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British Columbia

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The story of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in British Columbia, Canada's third-largest province, is one of meeting physical as well as spiritual challenges. British Columbia has mountainous terrain, a rugged and largely inaccessible coastline, a wide range of climatic conditions, and distinctive geographical regions separated by vast distances. The building of Church communities by early pioneer Saints under these conditions took faith, dedication, hard work, and perseverance.¹ These hardy pioneers not only laid the foundation of the Church in the most westerly of Canada's provinces, but they also built upon that foundation to establish branches, wards, and stakes. The dedication of the Vancouver British Columbia Temple in 2010 was the culmination of their courageous efforts; it was their fondest dream come true. This majestic edifice stands as a powerful symbol of the growing maturity of the Church in British Columbia and will serve as both a spiritual beacon and anchor for this and future generations of faithful Saints.

POTENTIAL PLACE OF REFUGE

In 1844, when Joseph Smith and Brigham Young recognized that the Saints would have to leave Nauvoo and were

looking for a place to go, they considered Vancouver Island, a large island thirty kilometres off the west coast of North America. They appealed to Great Britain, which had vast colonial territories in the area, for a grant of land. The territory that included Vancouver Island was essentially unorganized at the time. Neither Britain nor its colonies were in a position to think about accommodating a large group of people seeking refuge from the American territories, particularly because the division of land at the 49th parallel had not yet taken place and the borders that encompassed present-day Oregon and Washington were still in dispute. No response was given to their inquiries, and the Saints looked elsewhere for a refuge.²

Charles O. Card, on assignment from then President of the Church, John Taylor, to find a gathering place in Canada, passed through southern British Columbia in 1886 looking for a suitable place to begin a Mormon settlement. He was disappointed to find that the very appealing land in the Okanagan Valley had already been divided up and occupied by ranchers and farmers or set aside for native reservations. Card continued eastward and finally settled in southern Alberta in 1887. During the settlement period for

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the Mormons in western Canada, there was little growth of the Church except for the communities surrounding Cardston, Alberta.³

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

British Columbia is separated geologically from the rest of Canada by the Rocky Mountains. Before Confederation, it was a British colony governed by the Hudson's Bay Company from the town of New Westminster, located near the mouth of the Fraser River. The colony's inclusion in the Dominion, when Canada was created in 1867, depended on the commitment of the new Canadian government to build a railway that would connect British Columbia to the rest of the country. Although the railway was not completed until 1885, British Columbia entered Confederation as the sixth province in 1871, and Victoria, the town at the tip of Vancouver Island, was chosen as British Columbia's capital city.⁴ The national government also committed to develop a network of seaways and roadways that would link the disparate areas of the new province.

Generally, the factors that contributed to the movement of people into the province and their location in its regions explain how members of the Church came to settle as well. British Columbia is divided geographically into six distinctive habitable areas. These played a large role in determining how and when members of the Church would make a foothold in the province. The lack of connection between these regions made it hard for the LDS Church to develop as a whole across the province; rather, each area has had its own largely independent story.

The southwestern corner of the province was the first area to be populated. It consists of Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland. With the need for fur traders to search further afield for their goods and eventually the discovery of gold in the interior, traders, miners, loggers, and ranchers gradually moved northward toward Cariboo Country, home to mountains, high grassland plateaus, and extensive forests. Further to the west, settlements would develop along coastal inlets where fishing and logging resources were available for development and export.

The Thompson River area and the temperate zones of the Okanagan Valley in the southern interior were ideal for cattle ranching and fruit orchards, and this potential for development brought another wave of migrants to British Columbia. At the same time, settlers from Europe, Alberta, and the northern states migrated into the Kootenay region to settle in the valleys of the Rocky Mountains in the southeastern corner of the province. This region featured

BC Geography as Seen from the Air

BC has majestic geography with many mountains. Flying westward over the southern half of BC, an observer would see a vast range of snow-covered peaks divided occasionally by cascading rivers flowing through deep canyons that would make the entire area seem inhospitable to humans. But if the observer flew across the mountains at the 49th parallel, alluvial valleys carved by rivers and elongated lakes would be seen descending onto the foothills and plains of Montana and Washington. The first such valley, formed by the Columbia River, is followed quickly by the sight of the Kootenay Lake system; then the Okanagan lakes form another beautiful, fertile valley. Yet more mountains separate the southern interior from the Pacific coast. The Fraser River winds southward through these mountains to the islands of the Georgia Strait and the Pacific Ocean. The Fraser River's descent to the sea, just a few kilometres north of the 49th parallel, creates a wide, luxuriant valley that now supports a dozen cities and more than half the population of British Columbia. This area, now called the Lower Mainland, along with the southern tip of Vancouver Island, attracted British Columbia's first settlers.

Two mountain ranges, running parallel from northwest to southeast, dominate the landscape of the rest of the province. The Coast Range forms the coastal islands, making them and the coastline beautiful but largely inaccessible, except by water. Following the Fraser River upstream to where its headwaters drain the high plateau of the central interior known as the Cariboo Country, the traveller finds land ideal for ranching and access to its preserves of forests, minerals, and natural gas. Travelling northeast, where the Pine Pass allows for travel through the Rocky Mountain Range, one finds the high prairie of the Peace River Country, which stretches into Alberta. The Rocky Mountain Range continues its sweep down the southeastern edge of the province, providing a natural border with southern Alberta. This range of mountains leads once again to the province's southeastern boundary.

rich soils and navigable lakes and rivers with potential for hydroelectric development. Still later, others ventured toward the northeast and the Peace River district, where the high prairies were ideal for growing newly discovered strains of hardy wheat, and by the middle of the last century

the lure of oil and natural gas resources brought oil workers to the North.⁵

FIRST MEMBERS

In the latter part of the nineteenth century there were but few members of the Church in British Columbia. In 1875, the Copley family came from Utah to Vancouver Island. With no other members nearby, William Francis and Maria Judson Copley managed on their own to keep the principles of the gospel alive in the hearts of their many children.⁶

The first convert was Anthony M. Stenhouse, a member of the provincial legislature representing Comox on the northern half of Vancouver Island. He announced

in 1887 that he was going to “join up with the Mormons”; then he resigned his seat and moved to Cardston, where he was later baptized. How he became acquainted with the Church is not known.⁷

PATTERNS OF CHURCH GROWTH

British Columbia became part of the Northwestern States Mission in 1902, and mission president Nephi Pratt organized the Victoria Conference in May 1903.⁸ The first missionaries in Vancouver, on assignment from Portland, Oregon, in 1904, discovered the Neill family, Church members who had emigrated from Australia.⁹ From that point until 1909, missionary efforts were sporadic throughout the province until Melvin J. Ballard, the president of the Northwestern States Mission, came to organize a branch in Vancouver in 1911 and called Brother Neill as its first president. By 1925, the Vancouver Branch had purchased the first LDS Church building in the province.

Members of the Church from Alberta, Utah, Idaho, Great Britain, and other European countries swelled the ranks and began venturing north as the various areas of the province opened up. In some locations, early stalwart converts provided leadership. In most instances single families formed home Sunday Schools and then invited their neighbours to join them, leading to the first conversions. Growth patterns varied with the location, the stage of economic development, and the expansion of the Church's missionary efforts. Slowly, the capacity of missionaries to reach into the more remote areas of the province increased.

During the 1920s, members from Alberta and Idaho settled in Creston, a border town in the Columbia Valley. In the 1930s, Sunday Schools were operating there, and the Okanagan Valley had its first convert, Wilhelmina James of Vernon. She was the lone member in the Okanagan Valley for twenty years. When the Vernon Branch was formed in 1947, James handed President Gregson the tithing she had saved and

▼ *William and Maria Judson Copley and their young family were the first Church members in British Columbia, moving to Vancouver Island in 1875. (Edna Penn Collection)*





then served in the branch until she was asked to turn the first shovel of sod at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Vernon chapel in 1964.¹⁰ Growth was tentative in the province's interior, however, as members drifted back and forth across national and provincial borders and as the economy ebbed throughout the war and Depression years.

During the Second World War, the Alaska Highway project brought workers to the far north. Some stayed when they found good farmland on the northern prairie. Through the 1940s and early 1950s, opportunities for ranching and logging brought more American Church families to the Nechako Valley, in the central interior of BC. Other members were drawn further west to the port town of Prince Rupert and the aluminum-smelting town of Kitimat and to the Queen Charlotte Islands, where an armed-forces base working on the Distant Early Warning (DEW) Line brought both Canadian and US member

families in the early 1960s. Being able to stay in these more remote areas of the province depended on the success or failure of the mines, wood and pulp mills, the completion of power projects, and the building of rail and highway corridors. Some of the American families stayed for several generations and contributed to the growth and development of the Church in their respective areas. Throughout this period, depending on the number of missionaries in the field, missionary work continued and the fledgling branches of the Church grew.

In this brief chapter, it is not possible to account for every member family and branch, but it is hoped, nonetheless, that their pioneering experiences and achievements are recorded in personal journals and family histories and preserved for their descendants to cherish.¹¹

It is also important to keep in mind several realities that were common for all of the early members in remote areas. Church leaders had to cover great distances, with



▲ The Salters served in many locations throughout their life in BC. (Yvonne Salter)

many obstacles in their way, to organize and support units in distant valleys. Missionaries were not always available for remote area assignments. Curriculum materials were only sporadically available, and the members lacked the benefits of modern media to provide consistent contact with the General Authorities of the Church in Utah. In many instances the members were transient, moving from one place to another in search of satisfactory employment. These factors added to the complexity of fostering a community of Saints and building branches. The family of Roy and Yvonne Salter, featured in the sidebar, is an example of this phenomenon.¹²

While there has been steady growth in the Church in British Columbia as the following timeline indicates, it is important to remember that Church membership fluctuated over time because of economic growth or decline. World events that affected the number of missionaries in the field, immigration patterns, and changes in the demographic of large cities have resulted in members moving to suburbs or smaller towns where housing was less costly. As

Roy and Yvonne Salter

As a young man, Roy Salter played hockey in Trail, BC, where he met and married Yvonne. The couple joined the Church in 1952 and moved to Vancouver. As an employee of the telephone company, Roy was posted to the frontier town of Prince George, eight hundred kilometres north of Vancouver. Here the family started a home Sunday School with the only other member couple in the area. Roy became the first branch president, and, after three years in Prince George, he was posted to Victoria for four years. Then the family was transferred back to Prince George and this time was there only long enough to participate in raising funds and building a first-phase meetinghouse. There was another stint in Vancouver before returning to Prince George, where Roy served as the first district president for ten years. He spent another twenty years serving as a seminary teacher in the Kamloops Ward of the Vernon Stake. During those years, Yvonne delighted her friends and neighbours with the beautiful and delectable chocolates that she likely learned to make during her service in Relief Society in the Lower Mainland.

