

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE EARLY DAYS OF THE CHURCH IN MICHIGAN

" And again, verily I say unto you, let my servant Lyman Wight and my servant John Corrill take their journey speedily; And also my servant John Murdock, and my servant Hyrum Smith, take their journey unto the same place by the way of Detroit."  
Doctrine and Covenants 52:7-8

The above scripture was a revelation given through Joseph Smith at Kirtland, Ohio on June 7, 1831, only fourteen months after the Church was organized. The above four Elders and Lucy Mack Smith, mother of Joseph Smith arrived by steamer in Detroit on June 15, 1831 from Ohio. Michigan was still a territory with a population of about 32,000; it didn't become a state until 1837. According to Elder Murdock's diary, " the four brethren , John Murdock, Hyrum Smith, Lyman Wight and John Corrill were not successful. We wiped our feet as a testimony against that city. "

Stephen Mack, founder of Pontiac Michigan, was an uncle to Joseph Smith. He died in 1826 leaving a large family of a wife and 17 children. It was the reason for the Smith family to visit Pontiac. Stephen Mack's daughter, Almira Mack Covey went to Manchester New York to visit her aunt, Lucy Mack Smith. She was baptized immediately in 1830 by David Whitmer and confirmed by Joseph Smith. She became the first member of the Church in Michigan.

In 1831, the first branch in Michigan was organized in Pontiac. However many members after joining the Church, sold their property and moved to Jackson County, Missouri at the urging of Church leaders.

In June 1834, Joseph Smith led a thousand mile march called Zion's Camp from Kirtland to Missouri. It was an unsuccessful attempt to regain land from which the Saints had been expelled by non-Mormon settlers. The expedition failed as the militias in Missouri outnumbered the people in Zion's Camp; however, many of the future leaders came from this group. The volunteers included seven men, three women and four boys from Michigan.

Hyrum Smith and Lyman Wight taught a non member, Hosea Stout in Pontiac. He wrote, " The effect of their preaching was powerful on me, and when I considered that they were going up to Zion to fight for their lost inheritances under the special directions of God, it was all that I could do to refrain from going. " He later joined the Church in 1837 and was an officer in the Nauvoo Legion and chief of the Nauvoo police. As an early pioneer, he went to Utah where he had a long career in law and politics. In 1852 Stout was called on the first Mormon mission to China.

Joseph Smith visited Michigan in October 1834 with his father, brother Hyrum, the three witnesses to the golden plates, Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Martin Harris and two Elders, Frederick G. Williams and Robert Orton. Leaving Ohio, they sailed up the Detroit River and then took a stagecoach to Pontiac. Joseph Smith stayed in the home of the

Stevenson family , some of the original members in Michigan. Edward Stevenson then age 14 later described the Prophet as " a plain but noble looking man of large frame and about six feet high.....The Prophet stood at a table, for a pulpit, where he began relating his vision.... I do believe that there was not one person present who was not convinced of the truth of his vision of an angel coming to him. His countenance seemed to me to assume a heavenly whiteness and his voice was so piercing and forcible - for my part, it so impressed me as to become indelibly imprinted on my mind. " Stevenson later served six missions and settled in Salt Lake City with the first group of Mormon pioneers in 1847.

In 1844, Elders George Albert Smith and Wilford Woodruff ( then members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles ) visited Kalamazoo en route to Oakland County. While they were in Detroit, they learned of the martyrdom of the Prophet. They promptly returned to Nauvoo.

In July 1844, James J. Strang announced that he had been called as a Prophet to succeed Joseph Smith. Previously he had lived in Nauvoo where he joined the Church but was later excommunicated by Brigham Young. Some members called Strangites decided to follow him but the majority moved to Nauvoo to work on the Nauvoo Temple. Strang reigned for six years as the crowned " king" of an ecclesiastical monarchy he established on Beaver Island, near Charlevoix. In 1856, he was assassinated, reportedly by two of his former followers.

Decades following the martyrdom, the Church in Michigan struggled, partially due to the Strang influence and persecution. One Elder's journal said, " Strang has the Devil in Michigan. " As a result, few missionaries were sent to Michigan. Elder William Palmer was called as a missionary in Michigan in 1876. He wrote in his journal, " I endured a great deal of persecution, hard stones and sticks thrown at me. " Elder Palmer preached in a public park in Grand Rapids but was halted by the police despite having permission from the Mayor.

A few other miscellaneous historical facts about the early days of the Church in Michigan. In 1884, four Mormons from Arizona convicted of polygamy were imprisoned three and a half years in the Detroit prison. In 1895, there were only two missionaries in Michigan. They recorded that their efforts were poorly received due to "mobocracy." In 1893, there were only 47 members of the Church in Michigan. In 1908, two missionaries were arrested in Grand Rapids for offering the Book of Mormon for sale; they were put in jail and fined \$ 4.79 but later released. In 1918, two people were baptized in the Detroit River by cutting a hole in the ice with temperature reported to be 5 below zero.

Growth of the Church in Michigan continued to be slow. It wasn't until November 9, 1952, the first stake was organized in Michigan. It was organized by Apostles Ezra Taft Benson and Henry D. Moyle . It had 8 wards and 5 branches with 2700 members. George Romney, who later was two term Governor of Michigan, was called as the first Stake President.