

HISTORY OF THE HOLLAND WARD

Of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

This history is comprised of the memories of several individuals who were present when the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints first began to have an organized unit in Holland, Michigan. The first step in organization of our unit was when a couple of contiguous second story rooms in the Consumers Energy Building in Holland, on the corner of River Avenue and Eighth Street, were rented for a dependent Sunday School meeting which first met on Sunday mornings in the late summer of 1973. We were dependent on the Grand Rapids Ward with David Wadsworth as Bishop. Paul Bowers and Glen Deltour were instrumental in getting these meetings organized. A list of early members is not recorded but we know that some of those in attendance were the Ronald and Karen Kettring family, Paul and Delores Bowers family, Chet and Iona Bartels family, Diane and Sylvan Babcock family, Birdie Sarkees, the Glen and Linda Deltour family, Sid Taylor and family, perhaps others. We were limited in the upstairs location. The audience sat in two rooms and those in the 2nd room could not see the speaker at the podium. The people who owned the building did not allow us to be there except for the Sunday meeting so we could not clean it properly and it became unsatisfactory for our meetings which included families with a lot of young children. We next met in the Port Sheldon Township Hall on Port Sheldon Street in western Ottawa County, midway between Holland and Grand Haven. It was there that the Dependent Holland Branch was started with Marlin Dearden as the first Branch President in about late 1973. Those members living in Hudsonville, Allendale, Grand Haven, Spring Lake, Allegan, Saugatuck and all places in between were asked to attend in Holland. Chester Bartels served as 1st Counselor and Daniel Port 2nd Counselor, Diane Babcock was the first Relief Society President and Theodore (Ted) Blackmer was the first Elders Quorum President. Many members have moved in, moved out and/or become uninterested in the Church in those early years and many do so today as well. Early members in the Branch included those mentioned above, David and Ann Gaddis, Lee Shake, Eunice Blackmer and son Michael, Dan and Lynn Betts, Larry McComber, Greg and Eva

Parker, Dave and Pam Murray, The Dick White family, Larry and Marcia Mourdock, Robert Krieg (who was the first missionary to serve from the Holland Branch) and many others who moved shortly after being here and have eluded memory. Fred Ball was baptized as one of the first converts into the branch and he became the 2nd missionary to serve out of Holland.

In August of 1974 Dave Gaddis was called as the Holland Branch President. President Gaddis lived near Allegan so he had a long drive every meeting, as did most of the Branch members. Soon after the Branch seemed to have their feet on the ground President Gaddis, Chester Bartels and Marlin Dearden were involved with getting us the building on 152nd avenue that had been the Robart School, only a few miles from the prior meeting house. This building was obtained by the help of Bud Stoddard and the building served us well for the years 1975 through approximately 1988. The building was heated by a diesel furnace and had two rooms upstairs and a large room in the basement. In January of 1976 paneling was put into the chapel and the basement was divided into 3 rooms. Ron Kettring was called as the next Branch President in 1979 and was followed by Robert Baird in October, 1982. Chet Bartels served as 1st counselor for each of the first 4 Branch Presidents. Tom Cleland was also a counselor to Robert Baird, as was Joe Kozlarek and Earl Mott. Joseph Kozlarek was called as Branch President in about 1986 or '87. Jim Samders, Earl Mott and perhaps others served as counselors for Pres. Kozlarek. Sometime in the early 1980's the Grand haven Branch was formed, leaving Holland with a scant membership. We struggled to survive and many families prayed fervently for move-ins. Many prayers were answered when the Grant and Margaret Worth family moved in with their ten children, one child for nearly every age group in the primary.

Over the years many good families resided here for a few years, left their good influence and moved on to do God's service elsewhere. The Mourdocks are an example. The family moved to Holland two months after their baptism and soon became assimilated into the Holland Branch. Their oldest daughter fell into their swimming pool and was found on the bottom of it one fateful summer day. Her father quickly retrieved her and soon revived her with the help of a neighbor

who was a doctor. Her breath was returned and although she had turned nearly blue, her life was spared. An anointing and blessing were soon administered and little Amber was not impaired for the experience. The Mourdocks credit the members in Holland for nurturing them in the love of Christ so that now, 40 years later they have served in many callings in Stakes and Wards in sundry places.

As is the case with every unit of the Church the Holland unit was blessed with many faithful women. Diana Babcock was the first Relief Society President and she has been followed by many wonderful, strong female leaders. Priscilla Sanders, Iona Bartels, Hattie Frase, Wyla Beck, Allison Allen, Susan Richards, Delores Bowers, Joselyn Betts, Maureen Bringham, Jani O Bray, Nikki Shipley, Linnette Bartels, Pam Stit, Laurie MacPherson, Sherry Gotschall and presently Tammi Coltrin all have served admirably as Relief Society president in the Holland unit. No Branch President or Bishop can long survive without a good Relief Society under inspired leadership. The same can be said for the Clerks and other auxiliaries of the church. There is an equally long list of Clerks and Secretaries and also Primary, Young Women's and Young Men's presidents who have helped greatly in the growth of the church with their dedicated and inspired devotion to calling. Many a member can name a teacher or leader that inspired him or her to be what they have become.

