

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

**Sources**

LDS Church News; Wikipedia; Mormon Springs monument in Monroe County.

**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.*

Missionaries **John D. Hunter** and **Benjamin L. Clapp** arrived in Tishomingo County, Mississippi in 1839. On December 26, 1839, Hunter reported they baptized six people. Seven more were baptized in 1840 by **Norvel M. Head**. Five more people were baptized on December 1, 1841 by elders Daniel Tyler and R. D. Sheldon.

Escaping persecution, a group of 80-90 members in 40 wagons arrived in Nauvoo from Mississippi in April 1842. A small branch was organized in Monroe County in 1842 where others were converted. Other branches were created in Mississippi as membership increased.

During 1844 **Samuel Turnbow** from Alabama served a mission to Mississippi. During his mission he had an experience of blessing a daughter of **John Utley** who then rose to good health after having been believed to be dead.

On April 8, 1846, a company of settlers (some from Alabama) left Monroe County led by **John Brown**, expecting to join the main body of Latter-day Saints in Winter Quarters that was then planning to travel to the Rocky Mountains. They instead became the first group of Mormons to cross the Great Plains, wintering with fur trappers in Pueblo Colorado that same year. These were the first to establish a religious colony in the Western United States since the Spanish Missions in California of 1769. Later, they founded a second colony at Cottonwood Heights Utah and Holladay Utah in the Salt Lake Valley (once called the Mississippi Ward). They also helped found San Bernardino California and were involved in other colonies along the Little Colorado River in Arizona. **Alice Rowan** in San Bernardino became the Area's First Black College Graduate. She was one of the children of these first pioneers and taught at Riverside California and was among the first African American women to teach at a public school in the United States.

Missionary work in Mississippi halted during the American Civil War. It resumed in 1877 with the arrival of **W. H. Crawford** and others. The Baldwin Branch was organized on July 27 1877. In 1880, opposition tried, but failed to enlist the governor's help in forcing Missionaries to leave the state. Missionary **Alma P Richards** was murdered during 1888, though a church investigation committee concluded that the motive was likely a robbery rather than persecution.

On July 24, 1935, the first "Pioneer Day" celebration in Mississippi honoring the Utah pioneers was held in Columbia. Members of the Columbia and Darbun Branches dressed in pioneer outfits and paraded down Main Street to the City Park for a pioneer picnic and activities. Townsfolk were invited and participated. An impromptu rodeo was held at the end of the day-long celebration when a missionary from Canada, Elder **Weldon Bascom**, showed his rodeo cowboy skills by riding a wild bucking mule for entertainment. This bucking exhibition sparked such interest in the town that a professional rodeo was organized a month later by Weldon Bascom and his brother **Earl Bascom**, assisted by other Mormon cowboys including **Jake Lybbert, Waldo Ross, Ashel Evans, Horace and Lester Flake, and Don and Ferral Pearce**. Some of these cowboys were serving as Missionaries at the time. This historic rodeo is now known as the world's first night rodeo held outdoors under electric lights.

The first two stakes in Mississippi (Jackson and Hattiesburg) were created in 1965. The Jackson Stake was created on May 2, 1965. It consisted of Wards in Jackson, Meridian, Natchez, Columbus, Vicksburg, and Wesson, and a Branch in Greenville, see the May 8, 1965 LDS Church News.

The Hattiesburg Stake was created on June 27 1965 with Wards in Biloxi, Columbia, Gulfport, Hattiesburg, Liberty, and Pascagoula. The Bayou La Croix, Darburn, Laurel, McNeil, Sant Hill and Seminary Branches were also organized into that stake. See the July 3, 1965 LDS Church News.