

A History of the Rise of
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
Saints
in
Kansas

Written and Compiled by:

Hal Pierce

Anyone with historical information about the rise of the Church is invited to share that information by sending it to this website and it will be added. Thanks.

Sources:

Sources include the "Church Almanac"; "Polygamy on the Pedernales" by Melvin C. Johnson, Utah State University Press 2006; BYU Thesis, "The Indian Territory Mission", by Wesley R. Law, 1959; "History of Mormonism" by the Mormon History Association; "A Book of Mormons", by Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, Signature Books 1982; The Life and Times of Wilford Woodruff, A Mormon Prophet, Signature Books; Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, Deseret Book Company, 1985; LDS Church News; "The Best of the St. Louis Luminary" Edited by Susan Easton Black; and "A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Oklahoma" by Hal Pierce.

Kansas became a state of the Union on 29 January 1861.

At the first Church Conference on 26 September 1830 **Oliver Cowdery** was called to begin the Church's first mission west of New York State which would include seeking out the New Jerusalem location in Missouri, and to teach the Indians in the area about the Book of Mormon. Oliver Cowdery would lead a group with **Peter Whitmer Jr.**, **Parley P. Pratt**, and **Ziba Peterson** also going. **Frederick G. Williams** joined the group as they passed through Ohio.

The federal government was at that time removing eastern United States Indians and settling them in an area outside the western edge of Missouri. Later the area that would become Oklahoma became the primary place to settle the eastern Indians. This transfer of eastern Indians occurred primarily from 1817 to 1838.

On 13 January 1831 this missionary group arrived at St. Louis Missouri. From there they traveled on foot for 300 miles during bitter cold weather with only corn bread and raw pork to eat that was mostly frozen. They arrived in Independence Missouri.

Peter Whitmer, Jr. and Ziba Peterson stayed in Independence to work as tailors while the others crossed the border into what would become Kansas to teach the Delaware Indians. Oliver Cowdery, Frederick G. Williams and Parley P. Pratt had some good success with the Delaware Indians before being ordered out by the U.S. Agent to the Delaware and Shawnee Indians for lack of permission to teach.

After returning to Independence from the Indian Territory the Cowdery led missionaries had some success and a few baptisms in the Missouri area.

Before railroads the more convenient mode of travel was frequently by water and the Lord provided the technologies necessary to make that travel possible at the time needed. The Erie Canal running from the Hudson River near New York City to Lake Erie was opened during 1825 and ran through the heart of Palmyra New York. Also the Ohio-Erie Canal ran a short distance west of Kirtland Ohio and opened during 1833. This Canal ran from Lake Erie to the Ohio River giving access to the Mississippi River and its towns and tributaries. Of course steamboat travel was then possible.

Brigham Young appointed Presiding Elders for certain areas to gather Saints traveling to Utah to help maintain their faith and prepare them as necessary for the long trip. **Erastus Snow** was assigned to

the St. Louis area, **Orson Spencer (Catherine Curtis, Martha Knight)** in Cincinnati, **John Taylor** in New York City, **Jedediah M. Grant** in Philadelphia, **Franklin D. Richards** in England, **James McGaw** in New Orleans and **Charles C. Rich** in San Bernardino. The “Perpetual Emigrating Fund” allowed poor members to borrow monies for travel with the promise of repayment later if possible.

President Young gave instructions during December 1854, that because of a large number of deaths from cholera, and other diseases, emigrants should no longer be shipped through New Orleans but to the eastern ports of Philadelphia, Boston and New York City giving preference in that order. Depending on resources, time of the year or other considerations they would then be instructed to stay in the arrival community and work or continue on to Cincinnati. The preferred course from there would be river travel through St. Louis and then up the Missouri river to near Atchison Kansas (Mormon Grove) where they were prepared to go overland to Zion. Some who traveled overland to Atchison were those coming through Wisconsin, Northern Illinois and Iowa.

Supplies for overland travel on the plains involved being organized into companies of at least 50 people under the command of a man chosen by a Presiding Elder. Supplies needed for travel were obtained, if necessary, at the point of leaving but they must have been ordered and paid for prior to arrival at that point. Payments were by certificates of deposit or drafts from a reputable banking house in the eastern cities or St. Louis.

Every man able to carry firearms was required to have a rifle or other suitable gun with sufficient ammunition. Supplies delivered by the Presiding Elder included good wagons, oxen with yokes and chains, cows, guns, flour, bacon, etc. Emigrants were instructed to take only necessary baggage and to ride in the wagons very little. Those who were able and after paying their tithing were encouraged to contribute to the “Perpetual Emigrating Fund” to aid those who came after them.

On 29 August 1855 a Branch of the Church was established at Mormon Grove with **Jens Madsen** as the President. During 1856 Mormon Grove was abandoned as a starting point for the Saints in favor of outfitting them in western Missouri. Cholera had been a problem at one time there. Mormon groups traveling to Utah still traveled through portions of Kansas.

Westward Trails through Kansas

- 1.)** The Mormon Battalion of 500 men commissioned by the United States to help with the Mexican War began its march through much of Kansas during August 1846 from Fort Leavenworth and generally followed the Santa Fe Trail for the first part of the trip. Later fifteen members of the Mormon Battalion escorted **John C. Fremont** from California to Ft. Leavenworth Kansas to stand trial for insubordination.
- 2.)** The California and Oregon Trails originally began at Independence Missouri and traveled through northeastern Kansas Territory before moving into what would become Nebraska. They separated in the southern Idaho area. The first wagon train on this trail left Independence on 22 May 1843 headed for Oregon.
- 3.)** The Mormon Trail picked up the California and Oregon trails in Nebraska from Iowa and Winter Quarters and moved south to the Great Salt Lake Valley from southern Wyoming.

