incredible ability to depend on the Lord. “He expected and got help from the Lord when he needed it.”⁴³ During that time, “he was the . . . embodiment of the Czech mission. He knew it, he loved Czechoslovakia, he knew Prague, he knew Brno, he knew Pilsen, he knew all the little outlying areas, he knew everything about it.”⁴⁴ He also knew that to preach the gospel in the conditions that existed in Europe during this time period required great faith. And Wally exhibited that faith to his missionaries.

41. Ed and Norma Morrell, interview, May 8, 2013, 12.

42. Johann Wondra, interview by Mary Jane Woodger, May 30, 2013, Vienna, Austria, transcript in author’s possession, 4.

43. Mel Mabey, interview by Mary Jane Woodger, August 13, 2013, Alpine, UT, transcript in author’s possession, 8.

44. Bob and David Toronto, interview, August 20, 2013, 16.

7

“WHAT A POWER WE COULD HAVE”

During the mid-1900s, missionaries spent only one week in a missionary training facility. Then they went directly into the mission field to which they had been assigned. It then became “the mission president’s responsibility to train his new missionaries in the language and gospel study.”¹ Wally took this responsibility seriously. He tried to assign elders to the right district, town, or city and then transfer them so they were with the correct companions. He once noted in his journal, “I plunged into the puzzle of trying to most effectively transfer our missionaries. . . . It is a problem and sometimes a headache to make the best matches between the brethren, and to find capable men to take the positions of leadership and responsibility and who know enough Czech to carry on.”²

Toronto had been a mission president for less than a month when he became discouraged at the missionaries’ level of conversion. He wondered why his mission wasn’t having the kind of success of the early missionaries

1. Miller, “My Story: The Dream,” 5.

2. Toronto, journal, March 27–April 2, 1938, 211.