

# J. Golden Nuggets

## UNCLE GOLDEN

James N. Kimball

We are a cheerful but humorless people. This may explain in part the continuing popularity and folk hero status of J. Golden Kimball, a member of the First Council of Seventy from 1892 to 1938. Golden Kimball possessed two rather remarkable gifts, a wit clever enough to detect the humor and irony in the Church and a keen sense of how and when to use it. He understood how fine the line is which separates that which is humorous from that which is offensive in a religious setting. Though some may disagree (President Heber J. Grant included), Golden seldom crossed that fine line. But most members of the Church then as well as now loved him for occasionally running that risk.

I would like in this column to pass along a few of the anecdotes of this unique, witty, and much loved man. In an era of the Church when sobriety appears to have triumphed, such stories as I will relate would seem to be apocryphal. They are all, in fact, quite true.

Golden served the Church as both an elder and a mission president in the southern states. He reminisced of those days in a stake conference talk: "In the South I learned to pray with just closing one eye. I always kept one open on the lookout. You never knew who was going to be creeping up on you. We spent most of our time out in the woods away from the towns trying to find a place to eat, find a place to sleep. It was a great experience. There is nothing that can compare to the thrill and the flame of the Holy Spirit when you are doing missionary work."

"I remember when I was mission president, I went down to Athens, Georgia, to help the elders. One of them had written me, he was the Conference President down there, and said they feared for their lives. They had been threatened by the Klan with tar and feathering if they held a missionary meeting out in the woods. I wrote him and told him to go ahead and do it, that I would be down to help him. Well I caught a train, walked a long distance, and finally arrived there. I met with all the

elders. I was proud to serve with them, they were good elders. They weren't fearful of their lives. Well we started this prayer meeting out in the forest and no sooner had we started it than across a small stream a group of men gathered and built a big fire. You could smell the tar and you could see them cutting open big bags of chicken feather, pillows, and mattresses—I knew what they were up to. I told the elders to go on with the meeting. These men were yelling and war hooping and drinking and cursing. Well we finished our meeting and said a closing prayer and I walked to the edge of the stream and said, 'We have finished our meeting.' They all gathered on the opposite bank and said, 'Well then, we're coming to get you.' I said, 'That's fine but you know we're Mormons and Mormons have horns. You cross that stream and we'll gore the hell out of you.' Well they didn't cross that stream. They just stood and looked at us. Finally they put out their fire and went home."

Elder Kimball was asked to go down to Fillmore to speak to a Youth Conference. This story was told by a man who was in fact there as a 14-year-old. He said the reason Golden was invited had to do with the wildness of the young teenagers in that town. The stake presidency and the high council were very concerned about it. It seems there were a lot of teenage pregnancies as well as drinking, smoking, and carousing around late at night. The high council and the stake presidency were very concerned so they called all the youth together and asked Brother Kimball to talk to them. But the arranged program was quite peculiar. All the stake presidency and high council sat on the stand with Uncle Golden. Then, in turn, each of them got up and reprimanded the youth. Each addressed himself to some aspect of the sinning. After they were all finished, they retired to the first two rows in front of the podium. That left Uncle Golden the stage to himself. He stood up, walked to the podium, and won the loyalty and affection of the teenagers with one short broadside, "I understand all of you youth are going to hell. Well, I'm not worried about you. I'll tell you who I

am worried about. It's all these bald-headed bastards on the first two rows."

There was a brother named Arch McPhee, who lived in Springville and, according to a Brother Beesley (who related this story), was one of these small town authorities on everything. He would tell the town council how they should run the city and the library board and the gospel doctrine class or anyone that would ask. He was an outspoken authority on all subjects. Uncle Golden had to go to Springville to introduce a new manual for the Sunday School. Well, Arch didn't like the idea much. So when Uncle Golden asked for a sustaining vote of the manual in stake conference (back when the membership had a slight voice in such things), Arch McPhee jumped up from the audience and began to tell Golden that they didn't need it and that the Church must be falling into apostasy to use such things. After about two or three minutes of this Uncle Golden said, "Shut up McPhee. I know all about you, and I don't want to hear anymore from you. If you've got more to say, come up to Salt Lake on Tuesday morning at 10:00 a.m. and talk to me. I'll be waiting." And, needless to say, Golden got the sustaining vote.

But Arch McPhee didn't forget. He caught a bus to Salt Lake the following Tuesday, arriving at Uncle Golden's precisely at 10:00 a.m. After waiting a bit in the reception area, he was finally ushered into Golden's office. Golden was talking on that "damn contraption," the telephone and McPhee presumed that he had forgotten who he was. So McPhee began his tirade against manuals again but after about ten minutes Golden jumped up, went to the window, and looked out on South Temple. He stared down into the street for a moment and then said, "Come here, McPhee." Startled, Brother McPhee strolled over to the window and stared down into the street with Golden. Golden put his arm around McPhee's shoulder and point to the street. "See that street cleaner sweeping up those horse turds? Well, I'd be doing the same thing if I didn't learn to keep my mouth shut. Now McPhee, how about you learning that lesson?!"

JAMES N. KIMBALL lives in Salt Lake City. His great grandfather was one of J. Golden's 46 half-brothers. Jim does several firesides a month entitled "Remembering Uncle Golden" and still finds many who remember J. Golden and have a story about him to tell.