

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

Written and Compiled by:
Hal Pierce
2008

*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, "Minnesota Mormons" by Fayone B. Willes, 1990.

EARLY MINNESOTA CHURCH HISTORY

Minnesota became home to at least two former Mormon groups that did not follow Brigham Young and the other Saints to the area that would become Utah. They were the Cutlerites who had followed Alpheus Cutler in Iowa and moved to the area of Otter Tail County after Cutler's death and Henry Way's followers who settled in what is now Becker County.

Cutler was the original leader of the Wisconsin Pineries project intended to supply wood during the construction in Nauvoo Illinois. He failed to recognize the leadership of Brigham Young and follow him to Utah. They first settled in the area of Fremont County Iowa during 1852 and called their town Manti. Some of his followers joined the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints when it was organized in 1860.

Cutler's plans to move the group to Minnesota were derailed 10 August 1864 when Cutler died at age 80 years. However his counselor Chauncey Whiting and Cutler's wife led a portion of the group to Otter Tail County in west central Minnesota during 1865. Some others of their group arrived the next year. This group believed in the Prophet Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon but did not accept polygamy. By 1900 this group had essentially disappeared.

Henry Way's followers included about 30 families that initially followed Brigham Young but became disillusioned by where they were being led and then splintered from the Brigham led group. The group followed Henry Way to the area of Lamoni Iowa where Joseph Smith III would establish the RLDS headquarters for a time before moving on to Independence Missouri.

Although they had heard a good report of the Brigham Young group settlement in Utah they decided to move as a unit to Minnesota where lands were more attainable. They settled near Floyd Lake in June 1868 which was the first white settlement in Becker County. Some later joined the RLDS Church but most eventually melded into the religious community where they lived.

A faithful couple who were loyal to Brigham and the Apostles that settled in

Minnesota very early were Eli and Margaret McMean Houghton who stopped to visit their sons, James, Newl and George before going on to Utah and were convinced by their sons to stay in Minnesota in Monticello. After Eli's death in December 1865 this family became the beginnings of a Branch of the LDS Church in Monticello.

With the help of Elder Bengt Wulffenstein and other missionaries the Branch included the Houghton daughter Deborah and her non-member husband Ashley Riggs. Also included were George Riggs and his wife. Margaret Houghton and her daughter Laura immigrated to Utah during 1878. By 1990 Deborah's descendants remained in Minnesota with surnames of Ostvig and Holker.

Adam and Mary Elizabeth Rollins Lightner from Nauvoo lived in Minnesota on the St. Croix River until 1863 when they migrated to Utah with their 10 children.

History records that in 1854 a Mormon Missionary, Elder Ralph Joung, preached at Spring Grove. During 1857, Missionaries baptized Robert and Sarah Leduc Pope, Edwin Theodore Pope and Joseph Leduc and his wife. During 1858 Robert and Sarah Pope moved to Utah. Joseph Leduc died soon after baptism and his wife and children moved to Utah.

The Johnston army's invasion of Utah, the Sioux War of 1862 and the Civil War curtailed missionary efforts in Minnesota until the very late 1860s.

Minnesota became a State of the Union during 1858.

With the introduction of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 missionary work increased in Minnesota.

Early missionaries reported to be in Minnesota included Silas Hoyt (1868), Aariah C. Brower and Eli Whipple (1870), and Bengt Wulffenstein (1875). Elder Wulffenstein spoke English, Swedish, German and some Danish which helped immensely with the immigrants in Minnesota. There was no Mission President or organization at that time.

With instruction from Church headquarters the Northwestern States Mission was organized in 1877 by an experienced missionary named Cyrus H. Wheelock. This new Mission was headquartered at Council Bluffs Iowa and included Minnesota, Michigan, Wisconsin, Illinois and Iowa.

Missionaries at the time included Christian Heiselt, Niels Hendriksen, A Svendsen, Jacob Jacobson, Elder Anderson and Mads Jorgenson. Christian N. Lund came soon after these and he had already served 3 years of missionary service in his native Denmark.

A 12 years old blind boy dreamed that if he would be baptized he would receive his sight. He was baptized, received his sight and bore a powerful testimony to many who also were baptized. A man who could

barely walk because of rheumatism was submersed in a frozen river for baptism and soon received full health. Also, a group of former James J. Strang followers were baptized and formed a new Branch of the Church.

President Wheelock was released in 1880 and replaced by William M. Palmer. He served as President for 9 years. F. F. Hintze was serving during 1880, James Godfrey was serving during 1881, Carl M. Nielsen and Gilbert R. Belnap were serving in Minnesota during 1883. Missionaries generally depended on natives for food and lodging if possible. They faced intense persecution and physical threats many times but also were treated very kindly by many. Intense cold months provided some of their biggest challenges.

Early Branches were formed in Freeborn County, Mille Lac County, Montecello in Wright County, Farmersville in Winona County, Burns in Anoka County and Isanti County. In February 1882 there were 74 members and 227 members with 26 Elders after many had migrated west.

President Palmer returned to Utah for health reasons during the winter of 1887-1888 and John E. Booth and Dennis E. Harris filled in for him. President Palmer was released at the end of 1889 and replaced by Charles W. Stayner.

Some General Authorities who lived in Minnesota

*Apostle Russell M. Nelson lived in Minneapolis from 1947 to 1954 while studying medicine at the University of Minnesota.

*Adney Y. Komatsu was stationed at Fort Snelling during World War II.

*Monte J. Brough served as President of the Minnesota Minneapolis Mission.

See “Minnesota Mormons” by Fayone B. Willes, 1990 for much of the history of the Church in Minnesota. Also see “The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints” by Hal Pierce, 2008 for additional information about LDS splinter groups.