

When George was five, a revolution broke out in Mexico and most of the American-Mormon families returned to the United States. George's younger brother, Charles, who was born in this country shortly after the Mexican exodus, once got a rise out of him by yelling: "I'm the only Romney who can be President 'cause I'm the only one born in this country."

"That's not so," George cried out. "I can be President, too." He thought a moment, then added: "If a kitten was born in a garage, would that make it an automobile? Mom and Dad are Americans, so I'm a natural-born citizen, too." Thus he won his first important debate.

George's father eventually settled in Salt Lake City, where he established himself as a successful builder. His sons worked with him after school and during the summers as carpenters and lathers. George became so expert at filling his mouth with nails and spitting them out point-first that he could place 3,000 laths a day (the average lather puts up 1,600).

The Romneys were a devout family, and George was thoroughly instructed in his religion. From the age of four, he knelt with the family in daily morning and evening prayers. Sundays were devoted to church work and study. As a small child, he gave two-and-a-half-minute talks in front of the adult congregation as part of his Sunday-school training in public speaking.

#### An Interrupted Courtship

In his senior year at high school, George met one of the few people who ever left him speechless. She was Lenore LaFount, a beautiful 15-year-old brunette who strummed the ukulele and wanted to be an actress.

George followed her when she went out with other boys, bought her a piece of cake every noon in the school cafeteria, and once literally pulled her off a school dance floor when he decided she had danced long enough with another boy. "It was the most exciting thing we had ever seen," her sister exclaimed later.

His courtship of Lenore was beginning to take precedence over most of his other activities when the church invited him to become a missionary.

For a 19-year-old Mormon, this was a great honor. But there were problems. Missionaries must cease dating. So the offer meant he would be separated from Lenore for two years.

George sat with Lenore in a borrowed car one evening outside the LaFount home. "I've an obligation to let people know about the power they have to change their lives through God," he told her. Lenore understood; her father also had been a missionary.

But there was another problem—money. Missionaries and their families must pay their own expenses, and the Romneys were already supporting one son's mission in South Africa. So George found two eight-hour jobs lathing and shingling buildings. By the end of the summer of 1926, he had given the church 10 percent of his earnings for "tithing," had set aside \$630 toward mission expenses, and had enough left to buy a birthday present for Lenore.

He started his missionary work in Glasgow, Scotland. Eight hours a day, he and a companion gave street sermons and walked door-to-door handing out pamphlets. Evenings were spent revisiting families that showed an interest.

Romney learned how to face the jeers of hecklers and outshout them. "How many wives did Brigham Young have?" a heckler once yelled.

"Just enough that he didn't have to bother with any other man's wife," he answered without batting an eye.

Returning to America in 1928, George resumed courting Lenore. Her family had moved to Washington, D.C., so he enrolled at George Washington University there to study business and economics. To pay his tuition, he got a job as a clerk in the office of Massachusetts' Democratic Senator David Walsh. He worked his way up in the Senator's office until he became his tariff specialist.

In 1930 Romney took a job as lobbyist with the Aluminum Co. of America. When Lenore thought she wanted a career acting in movies, George convinced Alcoa he would be more valuable in their West Coast office and followed her to Hollywood. In 1931 he and Lenore were married (George calls this his "greatest selling job"), and he began to concentrate on building his career.



George Romney and Mormon President David McKay attend a church dedication near Detroit.

By 1939, he had moved to the Automobile Manufacturers Association as manager of its Detroit office. In 1948 he joined American Motors (then known as Nash-Kelvinator) as assistant to the president, and on the death of his boss, he was elected president.

Detroit had never seen an auto executive quite like Romney. A hard-selling salesman with a fervid missionary glint in his eye, George traveled 70,000 miles a year preaching the gospel of his company's small car. But he remained the antithesis of the high-powered salesman, for he lived quietly, never drank, and avoided profanity. He rose every morning at 5 to play golf, because, as he said, "the body is the temple of the spirit" and should be exercised properly.

Romney also transplanted the devout family life of his Salt Lake boyhood to high-pressured Detroit. The Romneys have two daughters and two sons, and the eldest son, Scott, already has followed in his father's footsteps by serving as a Mormon missionary in Great Britain.

Two Mormon principles that Romney has upheld zealously are a belief in individual responsibility and a dedication to public service. In 1956 he became chairman of the Detroit Citizens Advisory Committee on School Needs. During the two years he was on the committee, it submitted 182 proposals. Most of these reforms have now been incorporated into the Detroit school system.

In 1959 Romney moved on to state problems. As leader of a nonpartisan Citizens for Michigan movement, he organized a convention to rewrite the state's outmoded constitution.

After that, the call to politics was inevitable. It came when the constitutional convention bogged down in partisan politics, and Romney decided the only way to get things done was to run for office. When he won the governorship, Romney resigned as president of the Mormon Church's Detroit district. It was not an easy step for him, but as he put it: "Even though my religion is my most precious possession, we consider this mandate by the people a very important calling."

Such dedication has pushed Romney to the top in the business world, and it could do the same in the world of politics. No wonder there is talk of George W. Romney as Presidential timber.

A gathering of the Romney family includes, left to right, daughter Lynn Keenan, her husband, and their child; the Romneys and son Mitt; daughter Jane Robinson and husband; and the eldest Romney son, Scott.

