

The History of the Greenville Ward 2014

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In approximately 1965, fifteen families moved to the Greenville area from Utah, Washington and Idaho. These families came here to raise potatoes for the Ore-Ida Corporation. A large potato processing plant was built in Greenville by Golden and Nephi Griggs to help with this operation. The families that were at that time were the Swensen's, Petersen's, Beuse's, Buck's, Fisher's, Boyce's, Blackford's, Griggs, Ranney's, Goodrich's, and Rackham's. Ersil Beuse was the first branch president and Delbert Petersen was the second. These large families from the west became the nucleus of the Greenville Ward.

The first meetings, Sunday school and Primary, were held in one of the family's homes. The sacrament meetings were held in Grand Rapids on Sunday evenings. Later on they were held at the VFW. Before meetings, members would clean up all the cigarettes from the rooms. Must have been quite the atmosphere! They soon wanted another setup.

They found the "Big Mansion" on the corner of Baldwin and Washington Streets. It had been first owned by a governor. The last owner was Stan Ash. We were able to rent it for \$150.00 a month. What a stately mansion it must have been. It sat on three acres with a large yard and fruit trees. There were tall pillars in the front entrance. In back, there was a carriage building and a caretaker's house. The caretaker's house was used by the missionaries. The members furnished it. Sometimes members that needed a place to stay would stay there. One such instance was Bruce and Sue Nelson, who lived there shortly after being married. The inside had beautiful red cherry wood paneling. A large stairway into the living area was a real plus for weddings and Christmas decoration. It had two fireplaces, one in the living room and one in the dining room. The bedrooms were made into classrooms and an office for the bishop. Sixty people could be seated in the front room. The ceilings were quite high which lead to some rather expensive heating bills. Sometimes members had to keep their coats on during the meetings. The building needed many repairs, but the only repairs that could be made was the entry way and the roof.

The branch gradually grew and more families moved here from the west, and a few people in the area were baptized. Brother and Sister Towne were the first couple to be baptized. They were baptized in Grand Rapids on December 6, 1965. Then on December 7 they were confirmed. The same day at "the Mansion" the branch was to become a ward. Brother Lyn Swensen was the bishop at the time. Sister Nola Boyce was the Relief Society President.

We held many rehearsals for the road shows, and the youth were awarded often for their skits. This competition was held in Lansing, Midland, and Grand Rapids. They also won many scripture chase competitions. Seminary was held in the mornings before school. One year, four of the youth went to the big dance festival in Salt Lake City. They were Rodney, Glenda, and Roxanne Rackham and Earl Boyce. What fun they had!

The first wedding held in "the Mansion" was the Rackham's oldest daughter Nan. The matron of honor and the groom had to come from Minneapolis. They had eaten some salad on the way over and had food poisoning. The matron fainted during the ceremony and had to sit down. The groom could barely stand up. If it hadn't been for Brother Caudill, who happened to be a doctor, the wedding would not have taken place that day!

Through the years, Br. Caudill gave free medical care to the missionaries and other members that needed it. He also contributed many flower arrangements and decorations for the meetings to help beautify the chapel.

Relief Society was held during the day. We spent a lot of time quilting and doing crafts for homemaking. We'd start in the mornings, have lunch, and then finish our projects in the afternoon. The children had plenty of room to play together. This was a great time for fellowshiping and getting to know each other better. It was time well spent.

After a few years Ore-Ida sold out to Heinz Company, which would not honor the farmers' contracts. This led to farmers losing money and many members had to move back west. That left just a few families to keep the church going. The ward lost so many members that it was reduced to a branch again.

In 1972, the Branch President was asked to find some land for a new chapel site. Brother Jim Phillips found 25 acres west of Greenville that we could purchase for \$7500. The local members put up their own money and borrowed \$2000 from Purce Reeve to finish the deal. Brother Reeve was our High Councilor at the time. The land was bought in the name of Jim Phillips to keep the neighbors happy. Later, the land was deeded to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. Three acres were set aside as a chapel site and the rest to be a Branch farm and recreation area.

In 1976, we planted nine acres of asparagus. The starter plants were bought from Brother Boyce's farm. Brother Orsen Boyce and Brother Towne used their farm equipment. After the Boyce family moved, Harold Towne was diligently there with his equipment. He put in many hours. Many nights we had to use car headlights to see to get the job done. It took three years for the crop to mature. Once matured, the crop helped the ward raise approximately 10,000 a year. This money helped to pay the Stake assessments and was also used to help fund the Washington D.C. temple.

In early 1980, "the big mansion" was sold. We bought the 7th day Adventist church in Belding. Brother Phillips and Brother Redding handled the transactions through Brother Phillips' real estate business. They donated their commission to the building and Brother Stoddard paid the rest. It was about 30,000 at that time. Brother Stoddard also donated an organ for the Church. Also during this year the Branch reached enough members to become a ward again.