The Salters are typical of members who were trained to serve in one area and then went off to take on more responsibilities and train others in a new one. This pattern is often repeated in the historical record.

such, cities where the Church had vibrant memberships in the 1960s and 1970s may have seen their numbers subsequently diminish. In the north and southeast, particularly, mines and mills in small towns opened in the 1950s and 1960s, offering employment and reasonable housing. But, as those industries suffered downturns, younger families had to look elsewhere for employment. During the 1990s (in Vancouver especially) the Saints welcomed many immigrant members, particularly from South and East Asia and South and Central America, who brought with them a great desire to live the gospel in their new homeland.¹³

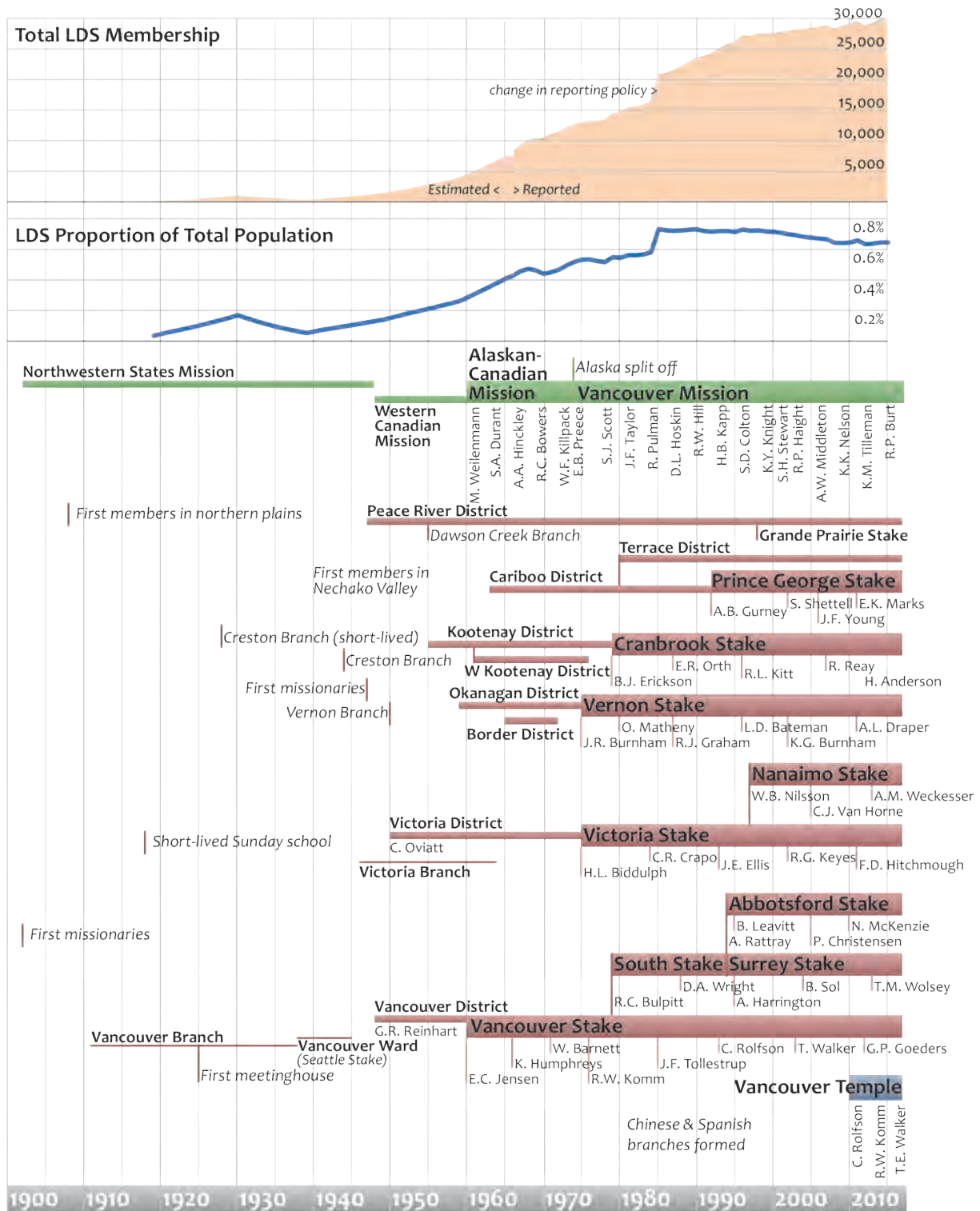
Over the years, especially after World War II, many families immigrated to British Columbia seeking greater opportunities, eventually making a significant contribution to building up the Church. Some of the immigrants who moved from Europe were already Latter-day Saints, such as Soren and Mary Hoyrup (England/Denmark), and some were introduced to the Church on the boat coming across, such as the Duerichens (Germany) and the Burgesses (England). Several influential Latter-day Saint families to move to BC were from southern Alberta. For example, five of the first eight stake presidents in BC, and the first three temple presidents, were born in Alberta. Two major projects that spread among the Church units in British Columbia were chocolate making to raise money for building funds¹⁴ and the annual Thanksgiving Food Drive; both originated in Alberta.¹⁵ Another group of move-ins, consisting of academics and CES employees from the United States, influenced BC as well. The group included Bruce Preece, Howard L. Biddulph, Dennis A. Wright, and D. Evan Davis; the latter three became stake presidents. Bruce Preece came as a CES employee and was later called to be the Canada Vancouver Mission president. Finally, several LDS families who came from Utah via Moses Lake, Washington, to the Peace River area seeking farmland strengthened the Church there.¹⁶

In 2016, there were eight thriving stakes and one district located in British Columbia. In addition, east of the Rockies, on the east-central border of British Columbia, the Fort St. John and Dawson Creek Wards are part of the Grand Prairie Alberta Stake. Additionally, the Cranbrook Stake, with its close proximity to Alberta, is in the Cardston Temple region.

MISSIONS, DISTRICTS, AND STAKES

The timeline below sets out the major milestones in the history of the Church in each of the distinctive areas of BC. Following the timeline is a more detailed outline of the development of branches, wards, and stakes in each of the six areas of British Columbia, beginning with the

BRITISH COLUMBIA TIMELINE



▼ *The Vancouver Branch in 1915, which included seven members of the Copley family. (Edna Penn Collection)*



▼ *Emily and James Rimmer. (Edna Penn Collection)*



first areas where members were present and proceeding to the parts of BC where Church membership has developed more recently. A description of the development of the Church in the various regions of the province illustrates many of the themes alluded to above.

VANCOUVER AND THE LOWER MAINLAND

The first record of members in Vancouver is in 1903. They were three members of the Neill family who had joined the Church in Australia and a convert named Daniel Davidson, who had travelled to Seattle to be baptized.¹⁷ In 1909, Melvin J. Ballard, the new president of the Northwestern States Mission, visited Vancouver and presided over its first conference, where twelve members were present. Two years later President Ballard returned to organize the first branch in Vancouver, with Edward Neill as president.¹⁸ The first recorded social event was held in 1911, and it was noted that “the women were always there to help and encourage and brought about a unity so needed at the time.”¹⁹ When the second conference convened in 1912, there were eighty members present. That same year, the first missionary from Vancouver, Edwin Emerson Pinckney, was called to serve in Great Britain.²⁰

In April 1916, the branch organized its first Relief Society, and the women joined in the efforts of the branch to raise money to rent a hall and to acquire the funds to purchase their own building. They knitted, sewed, baked, made candy, and held bazaars to help accomplish this goal. Their efforts were successful. The first meeting in their own building was on 6 September 1925 with about one hundred members present. In order to make the building more appealing, the women and girls scrubbed the floors, made cushions for the wooden benches, and sewed a curtain for the rostrum.²²

Emily and James Rimmer

In February 1906, while the Rimmers were living in Lancaster, England, Emily Rimmer had an unusual dream in which she saw the face of a man she had never met before. The dream reoccurred to her more than once. At first, she did not attach much importance to it. One day when her husband James was home alone, he invited two Mormon missionaries into his home, not because he was remotely interested in the Church, but because he thought he could enlighten the missionaries. By the time the elders left, James had begun to reconsider his previous opinion.

A few days later, Emily looked out the window and saw two men walking on the other side of the street. She called to her husband, told him of the dream she had had, pointed out the two men, and affirmed that one of those men had been in her dream. She described her experience as “just like a vision coming down from above—there was a pillar of light,” and when it came, the man’s face was there before her. By the time Emily had related her wonderful dream to her husband, two missionaries knocked on the door—one with the face she knew at once. The Rimmers invited them in and listened to them preach the gospel. After they left, Emily told James that “those men had been sent by God.” James and Emily fully investigated the Church and were baptized on 18 July 1906. Their parents and friends turned against them for joining the LDS Church, and James and Emily showed great faith in enduring the tribulations that resulted.

A few years later, the Rimmers immigrated to Canada, settling in Vancouver, British Columbia. They were faithful, contributing members of the Vancouver Branch and served in several responsible callings.²¹



◀ The Vancouver Branch, after meeting for years in homes and rented halls, purchased this meetinghouse, located at 804 East 14th, in 1925. (Edna Penn Collection)

► These two photographs of the New Westminster Branch illustrate the rapid growth of the Church in the Lower Mainland during the 1940s. The photo on the top was taken in 1942, and the one below it in 1946. (Photos from Alden Smith Collection)

► Women of the Vancouver Branch Relief Society with a few of their children, 1940. (Edna Penn Collection)

▼ Members of the Vancouver Branch, 1926, standing at the side of their recently acquired meetinghouse. (Edna Penn Collection)

By 1935, the benches were replaced with handcrafted wooden pews, and work began to dig out a basement to accommodate a recreation hall, office, kitchen, and classroom. A baptismal font was added, which had to be filled and emptied by hand. One young candidate for baptism there, Adrian Toolson, reported that the water was very cold.²³

When Canada entered the Second World War, twelve men from the Vancouver

Branch joined the Canadian Forces, and the Relief Society contributed to the war effort by knitting for the men overseas and providing necessary goods to members suffering in Europe. Following the war, membership grew significantly; young men began serving missions and more missionaries came to serve in Vancouver.

