

Fremont Branch History (1976 to 2014)

The original Fremont Branch of the Grand Rapids, Michigan Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints was organized in 1976. The congregations met briefly in a school building located on Cedar Street behind the bus garage for the Fremont Public Schools. Soon, the congregation moved to 72nd Avenue and Green Street, south of town. The 2-room country school building was purchased by the Church and renovated for use by the Fremont Branch members. The two rooms became one main room that served as the chapel and which had a small stage that served as the seating for the Branch Presidency and the speaker's podium. The basement was divided into classrooms, with a larger meeting area for the Primary. Also included in the building renovation was new white siding and a foyer with a bench seat and coat rack. Eventually, two classrooms were added to the back of the Chapel. Jean and LaVerne Houston donated a piano for the Primary and brought their organ from home for the Chapel. The organ was eventually replaced by one provided by the Church.

The Branch priesthood leadership was markedly strong in number of men holding the office of Seventy, which instilled an atmosphere of acceptance and missionary work. Less active members were encouraged to join in the new congregation. Three different men served as Branch President: Brother Jerry Tripp; Brother Dan Morrison, and Brother Paul Bunnell.

Members who consistently attended came from as far away as White Cloud, Brohman, Walkerville and Hesperia, but also included those who lived in the Fremont, Grant and Newaygo areas. Average attendance began at fifty-six people, although as the years went by and people moved away, the Branch dwindled in number, though it did not dwindle in the closeness and family relationships which had developed among the members. If there was illness in a family, someone offered to stop with meals and if a family wasn't present, members would call them before services were over. The Branch members certainly looked out for one another.

Branch members were not financially well off . . . The Church had a large enough piece of property attached to the plot with the meetinghouse that the Branch decided to use as a Church garden. Laverne Houston drove his tractor to the Church grounds to prepare the soil for the first garden. In the following years, a local farmer, Herb Ellcey, was enlisted to plow the ground each year. The Branch grew green beans, carrots, tomatoes, Brussels sprouts, peppers, squash, potatoes, etc. The Branch members would gather every Wednesday evening to work in the garden – to plant, hoe, weed, or pick beans. Any beans not claimed by a Branch member were sold in Paul Bunnell's store in Holton and the proceeds would be added to the Branch coffers. Any member in need of produce could pick or harvest any of the vegetables at any time. All of the children learned to love raw green beans. Naturally, the Wednesday nights when the sisters would provide a pot luck dinner were more heavily attended than those nights set aside strictly for work. The Branch members did not want for produce, and the bounty of the garden that was not used by members would be sold, so the Branch did not lack for funds.

Across the street from the Branch building was the Sheridan Township Hall, where the Branch would meet to hold their Branch socials. The favorite socials were pancake suppers with movie time. An old projector and screen were set up after dinner, and popcorn and soft drinks were provided as families intermingled to enjoy the film. Sometimes the social included a pot luck dinner with dancing or some other activity. The Branch gathered frequently, every month or every other month and sometimes included sledding parties at the Carter's home outside Hesperia. All revolved around the families of the Branch.

Eventually, the number of active families began to drop. Families moved away to improve economic position or to be near relatives and the number of active priesthood holders was of particular concern. Everyone held multiple callings, which offered a wonderful way to grow. Every time the congregation was asked how they felt about disbanding, the members responded that they wished to stay

in Fremont. They did not mind the extra duties and finances were not a problem thanks to the Branch garden. However, Stake leaders determined it was necessary to merge with the North Muskegon Ward, and the Branch was officially disbanded in 1986, with monies earned from the garden transferred to the North Muskegon Ward. Unfortunately, many members could not afford to make the weekly trip to Muskegon and became inactive. Nevertheless, former Branch members remained in contact with each other and friendships and close connections built through sacrifice and service have remained over the ensuing years.

The current Fremont Branch was organized in 1998, splitting with the North Muskegon Ward on Sunday, 24 May of that year. The first leaders of the new Branch were: Harvey Shriver (Br. President), Douglas Cengiz (1st Counselor) and Mark Walters (2nd Counselor); with Paul Bunnell (Melchezidek P/H Leader), Ronald Roediger (Branch Clerk); Kathy Westbrook (Relief Society President); Frank Anthony (Young Men's President); Kathy Roediger (Young Women's President) and Jean Anthony (Primary President).