When the asparagus matured, the members spent many hours picking, washing and selling it. During that time the admiral service station was letting us keep the asparagus in their cooler overnight. Then they changed hands. So Brother Phillips found a cooler unit and we built a pole barn to keep it in along

with other equipment. We had already dug a well so we would have water to wash the asparagus. The Boyce family had a flower and plant stand near the road. The Phillips also helped run the stand.

The profit from this project paid for carpet, drapes and remodeling of the Belding building. Brother Bruce Nelson did a lot of the remodeling. The front steps were repaired with railing and a ramp for the handicap was put in the back entrance. Through the farm we were able to be the only ward in the state to pay all our assessment on time.

Our ward was given an award for the most improved and maintained building in Belding. We became a ward again and Brother Brown was called as bishop.

We did many other things to help raise money for the building fund. Often this money had to be used for other things. With some of the asparagus money a small trailer was bought, and made into a food wagon. We had a lot of fun selling food out of it at the Belding labor days, and the Danish festival in Greenville. We did this for quite a few years. One of the projects was putting on dinners. Carl Redding and Susie Nelson made flyers and put them on care windows, and stores or wherever they could. They were a great success. We also put on many bake sells. We also participated in bazaars at the Belding mall. Our ward became known for serving great dinners at our ward conferences.

We have participated on the beet farms, practicing our Mormon Golf, and also worked on the church farm in Lansing picking apples. We have helped at the Red Cross Blood Drive, providing and serving sandwiches and drinks to people who donated blood.

One year the priesthood and other members painted the Towne's house for a service project. It was done in one day. Also, one very, very cold day they built a silo. It felt good to work in the barn because it was much warmer there.

In the early 1990's the stake had some families come into the Belding ward to help it be a little stronger. Brother Richard Armstrong was called as a bishop at that time. In 1994, the new brick church building was started in Greenville. What a wonderful site it was! It was finished in March 1995. We invited the town for an open house, and had a good turnout.

On April 1995, we held our first ward conference in the new building. In May 1995, Bishop Armstrong was released and Brother Lybbert was called as bishop. The ward saw lots of growth during this time with families moving in and new members being baptized. The church leaders in Salt Lake picked two units in the northeast to build additions to the buildings, and Greenville was chosen. A large addition was added to the brand new building. We are blessed to have a building big enough for two or three wards. We also have room for Boy Scout camping and nature trails.

In May 1995, we had our first social event. We celebrated Milt and Carol's 45th wedding anniversary.

On November 19, 1995, the new church building in Greenville was dedicated.

Throughout its history the Greenville unit has been a part of the Lansing Stake followed by the Midland Stake and is now a part of the Grand Rapids Stake.

We have many new members moved into the area. We have had many baptisms, a few weddings, and a few funerals in the new building. One sad note, Bishop Allen Smith was killed in an automobile accident while serving as the bishop.

We have had many young people serve on a mission in our area. We have many outstanding members move into our area, and many have moved or passed away. Each one has enriched or lives in some way or another. Each will never be forgotten.

In 1970, our closest temple was Salt Lake City, Utah some 1750 miles. Then the Washington D.C. temple was built, 650 miles away. The Chicago temple was built 1985 and is 250 miles away. The new Detroit temple was completed in 1999 and is only 125 miles away. We are blessed now to have a temple so close by. Also, the beautiful Nauvoo Illinois temple is only 480 miles away.

A list of those members who have served as Bishop or Branch President

- Ersila Beuse
- Delbert Petersen
- Lynn Swensen
- Orson Boyce
- Leland Maylin
- Maynard Failing
- Carl Redding
- Harold Towne
- Bruce Nelson
- Ralph Brown
- Roy Killinger
- Richard Armstrong
- Curt Lybbert
- David Rowell
- David Tischelaar
- Allen Smith (killed in automobile accident while serving)
- Rodney Rackham
- Craig Redding

A list of those who were members of the Greenville unit when accepting call to serve missions

Full-time

- Elder Swensen
- Charyl Boyce
- Bruce Nelson
- Earl Boyce
- Lucinda Rackham
- Rodney Rackham
- Kevin Rackham
- Brother and Sister Ralph Brown
- Maynard and Joyce Failing
- John Boyce
- Melvin Boyce
- Aaron Rackham
- Craig Redding
- Jared Failing
- Cortland Redding
- Cameron Redding
- James Richardson
- Matthew Rackham
- Chris Killinger
- Ethan Morris

Temple Service

- Frank Jeffreys
- Jim Phillips
- Brother and Sister Ralph Brown
- Carol Smith
- Kathy Killinger