In November 1947, British Columbia became part of the Western Canadian



The George Suiker Family

Another account about this building includes the story of the George Suiker family, who had moved to Vancouver from Europe. Having no other place to stay, they were invited by the branch president to live in the newly finished basement area of the chapel in exchange for keeping the building clean. The family was glad to be accommodated there until the family grew larger and they were able to move to a home in North Vancouver. After the move, their dedication was evidenced by the fact that each Sunday they would get in a small boat and row across the inlet and then walk the distance up to 14th Avenue in order to attend church. This family was also known to walk across the original Second Narrows Bridge in the 1950s in order to get to Church. It was an uncertain route, as it was a railway lift bridge that opened to allow ships to pass underneath.²⁴



Garreth J. Rynhart as president, with branches in Vancouver, New Westminster, and Victoria.²⁶ Soon a building for the New Westminster Branch was approved, and land was purchased at 538 10th Street in New Westminster in 1948. The new chapel was ready for occupation by 1950 for the sixty or so members who had been meeting in a number of local halls since 1942.²⁷ The number of branches in the district had increased to six by 1952 and by then, it was time to consider building a new chapel in Vancouver.

With funds raised by the members, the Church purchased land on 41st Avenue in Vancouver, and a groundbreaking ceremony was held in June of that year. Members laboured under the direction of E. Lyle Burgess, a member of the branch, to erect the building. While it was under construction, Burgess managed also to build a small fishing boat in the area where the chapel was being built. He might have been looking forward to the

Mission, centred in Edmonton, Alberta.²⁵ The Vancouver District was organized in May 1948, with local member



Making Hand-Dipped Chocolates as a Fund-Raiser

One woman recalled how they raised money for a new meetinghouse in Vancouver: "There was always a push to raise funds for a new building. Melba McMullin from the North Shore of Vancouver taught us to make hand-dipped chocolates for the building fund. They were sold in flat, one-pound boxes—the lids had been carefully covered with white, heavy, 'embossed' paper. The dipping was done in the Church kitchen, and I remember that on damp days the lower half of the windows were covered closely with newspapers to prevent any possible dampness sneaking through to streak the chocolate. The cultural hall had long tables set up in lines—the whole procedure was a well-organized assembly line! The dipped chocolates, all on waxed paper-covered boards, were removed to the tables in the hall to thoroughly cool before boxing, and after being closely checked for 'flaws.' Hundreds of pounds were made and sold for the building fund each year."²⁹

day when there would be some time to do some fishing with his boys.³⁰ President David O. McKay dedicated the new chapel on 1 August 1954. Twelve hundred members gathered for the occasion. "Therefore when we build," he said, "let us think that

we build forever. . . . Let it be such work that our descendants will thank us for it and let us think as we lay stone on stone that a time is to come when those stones will be held sacred because our hands have touched them."³¹



The building spurred growth, and by 1958, the Vancouver Branch was divided. The First Branch included Vancouver and Richmond, and the Second Branch served East Vancouver and Burnaby.

The Vancouver Stake was organized by Hugh B. Brown of the Quorum of the Twelve in 1960, assisted by N. Eldon Tanner and Franklin D. Richards, Assistants to the Twelve. Along with the two Vancouver wards, there were now wards in North Vancouver, New Westminster, Surrey, Richmond, White Rock, Langley, and Chilliwack. Ernest E. Jensen was the first stake president.³² At the same time, the Western Canadian Mission was divided and British Columbia became part of the Alaskan-Canadian Mission.³³ Work then began on the plans for a stake centre in Burnaby and a new chapel in North Vancouver. In 1966, under the direction of the new stake president, Keith Humphreys, a groundbreaking ceremony was held. With

◀ *The New Westminster meetinghouse was dedicated in 1950²⁸ and occupied until it was sold to help fund the building of the Vancouver Stake Centre in Burnaby in 1965. (Alden Smith)*

◀ *David O. McKay, President of the Church, and his wife, Emma, visited Vancouver in August 1954, where he dedicated the first LDS meetinghouse to be constructed in Vancouver. (Edna Penn Collection)*

► *The Vancouver British Columbia Stake Centre was dedicated 22 October 1967 by N. Eldon Tanner. Left to right: Arza A. Hinckley, president of the Alaskan-Canadian Mission; Archie D. Evanson, counselor in the stake presidency; N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency; Keith M. Humphries, stake president; and E. Lyle Burgess, counselor in the stake presidency.³⁶ (Edna Penn Collection)*

► *Lower Mainland stake presidents during the 1980s. Left to right: Ronald Komm, Richard Bulpitt, Jon Tollestrup, Dennis Wright. (Photo taken in the early 1990s by Cordell Rolfson)*

a renewed effort to raise funds and the dedication of members, the stake centre was completed and dedicated on 22 October 1967.³⁴

Seventy Thousand Dollars in Two Weeks!

In 1966, the Vancouver British Columbia Stake broke ground to build a stake meetinghouse in Burnaby, a suburb of Vancouver. As the building reached completion, the stake still owed the Church \$70,000 as its portion of the cost of the building. Keith M. Humphreys, president of the Vancouver Stake, wanted to offer the building to the Lord free and clear of debt. He felt inspired to call a special meeting in the new stake meetinghouse for all the priesthood holders in the stake.

During the meeting, Humphreys stressed the desire to have the building completely paid for before its dedication. He then asked the congregation to consider how much each priesthood holder could donate and then “double that figure.” He promised that if they did so, they would be greatly blessed. N. Eldon Tanner of the First Presidency, who was in attendance, then promised that if the stake could raise the \$70,000 by 22 October 1967—only two weeks away—he would return and dedicate the building.

The afternoon of the meeting, Church members pledged \$28,000, and, over the next two weeks, fund-raising was intensified. The members showed their great faith as the goal came in sight. For example, one little girl gave all the money she was saving to buy an aquarium. One less-active member donated the money he had set aside for his burial.

The night before the money was due, the stake was still \$5,000 short, but by the next morning, a counselor in the stake presidency had managed to raise the final \$5,000 from some members who had not yet contributed. Through their faith, the Vancouver members raised \$70,000 in only two weeks, and on 22 October 1967, N. Eldon Tanner was able to “dedicate this beautiful gift to the Lord.”³⁵

Music was always an important component of living the gospel in British Columbia. After a performance by the Mormon Tabernacle Choir in Vancouver and a choral workshop by Richard P. Condie, the choir’s director in 1963, the stake focused on improving its choral presence. In 1966, the Singing Mothers from the Vancouver Stake performed in Washington State with the Singing Mothers of

the Cascade Stake in preparation to sing in Salt Lake City at the general Relief Society conference and the Saturday afternoon session of general conference that October.³⁷ The



Singing Mothers of the Vancouver Stake also sang in a combined choir in the October 1966 general conference in the Tabernacle in Salt Lake City. Florence Jepperson Madsen directed the choir.³⁸

The Vancouver Stake was divided in 1979, creating the Vancouver South Stake, which included the area south of the Fraser River, with Richard Bulpitt as the stake president. Bulpitt served until 1988, when Dennis A. Wright became president of the newly named Surrey Stake. The Surrey





Stake Centre was completed in 1992, just in time to begin preparations for yet another stake in the region. Andrew Rattray, who served as a counselor under President Wright, was called in 1994 to be the first president of the Abbotsford Stake, which was composed of the Port Coquitlam, Maple Ridge, Langley, Abbotsford, Mission, and Chilliwack wards.

In 1980, with the dedication of the Seattle Temple, there was greater opportunity for BC members to attend and serve in the temple. The temple dedication was a significant event for Canadian members, who provided a women's choir and helped manage the open house and dedication activities. In spite of the three-hour drive, members of the British Columbia stakes faithfully attended and were grateful for the opportunities to serve that came with having a temple nearby. Until that time, British Columbian Latter-day Saints had to drive or fly up to 1,500 km to the nearest temple in Cardston, Alberta, to receive their temple ordinances.

VANCOUVER ISLAND

It may be said that William Francis Copley, his wife, Maria Judson Copley, and their family established a prototype for how the gospel would come to British Columbia. They left Utah and settled on the south-central eastern coast of Vancouver Island in 1875. The family grew, but because there were no other Church members and no contact with the Church, the children were not baptized. However, they were never allowed to forget the teachings and principles of the gospel. In 1902, British Columbia was added to the North-western States Mission, and the following year the mission president, Nephi Pratt, organized the "Victoria Conference" and called William M. Swan, a missionary from Salt Lake City, as president. Missionaries were preaching on the corner of Yates and Government Streets in Victoria when

two young Copley boys, visiting the city from their home "up-island" in Shawnigan, spotted them, and returned home to tell their mother, "who got on the next stage to Victoria, found the missionaries and fell on them with rapture." The missionaries came back to Shawnigan with her and taught the whole family, baptizing the younger ones and rebaptizing the older generation.³⁹

The Copleys were some of only a few members of the Church in British Columbia when the missionaries were withdrawn in 1905. Some of the Copley family went back to Utah to live, but two sons, Fred and Merien, who had married sisters, Hattie and Birdie Owens, in 1910 while in Fillmore, Utah, returned to Vancouver Island to live with their young families. In 1916, the Copley families moved to live and work on Lasqueti Island in the Strait of Georgia, about eighty kilometres north of Vancouver. In 1933, on another rare visit from full-time missionaries, a Sunday School was organized. Eventually, new members came, and a branch with about twenty-five members was formed on Lasqueti Island.⁴⁰

By 1918, there were five families in Victoria, and the first Sunday School on the Island was organized. However, because there was little growth, missionaries were

A Granddaughter's Recollection of Hattie Copley

Stephanie Mason Williams, granddaughter of Merien and Harriet (Hattie) Copley, described the Church on Lasqueti Island in the early years:

My grandmother, Hattie, always held a Primary for her children and taught them the gospel. They were musical and learned early to sing the songs of Zion. The Copleys were very hospitable and often invited their neighbours to their religious meetings. In the spring of 1934 the members of this Sunday school held a concert to earn money for an organ. They were pleased to raise \$13.70 and the Mission donated an equal amount. There were converts to the Church during this period. The most significant was my father, Laurie Mason. He was converted to the church by the encouragement of his girlfriend, my mother, the important LDS literature that he read and by strong feelings of the truthfulness of the gospel. Whenever he was in Vancouver working he attended the "little brown church" and wrote to Mom about his feelings about the Church. He was baptized September 21, 1930 in Vancouver.⁴¹