After the Branch had grown for some years it became the desire of many to have a new building and efforts were made to find the right parcel of ground for a new chapel. The Branch Presidency found a location that they thought might be appropriate at the east end of Eighth Street in Holland. When Glen Goodwin, the Stake President, looked at the site he did not like the fact that the Black River flowed at the end of the parcel. He turned around and pointed at a corn field across the road and stated "the church really belongs there"! Upon inquiry, that land was not for sale at that time. However, a few years later Earl Mott was given the assignment to find an acceptable building location and he found that same corn field now had a "for sale" sign out front. He recommended the spot, totally unaware of what had transpired earlier. There was an article in the Holland Sentinel of 23 March, 1986 announcing the erection of a new chapel in Holland on the east end of 8th St., our present building location. For many

years our building on 152nd Avenue was not properly heated and coveralls were kept handy. More than one member longed for a new building so they could be warm for services. It somehow seemed appropriate that for our first Sunday, about February 1, 1988, in the new church the furnace failed to function so that now we still had a cold service even with the shiny new facility. The brethren who had taken the brunt of the criticism for the failure of heat in the old building could only smile inwardly. The new building served nicely and proved to attract some interest from local neighbors and the community as a whole. In spite of the criticism of the Church by many local clergy, from their pulpits, we never did have protestors or pickets at the Holland Branch or Ward.

Another story worthy of note is that many local churches at times sent their young people to our Sacrament service to "critique" what they saw and some were even assigned to write about it as part of a class assignment. Soon after we dedicated the new chapel a group of Holland Christian students visited our services. One of the young women asked to speak to the missionary elders, took the lessons and was baptized. She later married a returned missionary who had served in Holland and they were sealed in the Salt Lake temple. Such class visits ceased after that as we have not seen youth "critiquing" as of late.

No ward history can be complete without mentioning missionary service. There has been a long list of sister and elder missionaries who have served in Holland. Some of them did not realize the impact they made as the seed they sowed did not find root until after they had departed. One such couple of adult missionaries was the Lutmers from Highland, Utah who passed out hundreds of Books of Mormon while serving here. They did not realize a baptism but witnessed wherever they went and left a trail of faithful example to all who met and knew them. The Branch and Ward sent missionaries of our number to myriad nations and states through the years. Youth who grew to near adulthood here and then moved elsewhere also served missions, in part because of the solid basis they received in the Holland Ward Primary and/or YM and YW programs. The number of missionaries is too long to list but during the last few years we have had as many as 5 missionaries serving at the same time. From a humble beginning great things can be achieved.

Boy Scouts are an integral part of the Church youth program. When the Worth family moved into the ward we did not have a Boy Scout troop so Grant Worth made work of us being given the designation of Troop #1 in the Gerald R. Ford Counsel of the Boy Scouts of America. Bryan Worth became the first Eagle Scout in the troop. Scouting has been a big part of many young men's lives in the years since. There now is an impressive list of Eagle Scouts from Troop #1. The boys are led today by competent Scout leaders of whom the future Eagle Scouts and missionaries will say, "He was my example!"

During the tenure of new Bishops the church membership continued to grow so the Physical Facilities office of the Church added the 2nd phase to our chapel. We met in the Zeeland Public School for several weeks while final construction was completed on the new addition, as it was attached to the existing building. A larger chapel, several additional meeting rooms, an added bathroom, a full size gymnasium, a new clerks' office and a new bishop's office were also part of the construction project. Even the parking lot was extended a bit to accommodate the larger crowds expected. This expansion took place in the early 2000's while Dave Wishmire was Bishop. One episode perhaps worth remembering is when the extension was built on the church was that one Sunday, during the sacrament service on a blustery winter day, the wind destroyed part of the wooden framework and a bunch of scaffolding that the builders had failed to properly support when they quit the previous week. The ensuing "CRASH" disrupted our meeting for only as long as it took to assess that further damage was unlikely.

Robert Miller was installed as the Branch President after Joseph Koslarek moved. He was replaced by Lee Allen who was the last Branch President as after only a few years the Branch became a Ward and Pres. Allen was then Bishop Allen. Bishop Allen was followed in the Bishopric by Chester Bartels, Gary Lewis, David Wishmire, and Brent Robinson and is currently under the leadership of Bishop Brian Bartels. Those called to lead as Branch or Ward organizations prove the adage that *God does not call qualified people to lead his Church, he qualifies those who are called.* Service in God's kingdom is a most humbling calling! No matter what the auxiliary each who is called to serve does his or her part in

furthering the work in our time. Each church leader has qualities that God used to further His agenda and each becomes a better member for the experience.

