

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

## **Sources**

Sources include the "Church Almanac"; "Polygamy on the Pedernales" by Melvin C. Johnson, Utah State University Press 2006; "History of Mormonism" by the Mormon History Association; Wikipedia; Church Archives; and "A Book Of Mormons", by Richard S. Van Wagoner and Steven C. Walker, Signature Books 1982.

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*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.*

Michigan Territory was established by Congress to be effective on June 30, 1805 and became a State of the Union on January 26, 1837.

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Michigan began with the Mack family. Almira Mack Scobey had gone to Kirtland, Ohio to visit her cousin Joseph Smith and there they joined the church.

On June 7th, 1831 Doctrine and Covenants, Section 52 was received which among other things commanded another one of Mack Scobey's cousins Hyrum Smith and also John Murdock to go to Detroit and preach the gospel on the way to Jackson County, Missouri. These two brethren went to Michigan in company with Mack Scobey and Hyrum's (and Joseph's) mother, Lucy Mack Smith. They were also accompanied by Lyman Wight and John Corrill. The missionaries eventually went to Pontiac, Michigan where they had much success, baptizing several people, including David Dort, the husband of one of the Mack sisters.

The second most senior of the original Latter-day Apostles was David W. Patten who lived in Michigan when he was baptized on June 15, 1832 by his brother John Patten. He was baptized in Greene County, Indiana. Shortly after baptism David Patten began a mission to southeastern Michigan Territory with Brother Wood (probably Joseph) as a companion. He states 16 people were baptized near the Maumee River. On October 18, 1832 David Patten took a steamer from Detroit on his way to Kirtland.

David Patten had married Phoebe Ann Babcock of Dundee, Monroe County Michigan during 1828.

In 1833 Joseph Wood and Jared Carter were sent as missionaries to Michigan. Besides Pontiac they also preached in Rochester Michigan and Auburn Hills Michigan. Another notable early convert was Samuel Bent who was a deacon in the Congregational Church in Pontiac.

In 1834 Joseph Smith went to Pontiac and preached in the area. Among those who accompanied him on this trip besides his brother Hyrum were Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Martin Harris, Frederick G. Williams and Robert Orton. "LDS Church Almanac" 2008 Edition, 236.

In 1834 a branch of Zion's Camp was organized that set out from Pontiac and eventually met with the main part of Zion's Camp in Illinois. This company was organized by Lyman Wight and Hyrum Smith who had returned to Michigan to organize the company. Elijah Fordham served as the historian and kept a journal of the company.

In 1839 on their way to serve as missionaries in the British Isles Parley P. Pratt and his brother Orson Pratt stopped in Detroit and stayed with their parents and their brother Anson and his family. While in Detroit they preached several sermons and published a few tracts. One of these was "History of the Late Persecution by the State of Missouri upon the Mormons".

Mephibosheth Serrine was among the missionaries serving at that time, and engaged in debates with representatives of other faiths in such locations at Royal Oak, Michigan.

Missionaries operated in Wayne County, Oakland County, Washtenaw County, Lapeer County, and Lenawee County. Branches were organized in such places as Lapeer, Van Buren Township, and Livonia.

Browne. "The Michigan Mormons". p. 15. In Feb. 1841 a conference was held in Brownstown Township where Serrine presided and 140 members attended. Browne. "The Michigan Mormons". p. 16.

By 1845 there were over 25 branches with 12 branches in Oakland County alone. Browne, "The Michigan Mormons". p. 17

After the death of Joseph Smith most members either moved to Nauvoo and then to Utah or joined break away groups such as the one lead by James Strang.

**James J. Strang** had been baptized in Nauvoo by Joseph Smith on 25 February 1844, ordained an Elder and instructed to create a Stake of the Church in Voree Wisconsin located near present day Burlington in extreme southeastern Wisconsin. After Joseph's death in June 1844 he claimed to be Joseph's successor and continued leading his group in Voree until 1848 when he re-established the group on Beaver Island in Lake Michigan. James J. Strang produced a letter supposedly written and signed by Joseph Smith designating him as Joseph's successor after his death. One individual who thought the letter might be legitimate, for a time, was Joseph's mother Lucy Mack Smith. Brigham Young ignored James J. Strang and his letter. James J. Strang was shot by dissidents of his group on 16 June 1856 and died 9 July 1856. At one time it was said he had as many as 12,000 followers. Some small remnants of this group still exist today (2008).

In May 1876 William Palmer began preaching the Mormon gospel in Michigan. He had been called as a missionary by Brigham Young. Palmer focused on Mecosta County, Isabella County, and Montcalm County. Browne, Michigan Mormons, p. 22-24<

In 1877 Cyrus Wheelock was sent to Michigan as the Mission President. Several missionaries came with him. Among these were John Hafen a Swiss immigrant who mainly taught German immigrants and Niels Hendrickson who taught Swedish immigrants. Browne, "The Michigan Mormons", p. 25

In 1880 Wheelock was released as mission and was a short time later replaced by Palmer. Palmer remained Mission President until 1889. Jenson, "Encyclopedia History", p. 594

In 1884 the church received a increase in its number of members in Michigan, but since some were being held in Detroit on polygamy charges at the Federal Prison it did not help the church. Among these were such early church leaders as David K. Udall and Ammon M. Tenney.