◀ *Flying to the temple. On 16 September 1961, members of the Vancouver Stake boarded a chartered plane bound for Lethbridge, Alberta. From Lethbridge, they travelled by bus to the temple in Cardston. This was the first of several such temple trips. (Adrian Toolson)*

again withdrawn, and members in Victoria lost contact with the Church. It wasn't until 1937 that Melvin Oxspring moved to Victoria, and at his request, missionaries visited once again. A Sunday School was organized with ten adults and seven children. Sister Una Hillier, as a counselor in the Sunday School, provided the continuity over the next ten years as she served in the Sunday School and as Relief Society president.⁴² In 1942, a dependent branch was organized, which became an independent branch in 1946 with Rex Nielson as the first branch president.⁴³

There was a good deal of mission and district reorganization during the period from 1947 and 1949. British Columbia was added to the Western Canadian Mission in 1947, the Vancouver District included Victoria and Nanaimo in 1948, and the Victoria missionary district was created in July 1949.⁴⁴ In 1959, the Victoria District was organized with local leadership. Conrad Oviatt of Nanaimo served as the first district president, with Eldon C. Ellis of Port Alberni and Albert Isfeld of Victoria as his counselors. Each of these men continued to serve concurrently as president of his local branch.⁴⁵

In November 1960, British Columbia, including the four Vancouver Island branches of Duncan, Nanaimo, Port Alberni, and Victoria, became part of the new Alaska-Canadian Mission, with headquarters in Vancouver.⁴⁶ Comox was added to the Victoria District in 1962, and Powell River, situated on the mainland but only accessible by water, was made a branch in 1967.⁴⁷ In 1964, the Victoria Branch was divided.⁴⁸ The second meetinghouse on the island was in use in Victoria before the end of 1960, and the third was begun in Port Alberni in 1963. Early in 1972, the Sydney Branch was added along with the Colwood Branch in 1973.⁴⁹

On 9 February 1975, Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve presided at the organization of the Victoria British Columbia Stake. Howard L. Biddulph, who had served as district president for the previous two years, was called as the first stake president. The Colwood, Nanaimo, Port Alberni, and two Victoria branches became wards, with the units in Courtenay (Comox), Duncan, Powell River, and Sidney remaining branches.⁵⁰ Another branch has since been organized on Salt Spring Island.

▼ *The stake centre of the Victoria British Columbia Stake was dedicated in 1982. (Edna Penn Collection)*



Growth continued unabated over the next two decades. The Nanaimo British Columbia Stake was created in 1997, with William B. Nilsson as the first stake president.⁵¹ The Nanaimo Stake, in 2016, included five wards: Nanaimo, Duncan, Courtenay, Campbell River, and Port Alberni; and three branches: North Island, Powell River, and Qualicum.⁵²

THE KOOTENAYS AND THE COLUMBIA VALLEY

This region, located in the southeastern section of the province, is separated from the rest of British Columbia by two chains of mountains, and the view of its residents tends to be directed toward the east and Alberta. There have been Latter-day Saints in the Columbia Valley since the 1920s, scattered from the town of Golden in the north to Invermere, Fairmont, and Creston near the Canada-US border. Members first came to the Creston Valley during the 1920s from Cardston, Alberta, or from across the border in the adjacent states of Montana, Idaho, and Washington. In the summer of 1928, there were enough members to organize a small branch. But numbers fluctuated over the next decade, and the branch was disbanded. Alfred May, visiting regularly from Porthill, Idaho, in 1937, reassembled the diverse

group and worked hard to get the branch up and running again. He provided transportation for many families so the group could get together for Church services. Sunday School continued and was held in many local homes and halls, including a little log cabin situated on the banks of Goat River. The fast-flowing river was the place of a number of baptisms.⁵³

The progress of the Church led to the reconstitution of the Creston Branch in 1944. A meetinghouse site was selected in Erickson, which was central to the people travelling from Creston, Canyon, and Arrow Creek. When the building was completed in 1949, it would be the first Latter-day Saint meetinghouse built by Church members in British Columbia. At that time, there were 120 Church members in the area.⁵⁴ In 1955, a home Sunday School was instigated at Kingsgate, which continued until Kingsgate and Creston Branches were amalgamated and became a ward in 1970. A new chapel was built on Knight Road in Creston in 1981, and the membership in Creston in 2014 was 320.⁵⁵

Meanwhile, after British Columbia became part of the Western Canadian Mission, an independent branch was organized in Cranbrook in 1948, with George Atwood as president. Atwood began a concerted effort to acquire a building for the small

► *The Cranbrook chapel was dedicated in 1950. (Darla O'Dell)*



◄ *Members of the Church in front of the "little log cabin" chapel on Goat River. (Darla O'Dell)*

wards in Cranbrook, with one ward each in Creston, Sparwood, and Trail, and branches in the Columbia Valley, Nelson, Jaffray, and Kootenay Lake.⁶¹

Community Search for a Small Boy

The following story illustrates the solidarity of the Saints and the sense of community in this region.

Shauna Salmon of the Cranbrook British Columbia Stake related that in September 2011, a three-year-old boy from the community of Sparwood was lost, and authorities launched a search and rescue effort. The centrally located Sparwood LDS meetinghouse became the search and rescue centre for the entire community, and the members of the ward immediately went into action. “Nothing could have prepared us for the number of people who arrived,” she said. “At 7 pm the doors opened and it wasn’t very long before the line stretched right out the doors. People were coming in droves to help a family who was devastated by their son’s disappearance and possible abduction. The search that night lasted well after dark.

“On Thursday morning, volunteers arrived again at the Church to help with the search. This time we were lined up fingertip to fingertip, and then shoulder to shoulder, as we pushed and shoved our way through the brush and the pine trees that blocked our path. We took the hits from branches and thistles on our clothes without complaint because we knew that we were doing something that mattered. As we walked next to total strangers, we shared our stories; we listened to each other; we grew together.”

The search went on for several days. The community (and the entire valley in which they live) became stronger. The boundaries that separated them were no longer there, as it no longer mattered what they believed; what mattered was their search for a young boy now four days absent from his family. They realized that they were all the same in so many ways. Shauna further commented, “When the phone calls started early Sunday morning, announcing the boy’s safe return from his abductor, the searchers returned to the church to celebrate with new-found friends. It was a beautiful day, . . . a miraculous Sabbath morning. We sent up more prayers—this time filled with gratitude for the blessings that the Lord [had] rained down on our community this week. As terrible as the situation was, we were grateful to have been a part of something so wonderful as seeing so many respond together to the need of one [family].”⁶²

branch. George and his wife, Eliza, took the cab off their truck and visited all the Church member farmers within fifty miles, asking for donations to the building fund. He got the same answer everywhere he went, “No Money.” However, George said, “If you don’t have any money, you do have calves, pigs, sheep, chickens, etc.” He would take whatever they would give him. It took many daylong trips to pick up all the donated animals and deliver them to buyers.⁵⁶

Obtaining a property on which to build posed some challenges. The branch presidency found they could purchase three good lots, but they needed a fourth so they could build the church on a corner. One woman, a nonmember, had purchased the fourth lot. When President Atwood explained why he wanted the lot, she sold him the land for the price she had paid for it. Two hundred people attended the dedication for the new meetinghouse in the spring of 1950.⁵⁷

In 1960, the Kootenay District was transferred from the Western Canadian Mission to the new Alaskan-Canadian Mission. The district included branches in Cranbrook, Creston, Jaffray, Kimberley, Kingsgate, Nelson, and Trail. Another independent branch was created in Jaffray in 1962. In 1963, the members in Kingsgate held their first meetings in a building they had built by themselves from salvaged lumber.⁵⁸

The Cranbrook British Columbia Stake, the fourth stake to be organized in the province, was created in 1979, with Brian Erickson as the first stake president. The stake consisted of two wards in Cranbrook and wards in Trail, Sparwood, and Creston, with branches in Fairmont, Grand Forks, Nelson, and Crawford Bay.⁵⁹ The branches in Sparwood and Trail later became wards, with young and vibrant members who took advantage of the stunning mountains that surrounded them and all the outdoor activity they inspired.⁶⁰ The Cranbrook Stake in 2016 consisted of two



VERNON STAKE

Vernon is a jewel of a city perched on the northern end of the Okanagan Valley. The city is centrally located in a stake that ranges from Osoyoos near the US-Canadian border on the south to Clearwater in the north, a distance of over four hundred kilometres, and from Lytton and Merritt in the west, to Revelstoke in the east, another distance of almost four hundred kilometres. This is a vast and beautiful area of south-central British Columbia.

As part of the same Northwestern States Mission that covered Vancouver Island and the Lower Mainland, the Okanagan region did not have the benefit of missionaries until 1947, when a home Sunday School that had been established in Vernon was organized into a branch with Percy Gregson as the presiding elder.⁶³ At the same time, in Kelowna, to the south, three LDS families organized a Sunday School. As their numbers grew, Kelowna also became a branch. A branch was organized in Penticton with twenty-five members in 1951, and another group in Kamloops became an independent branch in 1960.⁶⁴ The four branches were organized into the Okanagan District in

1959, under the direction of the Western Canadian Mission, and Percy Gregson became district president.⁶⁵ The next decade saw a threefold increase in Church membership in the area. The first dedicated meetinghouse was built in Penticton in 1961. In Vernon, work began on the first phase of a meetinghouse in 1964, and the second phase began in 1971 under the supervision of Bill Streibel. The cultural hall was completed in 1973.⁶⁶

With the growth of Church membership in the Okanagan District and the construction of new meetinghouses, the goal of stakehood seemed within reach. In 1974, E. Bruce Preece, president of the Canada Vancouver Mission, visited the district and encouraged the members to seek for stakehood, saying, "If the people of this district will show the desire and determination, this district will become a stake in two years." President Preece told them of a dream in which he was trying to milk a cow, but "she would not let her milk down." He glanced down and saw that the bucket was dirty. When he cleaned the bucket, the milk flowed abundantly. "Cleansing the inner vessel" became a mission theme.⁶⁸ In response, J. Ronald Burnham, president of the



district, declared a district goal in early 1975 for the district to become a stake by December. The mission presidency and the Regional Representative began an intensive training program to prepare the leadership to meet the demands of stakehood, and by early fall it became evident that the 2,448 members were ready to make that leap.⁶⁹ In 1975, the Okanagan District became the Vernon British Columbia Stake, with J. Ronald Burnham as president.⁷⁰

In 1980, under direction from the First Presidency, the Vernon Stake was asked to acquire and maintain a welfare orchard.⁷¹ There was concern expressed that the membership, which was already taxed with the funding of ward buildings and the Seattle Temple assessment, could not carry the financial burden, but the leaders were instructed to purchase the orchard on faith. In 1983, their faith was rewarded when the Church no longer required local funding for building and welfare projects.⁷²