The following weekend a huge storm struck the area and the first Sacrament service of the new Branch was cancelled to help members recover from the effects of the storm. Two days later, as a result of the storm, Brother Paul Bunnell, the new Priesthood Leader, passed away, and so the first actual service of the new Branch was a funeral service held for Brother Bunnell in the North Muskegon building on Friday, June 5th. Because a location for meetings had not been found, the first Sacrament meeting was held the following Sunday in North Muskegon.

The Branch was then able to secure the Gerber Union Hall on Warner Avenue for its meetings, and the first meeting was held there on Sunday, June 14th 1998. The Branch Presidency meetings were held at 7 a.m. each Sunday, with Sacrament

Meeting beginning at 9 a.m. Because the Union Hall would often be used for wedding receptions and other activities on Saturday nights, the new Branch Presidency would often have to clean the building, removing ash trays, empty bottles and other evidence of the previous nights activities. They would often hold their meeting while sweeping and mopping the floor and setting up tables for Sunday's services. We appreciated the generosity of the Gerber Union for providing the building, thanks to Brother Jeff Westbrook who gained permission.

With the help of Bishop Dennis Byers of North Muskegon, the Church eventually purchased property at 28 E. Sheridan, Fremont. Formerly a dance studio and gymnasium, the building was renovated with a large Assembly Room, Relief Society room, as well as seven classrooms and offices for the Branch President and Branch Clerk and a room for the Branch Library. After construction was completed, an Open House was held and many local visitors attended, including the Mayor of Fremont. The first service in this, their current building, was held on Sunday, 11 April 1998.

During the first year of the new Branch several activities were instituted and have become yearly affairs, including a Pioneer Day Picnic in July, a Barnfest in the fall, and the Annual Branch Christmas party held in December. While many members of the old Fremont Branch had passed away, several inactive members became active again because of the closeness of the meetings which helped the new Branch continue its' family-oriented closeness, and potluck dinners are held in conjunction with the semi-annual conferences of the Church and the Annual Branch conference. A Boy Scout Troop became activated for a while, but was then disbanded for lack of interest. (The Branch has since restored the old Cub and Boy Scout Troops and that is exciting).

In May of 2003, new leadership was called, with Douglas Westbrook (Branch President), David Hall (First Counselor) and Brian Miller (Second Counselor), and Mark Walters as Branch Clerk. In the fall of 2008, Mark Walters was called to be

Branch President, with David Hall (1st Counselor) and Brad Cook (2nd Counselor), with Harvey Shriver as Clerk.

The Branch Presidency was then reorganized in 2013, with Greg Johnson as President, Troy Anderson as 1st Counselor, Maurice Byl as 2nd Counselor. Later, Joel Genaw would be called to replace Brother Byl in the Presidency, with James Reynolds serving as Branch Clerk, Roger Bailey, as Executive Secretary, Harvey Shriver as Melchizedek P/H Leader, Brad Cook as Elders Quorum President, Ron Roediger as Branch Mission Leader, Sarah Robar as Relief Society President, Kara Genaw as Young Women's President, and Kathy Roediger as Primary President. Which constitutes the current leadership of the Branch.

Attendance in the Branch has fluctuated over the years, from the low 30's to the upper 70's, and during one summer meeting it actually reach 100 in attendance. As mentioned, the Branch is in the process of re-establishing the Scouting Units that had been set up in 1998, but discontinued a few years later.

Several full-time missionaries have been sent out from the new unit, including Angel Barbosa, Christopher Anthony, Charles "Chuck" Angelini, Eric Walters, and his brother, Alex Walters currently serving in the Phillipines.

The Church of JESUS CHRIST of Latter-day Saints



**Grand Rapids Stake - Fremont Branch
Fremont, Michigan**



(L-R) 2nd Counselor: Mark Walters,
Branch President: Harvey Shriver,
1st Counselor: Doug Cengiz



**BUNNELL, MR.
PAUL R.**
Husband of Joyce
Holton

Mr. Paul R. Bunnell, age 67, died early Tuesday morning June 2, 1998. He was born on November 28, 1930 in Muskegon and had been a resident of the Holton area for most of his life. Mr. Bunnell was a Sgt. First Class in the Korean Conflict, where he served as a military cook. He was the owner/operator of the Holton Food Market for 33 years before retiring in 1995. Mr. Bunnell was a member of the Fremont Branch of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints since 1970 and had been the former Branch President. On April 16, 1949 he married the former Joyce Gilbert in Kent City, MI. SURVIVORS include his wife, Joyce; a daughter, Paula (& Peter) Wyant of Muskegon; 3 grandchildren, Michael, Patricia, Julia; 2 brothers, Arthur Bunnell of Muskegon, Earl (& Unitha) Bunnell of Arkansas; a sister, Marjorie (& Carlos) Headley of Tennessee; a sister-in-law, Betty Bunnell; and many nieces and nephews. He was preceded in death by a daughter Julia L. Bunnell in 1955 and by 2 brothers, Glen and Forrest "Dell". SERVICES will be 11:00 AM on Friday at the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (1725 W. Giles) with President Harvey Shriver officiating. Burial will be in Oakwood Cemetery of Holton. VISITATION will be from 2-4 & 6-8 PM on Thursday at