====Establishment of the church====

By 1887 Michigan was part of the Indiana Conference. Browne, "The Michigan Mormons", p. 33

In 1890 Michigan was not officially included in any of the three conferences of the Northern States Mission. Jenson, Andrew. "Encyclopedic History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints", p. 593

The church dedicated a chapel in Detroit in 1928. That was the only building the church owned in the state. There were also Branches at Flint, Grand Rapids, Jackson, Saginaw and Lansing and Saginaw. Jenson. "Encyclopedic History", p. 594

About 1940 the church organized the East Michigan District with a district council to prepare for the shift to being a Stake. The District President, Jonathan Snow, had primarily grown up in Michigan because the church had sent his father to work in the salt mines in Detroit when Jonathan was a very young child. The first stake in Detroit was formed in 1952 with George Romney as President. A second stake was formed in Lansing in 1960.

In the 1970s the Detroit Stake, now renamed the Bloomfield Hills Michigan Stake, had John R. Pfeifer as President. Under his presidency the calling of Elders Quorum Presidents was made as deliberative a process as the calling of Bishops. "Ensign", Apr. 1974, 13

====Further Detroit History====

The 1967 Detroit race riot fueled a continuing "White flight" exodus of white people from Detroit. Coupled with this, the building of Interstate Highway 96 led to the destruction of the only chapel the Church owned inside the boundaries of the city of Detroit.

With the Stake Center for the Detroit Stake on Woodward Avenue in Bloomfield Hills, dedicated by David O. McKay in 1959, and a later chapel built on Nine Mile Road in Southfield Michigan just east of Telegraph Road the church began a decline in the city proper. In 1969 the Detroit Stake was split and a new Dearborn Stake was formed. Both stakes included parts of Detroit. In 1974 when the church renamed all stakes, the Detroit Stake became the Bloomfield Hills Michigan Stake.

The Michigan Lansing Mission was split in 1978. The new mission was named the Michigan Dearborn Mission. Michael J. Lantz, a convert to the LDS Church who had joined while serving in the US military in Vietnam during the Vietnam War "Detroit News", June 18th, 2007 became the Bishop of the Royal Oak Ward by the mid-1980s. His ward was at that point one of four in the Bloomfield Hills Stake that included parts of Detroit. Partly at his urging a new effort was made to send missionaries into the city of Detroit. W. E. Barry Mayo, the President of the Bloomfield Hills Michigan stake who was an immigrant from Canada and had previously served as the first President of the Church's Branch in Windsor, Ontario also was involved with these efforts. Starting in 1987 missionaries were assigned to work inside Detroit.

By 1989 a Branch had been organized in Detroit. In 1991 it was formed into a Ward. The Ward met in a former Greek Orthodox building just north of Highland Park and just south of Palmer Park. Its first Bishop was James Edwards who thus also became the first African American to serve as a Bishop in the Michigan Church.

In 1995 the Detroit ward was split into several Branches. There were also two other branches formed in parts of Detroit in the Westland Stake. One of these Branches, the New Center Branch, named after Detroit's historic New Center, was presided over by Jim Viland, a European American whose wife was African American. The branches generally met in rented locations, often with bars over the windows.

"Ensign", Dec. 195, p. 47. In 1997 the Detroit based Branches in the Westland and Bloomfield Hills stakes were formed into a District. During 2000 Lamenaïs "Monte" Louis, an immigrant from Haiti who had lived for many years in Detroit, became the President of the Detroit District. The year before his son Gregory had been the first person endowed in the Detroit Michigan Temple before he went on his mission to the California Arcadia Mission.

The Detroit Michigan Temple was dedicated during 2000 by President Gordon B. Hinckley. President Hinckley's son, Clark Hinckley, had lived for several years in Michigan.

In 2005 the Detroit District was realigned with the Bloomfield Hills and Westland Stake. This allowed for more progress, such as the 2008 realignment of the Ward and Branch boundaries between Detroit, Warren, Eastpointe, Harper Woods, and Roseville which allowed for a Ward that was almost half in Detroit for the first time since the Detroit Ward had been split. A chapel for the Belle Isle Branch which covered much of Detroit east of Interstate 75 and south of Interstate 94 as well as the Grosse Pointes was dedicated in June 2008. The dedication was performed by the Bloomfield Hills Stake President, the above mentioned Michael Lantz. This was the first chapel the church had in the city of Detroit that had built since Interstate 96 had taken the last chapel. Also in June 2008 a chapel was built and dedicated for the Detroit River Branch, and covered most of Detroit south of Interstate 94 and west of Interstate 75. This Branch not only had several African American members but also many Latino members.

#### ====Michigan Membership History====

|1891 || 47

|1930 || 972

|1945 || 7,183

|1980 || 22,607

|1990 || 28,245

|1999 || 36,888

|2006 || 42,514