

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

**Sources: Church News of the Deseret News and Church Historical Department.**

*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. Hal Pierce*

Joseph Smith, the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, met Emma Hale, his future wife, while working for Josiah Stool in Chenango County New York. Emma and her family lived in Harmony Pennsylvania nearby and Joseph lived with the Issac Hale family while working for Josiah Stool. Joseph also met Joseph Knight from Colesville, New York at that time and Joseph Knight became an extremely dedicated supporter of Joseph Smith and his work. Joseph Knight gave financial support and much encouragement to Joseph Smith and it was his wagon Joseph Smith used when he went to obtain the Golden Plates. Joseph Knight and his sons also helped Joseph and Emma move to Fayette New York where the Church was officially organized, but after the organization.

The Joseph Knight family moved to Kirtland Ohio with the Church, then to Jackson County Missouri, then to Illinois and was in the process of going west to Utah when the Patriarch of the family, Joseph, died in Iowa. This family became a great asset to the Church for many years. They took much of the brunt of the Missouri persecutions while there.

Joseph Smith moved into the Issac Hale home during the fall of 1827 after his marriage to Emma and lived in Harmony although they moved into a nearby cabin shortly after moving to Harmony, where most of the Book of Mormon was translated, and lived there when the priesthood was received and when the first 116 pages of the Book of Mormon translation was lost after Martin Harris took them back to Palmyra, New York to show them to his wife. Joseph suffered immensely because of this experience of losing the translation.

Their first child, a boy named Alvin, was born in Harmony but had lost his life on the day he was born during the summer of 1828. Emma as well was near death for a time.

During August or September 1830 the Smith family left Pennsylvania for New York and later moved to Kirtland Ohio during January 1831.

In the years of 1838 and 1839 missionaries Lorenzo Barnes, Elisha Davis and Benjamin Winchester baptized some people in Pennsylvania particularly around

Philadelphia where Joseph Smith created the first Branch of the Church on 23 December 1839.

On January 25, 1840 Joseph Smith established a Branch at Brandywine in Chester County a short distance west of Philadelphia. Also, during 1840 Elder Benjamin Winchester began publishing "The Gospel Reflector," a Church publication.

During 1841 some saints in Pennsylvania moved to Nauvoo and Jedediah M. Grant was appointed the Presiding Elder of the Church in Philadelphia during April 1843.

In 1845 the Eastern States Mission President Jesse C. Little encouraged members to gather with the Saints who were preparing to leave for the Rocky Mountains.

During 1850 Thomas Kane, a friend of the Church and a military Colonel from Pennsylvania, spoke to the Philadelphia Historical Society and influenced some to have a favorable opinion of the Mormons .

Beginning primarily in the 1850s there was an influx of some Church members into the Philadelphia area from Europe and Britain.

The Utah War or the Johnston Army invasion (1857/1858) brought about by a misguided President James Buchanan caused missionaries in the area to be called home. The Eastern States Mission was closed.

In 1882 the missionaries baptized Emanuel Rock and set him apart as a Branch President to serve what would become the new Fairview Branch.

In May 1886 a group of people, including George Barnes, who originally followed Sidney Rigdon's apostate group in Pennsylvania and later became followers of William Bickerton established Branches of the Church at Little Redstone after being taught by the missionaries. The Bickerton group was headquartered south of Pittsburgh.

During 1893 to 1900 the Eastern States Mission was reorganized with eastern and western Conferences of the Church established.

During 1904 the first meeting house of the church was built in Pennsylvania for the Fairview Branch at Waynesboro.

On 16 October 1960 the first Stake in Pennsylvania at Philadelphia was organized with Bryant F. West as the Stake President. The Pittsburgh Stake was created on 11 May 1969 with William P. Cook as the President.

On 17 September 2011 ground was broken for the Philadelphia Temple.

### **Apostates in Pennsylvania:**

**Sidney Rigdon** (Phebe Brooks) was born 19 February 1793 in St. Clair Township, Allegheny Co., Pennsylvania and died in Friendship, Allegany Co., New York on 14 July 1876. At Joseph's death he proclaimed that no one could take Joseph's place as President and that he should become "Protector" or "Guardian" of the Church. He was supported in his stand by Nauvoo Stake President William Marks. Sidney Rigdon had been Joseph's first Counselor at the time of Joseph's death but was essentially uninvolved in Church leadership. After his proposal was not accepted by the membership of the Church he left Nauvoo "for his safety" and was excommunicated by the Church on 8 September 1844. He went back to Pittsburgh Pennsylvania where he had been living and reorganized the First Presidency and Apostles of the Church among his followers during April 1845. By 1847 most of his followers had deserted him likely because he seemed mentally unbalanced. As this group dissolved one of his followers named **William Bickerton** reorganized the Church into what became known as the Bickertonite group of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Sidney Rigdon moved to Friendship New York and later started "The Church of Jesus Christ of the Children of Zion" after communicating with former James J. Strang followers and had spokesman Stephen Post read his messages to his followers but the Church soon dissolved after his death.

**William Bickerton** took the lead of the Rigdon group as Sidney Rigdon relinquished it. Bickerton established a Branch of the Church during May 1851 at West Elizabeth Pennsylvania south of Pittsburgh. At a conference on 9 July 1861

twelve members were called as Apostles of the Church. The Church was incorporated during June 1865 as the "Church of Jesus Christ of Green Oak Pennsylvania." It is now incorporated in all of Pennsylvania as the "Church of Christ." Membership today (2008) is claimed to be 12,136 with nearly 3,000 living in the United States. There is a publishing house in Bridgewater Michigan that publishes copies of the Book of Mormon. The Church accepts the Book of Mormon and Bible as scripture but does not accept the Doctrine and Covenants or the Pearl of Great Price. There is no paid ministry. Joseph Smith is not thought to be the choice seer predicted to come in the Book of Mormon but that seer is thought to likely be a person of Native American heritage that will come later. The Church does not accept plural marriage, plural Gods or baptism of the dead. Deaconesses (women) in the Church may prepare the Sacrament and revelation may be received by any individual member. They believe Sidney Rigdon was the rightful heir to leadership of the Church and Restoration after Joseph Smith's death. The glaring irony of this organization is their basing their existence and priesthood authority on a man (Sidney Rigdon) whom they would not follow.