



PREFACE

Wallace “Wally” Felt Toronto became a pioneering missionary leader for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints among the Slavic people. Serving three missions among the Czechs, he continued as their mission president in absentia for another twenty-five years. He holds the longest term as a mission president: thirty-two years. Born December 9, 1907, in Salt Lake City, Utah, Wally was originally called to serve in the German Mission, but less than a year into his mission he received a transfer, where he joined the first elders to open the Czechoslovak Mission.

At the young age of twenty-seven, just two years after marrying, Wally was called to preside over the Czech Mission. Under his leadership, new cities were opened, conversions continued, and branches of the Church were organized. The Nazi occupation of Czech lands in 1938 and 1939 led to the evacuation of all missionaries including President Toronto and brought the dissolution of the Czech mission during World War II.

After a seven-year hiatus, and much to Toronto's surprise, he and his family were called once again to preside over the mission. With a larger missionary force, the Church expanded even after the February 1948 Communist coup. With the Communist restrictions growing, the young mission president came under more and more scrutiny. By 1950, Wally was considered one of the top wanted spies by the Communists, and both he and his wife were under twenty-four-hour surveillance. In the end, all Czech missionaries were expelled, the registration of the Church was canceled, and faithful Saints were now left without the opportunity even to hold branch meetings.

After returning home, through cryptic letters, Wally kept in touch with the Saints in Czechoslovakia for the next eighteen years serving as the Czech mission president in absentia. In 1964, President David O. McKay assigned the Torontos to visit the Czech Saints as tourists, and the next year the prophet asked Wally to return alone to meet with the ministry officials. He did so but was arrested following his interview on television during a huge national sports festival. Wally's request for Church recognition was rejected by the Czech government, and he was deported at the German border. Wallace Toronto would remain president of the Czech Mission until his death from cancer on January 10, 1968, in Salt Lake City.

As I began to write this biography, I knew from the enormous amount of data I had collected I could write several volumes about this man's life and still never fully tell the whole story. Such a portrait may be frustrating to those who would like a more critical treatise, but the full life of Wallace F. Toronto cannot possibly be told in these limited pages. It is my hope that Wally's courage and great ability to love others, which he

became known for, will carry from these pages into the hearts of the readers.

Acknowledgments

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