For Vernon Stake members, temple service has always been an important part of their commitment to the gospel. Shirley Burnham recalled how that service was accomplished:

In April 1975 there was a typical district youth temple trip to Cardston. Fifty-four youth travelled 11 hours by bus and arrived at 3:30 am. Wayne and Karen Olsen, former residents of Vernon, took them in. The return trip took 15 hours because the bus broke down. The total cost was \$1,175. On November 17th 1980 the Seattle temple was dedicated and became the Vernon Stake's assigned temple. It was closer for most of the stake, but the cost of accommodations was much higher. Clifford Oviatt of Penticton, the high counselor in charge of temple work, decided to help. He and his wife, Margery, bought a home near the Temple. Members could book a room for ten dollars and leave the money in an envelope in the kitchen. Many adults from our stake

◀ *Vernon meetinghouse under construction. Church membership in the Okanagan area increased threefold in the 1960s, necessitating the construction of more Church buildings. This three-phase meetinghouse, dedicated 8 December 1974, became the first stake centre in the interior of British Columbia in 1975, when the Vernon British Columbia Stake was formed.*⁶⁷ (Shirley Burnham)

► *Michael Cirillo and Christopher Hubbard picking apples in the welfare orchard.* (Michael Cirillo)

Vernon Stake Welfare Orchard

When Reginald Olsen was asked to be the first chair of the orchard committee, he looked over the thirty acres of trees with dismay and thought, "We don't even own a pruning pole." Ronald Burnham, the stake president, asked him to fast about the assignment and meet him at the orchard the following day. The next day Olsen looked at the orchard again, but with his "spiritual eyes." "I could almost see what would happen if everyone put their shoulder to the wheel. I was almost working full time at the orchard, but my business never grew so much. The blessings came."⁷³

Members from all over the stake helped with the pruning, harvesting, and sorting of the apples, pears, and peaches. Most of the fruit was shipped to LDS canning plants in the United States, but workers were allowed to take the windfalls home or to buy premium fruit. The buildings on the property housed some equipment, and there was a kitchen for work crews and even a bunkroom for people who came a great distance to help. Even members from the Vancouver area came to help with the harvest each year. Working in the orchard became a favourite activity among the Young Single Adults, who would come home and could be heard whistling the tune to "Don't sit under the apple tree with anyone else but me."⁷⁴



became ordinance workers in the Seattle Temple traveling monthly to fill their assigned shifts all in a cluster rather than once a week.⁷⁵

Much dedication and sacrifice were required of those who were called as leaders in the large Vernon Stake. An outstanding example of this is Robert J. Graham, who became president of the Vernon Stake in 1987. Before moving to Kamloops, Graham had already served as a counselor in the East Kootenay District presidency and as a counselor in the Cranbrook Stake presidency. Then he served as counselor to each of the first two presidents of the Vernon Stake. Accepting the call to serve as stake president required another nine years of travelling one and a half hours in each direction weekly from Kamloops to Vernon for stake meetings, as well as visiting wards and branches throughout the stake. He trained many for leadership by having stake officers and high counselors serve a maximum of three years before returning to their wards for service there. During his tenure, an increase in membership enabled the Merritt Branch to be established once again and Revelstoke to become a dependent unit of the Salmon Arm Ward. The Kelowna Third Branch was established in Kelowna for all young single adults in the stake. After nine years of service as stake president, Graham continued to contribute to the growth of the Church and was in 2016 serving in the Vancouver Temple. His life of service and sacrifice is typical of many leaders who have served the Church in British Columbia.⁷⁶

In due course, dedicated meetinghouses were built in Kelowna, Kamloops, Penticton, and Salmon Arm. West Kelowna and Merritt acquired smaller chapels in 2008 and 2009. Osoyoos purchased a building and converted it to meet the branch's needs. In 2016, the Clearwater Branch was holding meetings in a rented school, which they had converted for branch use. Senior couple missionaries had often been called

from within the stake to move to and give support to the outlying branches, and their dedicated service did much to encourage growth.⁷⁷

PEACE RIVER COUNTRY

Dawson Creek and Fort St. John are located along the Peace River on a high prairie plateau in northeastern British Columbia. These two small but vibrant cities, along with Chetwyn, are geographically closer to Alberta and became part of the Grande Prairie Alberta Stake when it was formed in 1998.

There were only two known members of the Church in Dawson Creek in the early 1940s: Joel Walton, who homesteaded in the Pouce Coupé area seven miles east of Dawson Creek, had arrived in 1908; Mary McPhee also arrived in the area during this early period. The Peace River District was established 1947, five years after the completion of the historic Alaska Highway. Dawson Creek members met in various homes and halls from 1948 until they were organized as a branch in January 1956, with Delbert Fuhriman as the first branch president. Church members from Fort St. John and Taylor travelled to Dawson Creek to attend meetings.⁷⁸

The Dawson Creek Branch dedicated a meetinghouse in 1968. Although activity for the approximately eighty members in this large district was challenging, an early Relief Society president is quoted as saying, "What I remember is the friendliness of the sisters, their concern for one another and how hard they tried to live the lessons they were taught. They had the sweet spirit of the Lord with them and a unity that is seldom seen. How very blessed we were."⁷⁹ Many fund-raising projects, such as selling homemade chili and root beer at the local rodeo, chocolate making at Christmastime, bazaars and bake sales, raffling off hand-stitched quilts, and harvesting member-grown potatoes, helped Church members to construct a first-phase meetinghouse in Fort St. John in 1976. Within



▲ Robert J. Graham, president of the Vernon British Columbia Stake from 1987 to 1996, is an example of selfless service and dedication. (Robert J. Graham)

eight years, membership and activity qualified Fort St. John for an addition to their building, which was completed and celebrated in 1984.

In 1998, the Dawson Creek and the two Fort St. John branches became wards of the newly formed Grande Prairie Alberta Stake. This was an especially joyful and historical milestone for the “pioneers” in this area. Another happy occasion was the dedication of the Edmonton Alberta Temple in December 1999. As Judy Hawthorne recalled, “We no longer had to travel 12 to 14 hours to attend sessions in Cardston. Blessings were certainly flowing as we entered the 21st century.”⁸⁰ In 2005, the two wards in Fort St. John were combined, but that has done nothing to dampen the spirit. “Here in Fort St John we continue to enjoy excellent leadership and a spirit of camaraderie that radiates throughout our Ward and into the community. This beautiful Peace River Country, ideally suited for year-round outdoor family activities, benefits both youth and adults alike.”⁸¹

THE CARIBOO

The Cariboo region of British Columbia covers a vast area of the central British Columbia interior, extending from Bella Coola, Kitimat, and Prince Rupert on the west, north to Vanderhoof, Prince George, and beyond, and south to One Hundred Mile House, a town, as the name suggests, located one hundred miles along the Cariboo gold rush trail from Lillooet. The first members of the Church in the Cariboo were the Lewis Mecham family, who moved to Bella Coola in 1928. They conducted a home Sunday School for their large family for many years until a branch was organized in 1958, which completed a Church building in 1965. A branch was organized in Kitimat a year later.⁸²

The Cariboo District, one of the largest in the Church, was organized in 1961. At that time, there were approximately 130 members in the area, organized into seven branches: Fort St. James, Prince George, Quesnel, Bella Coola, Kitimat, Prince Rupert, and Vanderhoof. Williams Lake was added as a dependent branch in 1965. A meetinghouse was dedicated in Bella Coola in 1966, and Kitimat acquired a building in 1980.⁸³

The story of the Duerichen family tells a lot about life for new members in the Cariboo. Fritz and Therese Duerichen and their children, Norbert and Hans, pioneered in a remote area in the northwest of British Columbia about twelve miles north of the town of Smithers. Before coming to Canada from Germany, they had met a member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and were greatly impressed by her “great calmness, faith, and absolute confidence in God.”⁸⁴ On the boat to Canada in 1949,

the Duerichens met other Latter-day Saints, the Fred Oertli family, and their interest in the Church grew. After arriving in British Columbia and settling near Terrace, in 1952, they contacted R. Scott Zimmerman, president of the Western Canadian Mission in Edmonton, Alberta, asking for more information about the Church. Zimmerman and a young missionary soon visited the Duerichens, arriving by train and hitchhiking on a logging truck to get to the Duerichen cabin. Of the visit, Fritz wrote: “He slept in our poor cabin[,] answered all our questions and walked the next day down 4 miles [on] a muddy road to reach his train.”⁸⁵ Three years later, the Duerichens were living on an isolated homestead when two missionaries visited them. On the fourth day of their visit, 5 September 1955, the missionaries baptized the whole family in the Bulkley River.⁸⁶

The Duerichens soon began a home Sunday School, and their home became the centre of Church activity in that region for many years. In 1962, Fritz and Therese were sealed in the Cardston Temple, and Hans was called to serve a full-time mission in Germany. Meanwhile, the Duerichen Sunday School expanded and contracted as members moved into the area and moved out again. Also, members travelling through the region, or on their way to Alaska, always found a friendly welcome in the Duerichen home.⁸⁷

By October 1983 there were enough members in the town of Smithers to form a branch of the Church. A few months later, Hans Duerichen was set apart as the branch president, serving until 1990. In September 1993, the first phase of the Smithers meetinghouse was completed, and Hans Duerichen was again called as the branch president, serving this time until 1997.⁸⁸

Church presence on Haida Gwaii (formerly known as the Queen Charlotte Islands) has fluctuated much in recent decades, and Church members have experienced growth, challenges, and hopes for the future. During the 1960s, a Canadian Armed Forces base on Haida Gwaii brought a number of Canadian and American LDS families to the island, and there was a vibrant Church community. Because the majority of the island’s population was of the Haida First Nation, Church members focused on converting them to the gospel and introducing native children to the Indian Placement Program. Communication with the families about where the children were going and why, which may not have been as transparent as it should have been, caused tension between the native families and the local nonnative members. But a number of Haida children were placed in LDS homes and given their first exposure to cultural and educational opportunities that were limited on the island.