However, the Mormon Trail stayed mostly on the north side of the Platte River while the Oregon and California Trail travelers stayed mostly on the south side of the river, thus avoiding conflicts and mixing of livestock.

- 4.) The Pony Express functioned from April 1860 to November 1861 to take mail from St. Joseph Missouri to Sacramento California. It also used the California Trail.
- 5.) The Santa Fe Trail was developed during the 1820s for commercial reasons to take goods from near Independence Missouri to Santa Fe New Mexico and return. This trail traveled through southern Kansas and into Colorado and New Mexico.

During 1882 **Joseph Doxey** reported that his work and that of two other missionaries had resulted in a Branch being created at Meriden Kansas, a short distance from Kansas City but opposition from locals soon required it to be closed.

President **Andrew Kimball** went to St. John Kansas during September 1895 to dedicate a new chapel which would become Mission headquarters. The location of St. John for the chapel was the result of a former member of the Bickertonite Church (**Mr. Glasscock**) giving land to the LDS Church for the chapel. The Bickertonite group, which was originally followers of **Sidney Rigdon** in Pennsylvania, had been created by **William Bickerton** and had located a mission in St. John to be near the Indians (Lamanites), expecting to teach and baptize them. LDS missionaries from the Northern States Mission had good success working with the Bickertonite group in Kansas. For some however, the issues of authority and polygamy, was preventing them from joining the Church. Elder Edward Stevenson of the Quorum of the Seventy attended the dedication as well as President Kimball, his wife Ollie and two of his five children, Clare and 6 month old Spencer. Spencer would later become Prophet and President.

Because of the success among the Bickertonite group in Kansas the state was transferred from the Southern States Mission to the Northern States Mission during April 1887. Kansas remained in the Northern States Mission until March 1895 when it became part of the Indian Territory Mission headquartered at Manard in the future Oklahoma.

During April 1897 **William T. Jack** replaced President Kimball and immediately moved Mission headquarters from Manard, Indian Territory to St. John Kansas about 80 miles northwest of Wichita.

In early 1897 the States of Arkansas and Texas were added to the Indian Territory Mission. The Mission was now huge. It included the States of Kansas, Arkansas, and Texas as well as the Indian Territory that would become Oklahoma. The Mission was headquartered at St. John Kansas and covered an area of 351,000 square miles with a population of over 6 million people.

The first sister missionaries began serving in the mission beginning 15 April 1898. Sister **Belle Taylor Copening** who was the wife of the Chief Clerk in the mission office, Elder **Frank L. Copening**, became the first sister missionary.

Sister Copening served with Sister **Ida M. Breckenridge** and they were very successful going tracting from house to house, passing out tracts and holding gospel discussions in the area of St. John Kansas. Sister Copening was originally from Juab Utah and returned home on 25 January 1899.

On 20 January 1899 a monthly paper called "Truth's Reflex" began publishing under the direction of President Jack. Subscription price was 25 cents per year and was published monthly.

The Indian Territory Mission's name was changed on 29 March, 1898 to the Southwestern States Mission. At that time the East Arkansas Conference of the Mission was lead by John H. Peterson and the West Arkansas Conference was led by Frank L. Copening

In April 1900 President Jack was replaced by **James G. Duffin**.

During October 1900 the States of Missouri and Louisiana were taken from the Northern States Mission and added to the Southwestern States Mission. Then on 26 December 1900 the Mission headquarters was moved from St. John Kansas to Kansas City Missouri at 140 Locust Street. The Church had now returned to Jackson County Missouri from which it was driven out in 1833.

President Duffin recommended to the First Presidency of the Church that members no longer be encouraged to migrate to the Stakes in the west or assemble in local colonies, as had previously been the case. This idea was quickly approved by the First Presidency with the new policy beginning in late 1901.

A Branch was organized in Jay, Kansas during March 1901 but was dissolved and moved to Leavenworth during 1914. A Branch was established in Topeka on 29 June 1913. It began as a dependent Branch and in 1926 became independent. A chapel was built by the Wichita Saints and completed during 1920. Topeka became part of the Kansas City Missouri Stake on 21 October 1956 and the Wichita Stake, the first headquartered in Kansas, was formed on 24 June 1962.

General Authorities of the Church who visited Kansas during the early part of the 20th Century included **James E. Talmage** in December 1919 and **J. Reuben Clark** during March 1936.

On 4 April 1904 Kansas became part of the Central States Mission, as the name was changed from the Southwestern States Mission while still located in Kansas City Missouri.

Also during April 1904 President Duffin purchased for the Church a property in Independence from **Maggie S. Swope** that included part of a property that had been purchased by Presiding Bishop **Edward Partridge** during 1831 and lost in the expulsion from Jackson County during 1833.

In October 1906 **Samuel O. Bennion** became the Mission President. He would serve in that position until April 1933.

The Central States Mission headquarters was moved to Independence Missouri in March 1907. This Mission became the Kansas-Missouri Mission during 1970 and the Missouri Independence Mission in June 1974.

A new Chapel was constructed in Independence and was dedicated on 22 November 1914 and a Mission home was built in Independence during 1917. Also, Zion's Printing and Publishing Company owned by the Church was incorporated in Missouri during 1907 and later began publishing missionary tracts and copies of the Book of Mormon in large numbers from Independence.

The first Institute of Religion was established in Kansas during 1974 near the Kansas State University campus at Manhattan Kansas.