Sytsema Funeral Home
737 Apple Avenue
and from 10-11 AM Friday morning
at the church.

New Latter-day Saints branch forms

A Fremont branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was formed in May, a division of the large congregation of the church's North Muskegon ward.

Harvey Shriver is branch president of the new Fremont unit. Shriver recently moved here from Joliet, Ill., after serving as the bishop of the Joliet 1st ward for several years. Doug Cengiz and Mark Walters serve as Shriver's counselors.

The Fremont branch has a membership of 150 and meets at 9 a.m. Sundays at the RWDSU building at 5960 S. Warner in Fremont.

Creation of the Fremont branch required organizational changes in the North Muskegon ward., which was formed in November 1995 from a division of the Muskegon ward. Stan Brown is the new bishop of the North Muskegon congregation, called to service by the First Presidency of the Church in Salt Lake City, Utah. Brown is operations manager of a firm headquartered in Vermont. His counselors are Muskegon residents Paul McQuay and Ron Wehl.

The North Muskegon ward meets at 9 a.m. Sundays at 1725 W. Giles, sharing its building with the Muskegon ward that meets for worship at 1 p.m.

- May 24, 1998 -- Fremont Branch splits from North Muskegon Ward; sustaining vote of new Presidency of the Fremont Branch
- May 31, 1998 -- No meeting because of major storm
- June 5, 1998 -- Funeral of Brother Bunnell
- June 7, 1998 -- Joint meeting with North Muskegon Ward
- June 14, 1998 -- 1st meeting at Gerber Union Hall
- August 29, 1998 -- Fremont Branch Social (Branstrom Park)
- December 13, 1998 -- Branch Conference

1998 Baptisms

- Autumn Bishof
- Chris Bouwsma
- Aaron Campbell
- Al Crisler
- Krystyna McCullough
- Courtney Robins
- Miranda Robins
- Paula Robins
- Tony Robins
- Eric Walters

First Baptisms were performed in Brother & Sister Westbrook's pool on August 9, 1998.



Aaron Campbell with President



The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Grand Rapids Stake - Fremont Branch Fremont, Michigan

- September 12, 1999 -- Branch Conference
- October 8-16, 1999 -- Detroit Temple Open House
- October 23-24, 1999 -- Detroit Temple Dedication
- December 10, 1999 -- Fremont Branch Christmas Social



Detroit Temple Open House
Front row, sitting (L-R) Chelsea, Elissa & Brittany Roediger; Middle row (L-R) Cora Hendrix, Joy Campbell, Jean Houston, LaVerne Houston, Catherine Garfio; Back row (L-R) Kathy Roediger, Al Crisler.



Halloween Party
Wrap him up, wrap him up!
Jean & LaVerne Houston



Detroit Temple Dedication



Halloween Party
Roasting hot dogs!
(L-R) Alex Walters, Ben Campbell, Eric Walters & Aaron Campbell.



Halloween Party
Cake eating contest
(L-R) Chelsea Roediger, Ilyon Flaquel, & Kendra Botten



Halloween Party
Line Dancing!
Marisol & Diana Barbosa



Fremont Branch Christmas Social
Young Women & Young Men
Standing (L-R) Ashley Walters, Casandra Candeleria, Ashley Westbrook, Cynthia Anthony, Chuck Angelini, Jennifer Bordeaux, & Brittany Roediger. Sitting - Patty McCullough.



Christmas Social
Marisol Barbosa & Scott Anthony



Christmas Social
(L-R) Chuck Angelini, Ron Roediger (sittin' Shepherds: Don Angelini, Al Crisler & Jose Barbosa, Narrator: Doug Westbrook.



Late 1970's – Original Fremont Branch at Building on 72nd and Green



May 5, 1999 – Fremont Branch Open House
Branch Presidency with Stake Presidency
Mark Walters, Harvey Shriver, Doug Gengis, Charles Stoddard, Dale Fegal