Some of the children returned to the island, but few continued active in the Church. The branch was disbanded in 1981, when the military base closed and most active LDS families left the island.⁸⁹

In 2012, missionaries were once again sent to the island and immediately found individuals receptive to the gospel message. Some Latter-day Saint families from the 1970s who continued to live on the island were still held in high regard, and some residents had positive memories of being in the Indian Placement Program. This was enough to plant the seed for active proselytizing on Haida Gwaii. Since that time, a senior missionary couple has also been assigned to Haida Gwaii and two dependent units were started, one in Queen Charlotte City and another located centrally on the Island.⁹⁰

In 1959, the newly organized Kitimat Branch included members from Terrace and Smithers. In 1963 Prince Rupert was organized as a dependent branch on Kitimat.⁹¹

In Prince George, missionaries were conducting Primary meetings in the early 1950s, and by 1956, they were holding Sunday School meetings in the Elks Hall. There were only a few members at first, but in 1963, Prince George became an independent branch, with Roy Salter as branch president. In the next four years membership increased to 189, and a meetinghouse was built in 1967.

The first members of the Church in the area between Vanderhoof and Burns Lake, known as the Central or Northern Interior, were summer residents from the United States who owned or worked in the sawmills in Fort St. James. The summer residents brought the membership up to sixty, but no regular meetings were held during the winter months. The Chromarty family moved in from Fort St. John, and two families began meeting during the winter, looking forward every year to the arrival of the summer visitors.⁹²

The Northern Interior Branch was organized in 1961, and it pulled together all the small groups meeting throughout the vast area. As a district within the mission, the areas now received full-time missionaries,

resulting in convert baptisms. Discussions regarding the building of a meetinghouse began in 1961. By 1964, branch members had raised enough funds to purchase the old Hudson Bay Store, which they moved onto some property that had been acquired. They renovated and refinished the building to become a beautiful meetinghouse that was dedicated in June 1967. The new meetinghouse also housed the missionaries who served in the area. The missionaries were specifically sent to teach the First Nations people. They introduced the Indian Placement Program and did much to harmonize relations between the First Nations and the nonnative residents of the town. A well-attended seminary for native students was held once a week.

The Northern Interior Branch was dissolved in 1972, and its members joined the Vanderhoof Branch, forty miles to the south. The sawmills had become unprofitable, and the summer visitors stopped coming to Fort St. James. The large meetinghouse became too expensive to maintain and was sold. It became the courthouse and government office building for Fort St. James. The sale made it possible to build a new meetinghouse in Vanderhoof, where a number of families had moved from the United States to build permanent homes in the community.

► *Orin and Mabel Gulbranson were twentieth-century Mormon pioneers in Vanderhoof. (Melba Gulbranson)*

▼ *The LDS meetinghouse in Fort St. James was originally a Hudson's Bay store. It was later sold to help build a meetinghouse in Vanderhoof. (Jane Chromarty)*



Glen and Judy Gwilliam and their children moved to Vanderhoof from Idaho in the spring of 1962. They found one LDS woman and her two daughters holding Primary in their home. When several other member families moved into the area that summer, they made the trip to Fort St. James for meetings.⁹³

The Remarkable Journey of the Gulbranson Family

In 1961, Orin and Mabel Gulbranson, with their eight children, found themselves on hard times after Orin's lengthy illness and the loss of his livelihood. They lost their home, their land, and their car. Having joined the Latter-day Saint Church a few years previously, the family decided to move from their home in Minnesota to Utah to be closer to the Church. They embarked on their journey in June 1962, taking with them the only things of value remaining to them—thirteen horses from a riding-stable business that they had owned, four wagons, their food storage, and five dollars in cash. The family travelled by horse and wagon across the plains, much as the early Saints had done, relying on the kindness of strangers along the way.⁹⁴

There was a lot of publicity over this strange mode of travel. The oldest son, Mel, who was fifteen at the time, recalled, "There were benefits from the attention. Almost daily they received offers of food or a place to stay for the night."⁹⁵ It took almost three months to make the journey. They settled for a short time in Sandy, Utah, and opened the Covered Wagon Riding Stables.

Four years later, still struggling financially, they saw an advertisement for cheap land in British Columbia, so the family once again decided to move. They took with them the thirteen horses that had pulled their wagons across the plains, but this time they travelled by truck. They chose Vanderhoof as their new home and caused quite a sensation when they arrived in the small town, especially among the few Church members already there. The Gulbransons raised crops and cattle, took jobs in the local sawmills, and eventually set up their own logging business. The new family more than doubled the number of Church members in the area. They became close friends with Glenn and Judy Gwilliam, another LDS family in Vanderhoof. The uniting of these two families later through the marriage of their children, Lily Gulbranson and John Gwilliam, has sustained family and faith connections, resulting in the remarkable growth of the Church in Vanderhoof.⁹⁶

But things were about to change in the Nechako Valley during the summer of 1962, when the Gulbranson family arrived.

The move-in of the stalwart Gulbranson family prompted Milton L. Weilenman, president of the Alaskan-Canadian Mission, to say that he felt Vanderhoof



would become the centre of the Church in the Central Interior.⁹⁷ The little congregation moved forward with faith. After renting several unsuitable venues for their meetings, the members built their own meetinghouse. Unfortunately, it was a poor structure with no insulation and only plastic in the windows, so after a hard winter in the small building, the Church members decided that they needed a proper LDS building. Considerable sacrifice of time, talents, and financial resources were required to see the building completed, and the proceeds of the sale of the Fort St. James building helped to make it possible. A three-phase building was dedicated at Vanderhoof on 26 September 1976. Vanderhoof went on to become the core of the expanding district throughout the late 1970s and 1980s.⁹⁸

The town of Vanderhoof presents somewhat of an anomaly in British Columbia. Located in what is regarded by the Lower Mainlanders as the far north but which in reality is the geographic centre of the province, it has had two robust wards throughout the latter part of the last century, comprising almost half the town's population. Many young people, including both members and nonmembers, were encouraged by leaders to participate in a full slate of Scouting, Mutual, and sporting activities. This, combined with a very well-attended seminary program, was designed to keep the youth occupied and ensure that they would be an important force for good in the town. Latter-day Saint youth were particularly active



in high school sports. They were prominent players on the local basketball and volleyball teams. No other place in the province offered the advantages to the youth as this small town with its large LDS population. Approximately 140 missionaries were sent out from Vanderhoof over the years. Most of these young members had to leave the town to pursue postsecondary education and employment, and as a result, some of the second and third generation families have not been able to return to settle. But they will always remember Vanderhoof as a great place to be raised a Mormon.⁹⁹

Administering the vast Cariboo District posed significant challenges. In 1973, the western portion of the district was constituted as the Terrace District, and in 1975, the remaining part of the Cariboo District was renamed the Prince George District. Three years later, the two districts were recombined as the Prince George Terrace British Columbia District, but in 1980 they were again divided into the Prince George and Terrace Districts.¹⁰⁰

Continued growth over the years resulted in the creation of the Prince George British Columbia Stake, the sixth stake in the province, in 1992. The new stake consisted of two wards in Prince George, two wards in Vanderhoof, and one in Quesnel, as well as several branches. In 2016, there were four branches in the stake, including Bella Coola, Burns Lake, One Hundred Mile House, and Williams Lake. Bryce Gurney was the first stake president.¹⁰¹

The Terrace District continued in existence and in 2016 consisted of four branches: Terrace, Smithers, Kitimat, and Prince Rupert.¹⁰²

Church Educational System (CES) teachers have made a particularly important contribution in the development of the Church in the central interior of British Columbia. There were Church members in several remote areas of the Cariboo/Prince George District, but growth in these areas had been slow in the 1960s and early 1970s because of lack of leadership and administrative experience. Allan Fletcher was one of the first CES teachers in the north. Upon completing his education at BYU, Fletcher was assigned to work in northern BC. As he crossed the border into Canada in 1976, he was immediately contacted by Bruce Preece, the mission president, and called to be the president of the Terrace District. Fletcher not only organized and taught seminary and institute classes in each of the far-flung towns in the region, but he and his wife, Elaine, served in both branch and district callings, teaching the new members all that they needed to know to organize and manage their district and branch responsibilities. They mentored, encouraged, and supported the members, and to this day members speak with great fondness and indebtedness for all that this couple did to teach them about the Church. The Fletchers' story is not unique, and members from throughout the province remember, with deep affection and gratitude, the contributions of CES personnel, often from the United

◀ *The Gulbranson family travelled by horse and covered wagon from Minnesota to Utah in 1962. Four years later, the family relocated to Vanderhoof, British Columbia, this time travelling by truck. (Melba Gulbranson)*

▼ *Allan Fletcher, a seminary and institute teacher, and his wife, Elaine, were among the many CES personnel who made significant contributions to the growth of the Church in British Columbia.¹⁰⁴ (Allan Fletcher)*



States, including Bruce Preece, Victor Manwaring, Jackson Ellis, Paul Hyde, Conrad Harward, and Dennis Wright.¹⁰³

THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL LIVES OF BC MEMBERS

It is clear from the record and the memories of the Saints that the major effort of the members in the first half of the twentieth century was simply to find one another, to get together as often as possible for mutual spiritual edification, and to build enduring friendships in social gatherings. Most congregations proceeded in the same pattern. Once they had coalesced as a group, and after meeting in numerous makeshift spaces and rented halls, the Saints felt a pressing need for buildings of their own. That meant fund-raising, and so they poured their hearts, minds, and energies into earning and saving money to build meetinghouses. Members sacrificed their savings, their time, and their labour toward achieving this goal. There are many fond, and perhaps not so fond, memories of bake sales, chocolate-making projects, sewing and quilting bees, bazaars, flyer and telephone-book deliveries, and many other activities that went into the effort. The fund-raising projects served many functions. They strengthened members' faith and commitment to the gospel. They united them and taught them to work and serve together. The achievement of their goals provided reasons to celebrate together and to feel a sense of ownership when they could finally worship in their own buildings. It was a great training ground for service in the Church, and the presence of a building in the community drew the attention of others and often curiosity about the gospel.¹⁰⁵

Brief histories of the growth of the Church outside of Utah are often replete with the names of priesthood leaders and the dates of building dedications. These facts tell only part of the story. The strength of a branch was based in large part on the dedicated service of the women, who organized

and managed the innumerable activities as well as their homes and families, trying to keep their children close to the gospel by their teachings and examples. In many instances they assumed the tasks associated with fund-raising, until each area of the Church had at least one building in which to meet for worship and for socializing.¹⁰⁶

A Church building meant local Latter-day Saints could plan and carry out more ambitious activities for children, youth, and adults. In the 1950s and 1960s, members were drawn to the chapels from long distances to participate in activities that included dance festivals, theatrical productions, gold and green balls, sporting events, and quarterly conferences. Gold and green balls were formal dances sponsored by the Mutual Improvement Association (MIA) and were often the highlight of the year's activities. In 1961, the first stake auxiliaries were organized in Vancouver, and it was often these leaders in every stake who instigated and carried out social and cultural activities for their members.¹⁰⁷ In the 1970s, some of these events took on a life of their own, inspired in part by the travelling musical and theatrical groups that occasionally visited the province from Utah.¹⁰⁸ Many enjoyed visits from the Mormon Tabernacle Choir¹⁰⁹ and BYU entertainers, such as the Young Ambassadors and Lamanite Generation.¹¹⁰ Stakes put on their own productions of *Promised Valley*, *The Order Is Love*, and *Saturday's Warrior*.¹¹¹ Dance festivals, like the "Swinging Safari" festival held in Burnaby in 1965, would draw youth from throughout the mission to present the dances they had created and practiced in their own units.¹¹² Spring balls were an annual event in several stakes.¹¹³

Planning and participating in cultural, athletic, and service activities provided experience and opportunities for the younger members to feel part of a large organization and helped to prepare them to serve. It gave them new opportunities to introduce the gospel to their friends.

Large-scale events also helped to train leaders in the wards and branches that were being created outside of the major cities. As members moved to the suburbs and smaller communities in the province, they took with them the skills and experience needed to lead and strengthen new branches and wards.

During the 1970s and 1980s, there was a general resurgence of interest by the Church in education. Seminary and institute directors were sent to take up residence in BC to service the CES programs for the youth and young adults. Early-morning seminaries were established in every ward, beginning in Vancouver in 1962.¹¹⁴ Institute classes were



► The “Christmas Is” Concert was held in the Vogue Theatre in Vancouver each Christmas season from 1987 to 1993. (Adrian Toolson)

◄ Gold and green balls, such as this one in the Hotel Vancouver about 1948, were held regularly in many Church units as a wholesome and culturally enriching activity. (Adrian Toolson)



◄ Women of the Cranbrook Relief Society, about 1958. (Jack Willicome)

set up near university and college campuses, and the Church Educational System sent speakers from the Church colleges to give seminars for adults during annual Education Week events. This service also increased interest in and availability of Church literature, broadening exposure to the principles of the gospel. The Church-wide curriculum was revised to focus on study of the scriptures, to better prepare the young men to serve missions, and to encourage enrollment in postsecondary education, especially at Brigham Young University in Utah and Rick's College in Idaho. The need to serve missions was reinforced, and growing numbers of BC youth were answering that call. Family history libraries were set up in many Church buildings, giving members and nonmembers alike the opportunity to research their family's genealogy using microfiche, films, and other resources from the Family History Library in Salt Lake City.¹¹⁵

Senior couple missionaries were sent out in great numbers during these years. Many of them have given faithful service in distant lands, but many others were assigned to become supportive members or leaders of the small branches within the mission or stakes. These faithful leaders,

who had gained their experience within larger congregations, blessed the lives of new members and less-experienced leaders in Sechelt, Squamish, Merritt, Clearwater, and many other small towns in BC. They forged the pathway to growth throughout the province.

In the early 1980s, in response to an economic downturn and higher costs for fuel, the Church amalgamated Sunday and auxiliary meetings, reducing the need to drive to the buildings during the week. The Church also assumed the costs for new buildings and budgeted activities. While it meant the winding-down of fund-raising activities, it also had the effect of discouraging large-scale productions and district-wide and stake-centred activities. More and more ward and branch buildings were erected, situated closer to the members, and they accommodated smaller-scaled activities for youth and wards and branches. Roadshows, potluck dinners, games nights, Saturday-night dances, and pickup sporting activities took the place of many big stake and district-wide events. It meant that there was more associating with local members and the community—not unlike the early days of branch building. At the same



time, there was a renewed focus on province-wide Scout jamborees,¹¹⁶ girls' camps, and youth conferences so that young people could have a broader range of associations throughout the stakes and districts.

The 1990s also saw the first pioneer treks for the youth of most stakes. Once in every four years, each stake organized a three- or four-day event in which the youth, dressed in pioneer outfits, pushed and pulled handmade handcars over many miles of rough terrain, simulating the early Mormon pioneer experience. These occasions continue to stand out in the memory of every young person who participated. Ward and stake young men and young women leaders put in innumerable hours of service to make such events the means of increasing the faith and testimony of the youth.¹¹⁷ Youth were also encouraged to participate in

stake sports events, including annual softball, basketball, volleyball, and floor-hockey tournaments. Some of these were deemed too competitive and damaging to the Church facilities and were curtailed to some degree in 1985.¹¹⁸ Members in the Lower Mainland enjoyed an annual track and field day held at Stanley Park. The Vernon Stake continues to hold an annual marathon for walkers and cyclists.

The Vernon, Surrey, and Cranbrook stakes shouldered the responsibilities of Church-owned orchards and farms as part of the Church Welfare Services program. Members from throughout the region participated in planting, pruning, weeding, and harvesting the produce of those farms. Church welfare services discontinued the farms and orchards in the early 2000s, but efforts to help the poor and needy have not ceased. A province-wide service activity



▲ Pioneer treks were held periodically in most British Columbia stakes to give youth a meaningful pioneering experience and to strengthen faith and testimony. (John McCulloch)

◀ Burnaby Scouts at Farragut Jamboree in Idaho in 1966. Participation in Scouting has been an important element of the Church youth program. In this photograph, Scouts share aspects of BC aboriginal culture with their American counterparts. (Edna Penn Collection)

► Providing meaningful service in the community is an important dimension of twenty-first-century Latter-day Saint activity. In this example from Burnaby, the annual BC Thanksgiving Food Drive provides substantial assistance to local food banks. (John McCulloch)

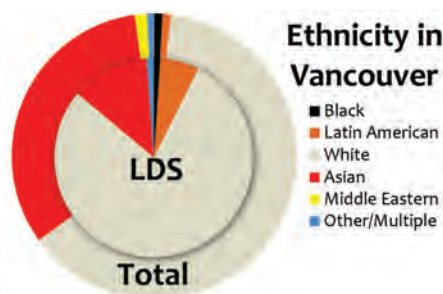
was adopted in 2010, known as the annual British Columbia Thanksgiving Food Drive. The Church, in cooperation with local businesses, sponsors and provides volunteers in almost every community to collect food to restock the shelves of local food banks. In 2015, five thousand volunteers participated in the drive, which gathered and donated over 430,000 pounds, or more than one million dollars' worth, of food.¹¹⁹

Another annual tradition which gained momentum during the 1990s and continued into the twenty-first century

is crèche exhibits or nativity festivals, set up during the Christmas season in many meetinghouses, where the community is invited to share in an LDS view of Christmas. In addition to beautifully arranged displays of nativity sets, these events often also include choirs and dramatizations of the nativity. In many areas, particularly in the Vernon, Victoria, and Abbotsford stakes, the festivals attract strong attendance from nonmembers.¹²⁰

When it was announced in 2006 that Vancouver would be getting a temple, the three stakes in the Lower Mainland wanted to see a trial run of a large production in preparation for the temple youth celebration. Over two hundred members of the Vancouver, Surrey, and Abbotsford stakes participated in three performances in the historic Massey Theatre in New Westminster to celebrate the diverse cultures that are represented in the stakes of the Lower Mainland. "Every Nation, Every People" featured dance and musical performances from each of the ethnic groups. Each performance began with a story told by a child of how his or her family first came to British Columbia. Ruth Yates was the creative director, and Shelley Murley composed several musical numbers for this event that





◀ *Filipinos in 2007 cultural celebration. The “Every Nation, Every People” production, presented by the three stakes of the Lower Mainland at the Massey Theatre in New Westminster in 2007, showcased the rich cultural heritage of the many ethnic communities in the area.*
(Shelley Murley)

A Diverse Church on Canada's Pacific Rim

Brandon S. Plewe

Vancouver is a very diverse city, second only to Toronto in its proportion of minorities. Its location as a gateway to the Pacific has long brought immigrants from China, Hong Kong, and many other countries; according to the 2001 census, a third of the residents of Vancouver are Asian.

While almost all of the original Latter-day Saints in Vancouver were white, whether Canadian-born, from the United States, or from Europe, the makeup of the Church is gradually beginning to reflect this diversity. Immigrants have included members of the Church, especially those from Latin America. Further, missionaries in the city, as in the rest of North America and Europe, often find the most success among immigrants; almost a third of Vancouver members were born abroad.

As can be seen on the graph, the proportion of Vancouver Mormons who are Asian is substantial (13 percent), if less than the population overall; on the other hand, the proportion who are Latin American (7 percent) is substantially stronger than Vancouver in general. The city has three Asian language congregations and two Spanish congregations, more than any Canadian city other than Toronto. A recent development is that in the Third Ward of the Surrey British Columbia Stake, Hindi/Punjabi sacrament and Sunday School meetings are being held concurrently with English services.

► *Hundreds of youth, preparing for the prededication youth temple-celebration event, gathered in front of the Vancouver Temple in 2010.*
(John McCulloch)

would be reprised in the temple celebration event, which she coordinated three years later.¹²¹

THE VANCOUVER BRITISH COLUMBIA TEMPLE: THE CULMINATION OF 100 YEARS OF SERVICE

During the 1990s, in particular, there were many immigrants from Asia and South and Central America flowing into the Vancouver area, some of them already Church members and many others ready to accept the gospel of Jesus Christ. Mandarin-, Cantonese-, and Spanish-speaking missionaries laboured amongst the newcomers, and soon there were branches created to address their various language needs.

Toward the end of the decade, and partly because the new immigrants had particular difficulties crossing the border into the United States to attend the temple in Seattle, Jon F. Tollestrup, president of the Vancouver Stake, felt the need to pursue having a temple in the Lower Mainland. This became a pressing need after 2001, with the increased border vigilance as a result of the terrorist attacks in New York. Cordell Rolfson and Thomas Walker, who followed Tollestrup in succession as stake president, were encouraged that more, smaller temples were being built throughout the world and urged Church members to be “Temple Bound.”¹²² Initial responses from the First Presidency to the requests for a temple in Vancouver were that they should be patient.

The patience and persistence of leaders and members was rewarded when it was announced, in 2006, that the Vancouver Saints would indeed have a temple of their own.¹²³

Gordon B. Hinckley, President of the Church, visited the Vancouver area in 2007 to select a site for the new temple. After viewing several possible temple sites that had been preselected for his consideration, President Hinckley focused his attention instead on a piece of land that was not on the list, nor was it available. With instructions to “make it happen,” Paul Christensen, president of the Abbotsford Stake, used his influence to persuade the owners to sell and the city of Langley to approve the beautiful site, where over the next two years, a house of the Lord was built.¹²⁴ Thomas S. Monson, who was also present when the site was selected, returned on 2 May 2010 to offer the dedicatory prayer. President Monson’s hearty approval of the pre-dedication cultural celebration cheered the 1,200 youth from across the province and northwest Washington state, who, in song and dance, paid tribute to the devotion and sacrifice of the pioneers that had made the temple possible.¹²⁵

Cordell Rolfson, former president of the Vancouver Stake, was the first temple president, with Ronald Komm, also a former president of the Vancouver Stake, and Ronald

Burnham, former president of the Vernon Stake and a counselor in the Seattle Temple presidency, as counselors. The first ordinances were performed in the Vancouver Temple on 4 May 2010 and have continued with dedicated service and attendance by members from across the province and northwest Washington State.

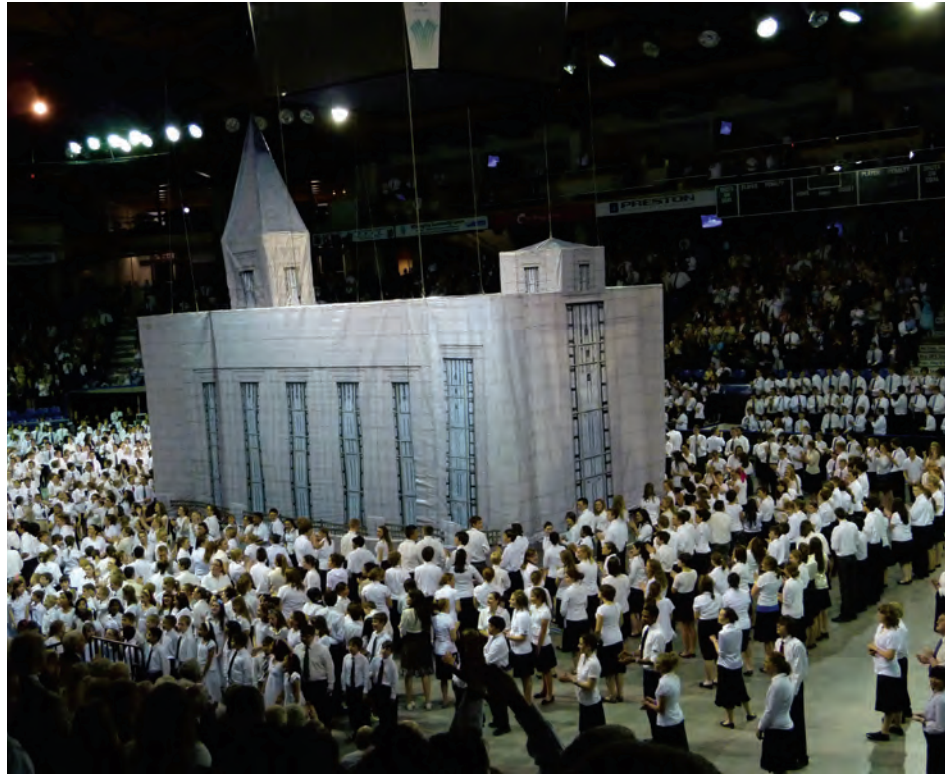
The temple dedication drew people from every part of the temple district. Six British Columbia stakes and two from northwest Washington prepared dance segments for the youth cultural event held in Langley the night before the temple dedication.¹²⁶ Twelve hundred young people and a delighted audience celebrated the history of the Church in British Columbia. It honoured the first LDS family in BC, the Copleys on Vancouver Island, and many others who were Church pioneers in the province. As some of the oldest members of the Church in BC walked onto the floor at the youth cultural event and their stories were told in song and dance, the audience gratefully acknowledged the effort and sacrifices made by these noble and great ones who had laid the foundations to bring the Church in BC to the stage where the blessings of a temple could be available. The youth celebration dramatized the significant events in the province: the lives and culture of First Nations people;





◀ *The beautiful Vancouver British Columbia Temple, the seventh temple in Canada, was dedicated in 2010. (Richard Yates)*

► *The dramatic highlight of the temple youth celebration in 2010 took place when, in the midst of hundreds of youth singing on the floor of the arena, a large inflated model of the temple rose up before an astonished audience. (John McCulloch)*



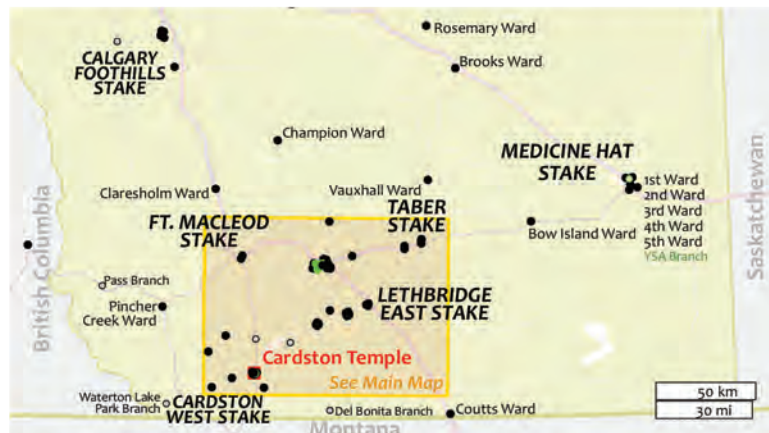
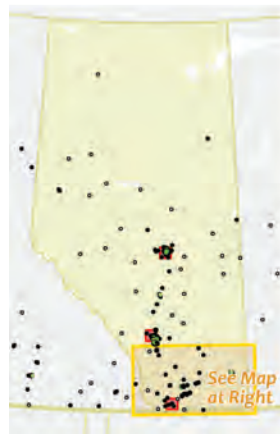
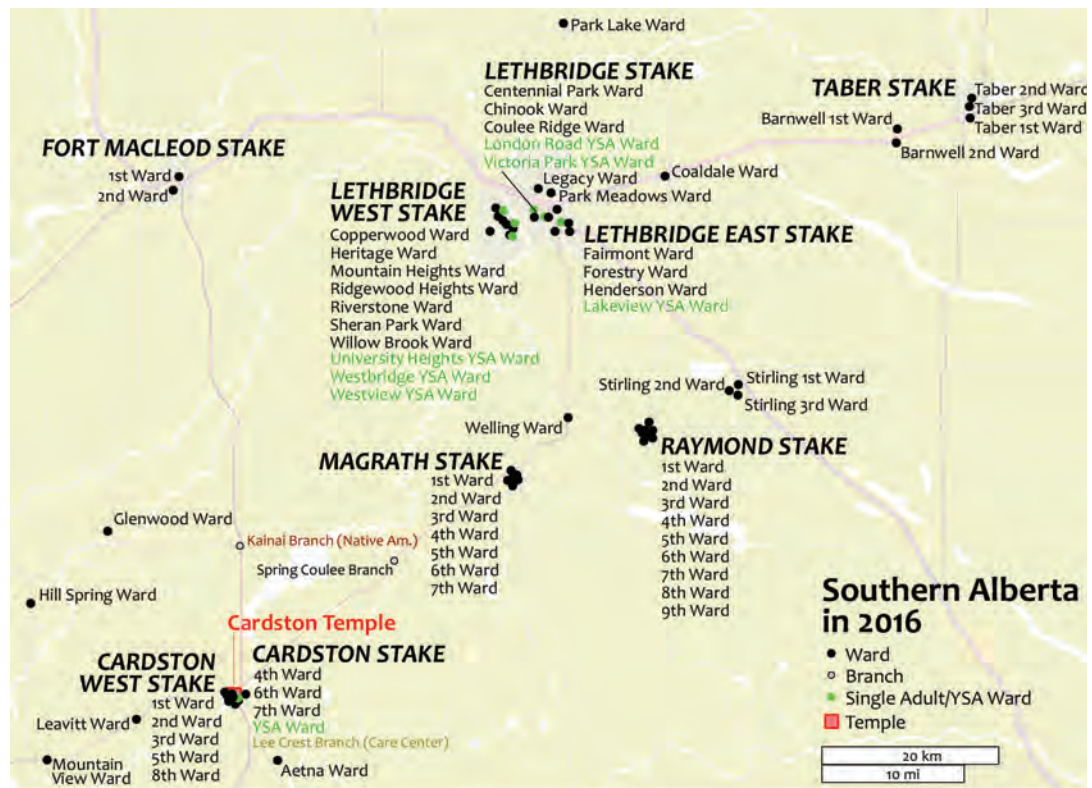
▲ *In 2010, Paul Christensen, former president of the Abbotsford Stake, became the first Area Seventy called from British Columbia. (Paul Christensen)*

the coming of Europeans to BC to search for gold, to log, to fish, and to farm; the completion of the cross-country railroad; the Great Depression; the service given in aid of the forces in the Great Wars; the women in the workforce; and the immigration of Asian and South and Central American member families.¹²⁷

Just prior to the temple dedication, Paul Christensen, president of the Abbotsford Stake, who had overseen the preparation of land and construction of the temple, was called to serve as an Area Seventy, a member of the Fifth Quorum of Seventy.¹²⁸ In that capacity, he organized the committee to develop the Canadian branch of lds.org, one of the first of lds.org global/country sites. With a goal of uniting Church members in Canada, the website featured many stories of conversion, faith, and service. As a result of the website's first committee being based in British Columbia, the web archive contains many BC stories, as well as a wealth of articles about other Canadians living the gospel.¹²⁹

CONCLUSION

In 2016, there were approximately thirty thousand members of the Church in British Columbia, eight stakes, one district, and eighty congregations.¹³⁰ The Vancouver British Columbia Temple, in operation for six years, had become the destination of many of the faithful Saints in the province, some of whom regularly travelled more than one thousand kilometres to render sacred service there. Righteous pioneers in British Columbia throughout its history are remembered in this history for their devotion. They continue to serve, lead, and train the precious Saints of the province, who will be the subjects of histories yet to be written.



The Cardston settlement, which began in 1887, followed by settlers who came to take up irrigated lands, formed the core of the Latter-day Saint community in southern Alberta.¹ But the agricultural base soon proved inadequate to maintain the burgeoning population. Successive waves of Latter-day Saints migrated northward to cities which later formed stakes, Lethbridge (1921), Calgary (1953), and Edmonton (1960), while others migrated further north and to other major Canadian cities. Southern Alberta has nonetheless remained a strong and vibrant part of the Church in Canada. In 1923, the Cardston Alberta Temple was dedicated and became the spiritual focal point for the southern Alberta settlement. With three stakes at that time, the southern Alberta Latter-day Saint community had grown to ten stakes by 2015.