

A Brief History of the Wyoming Ward by Garth Aamodt

The personality of any denomination or unit of our LDS Church is made up of what? The building? The bishops & leadership? The times and seasons in which it exists? Yes, all that of course...and certainly, beyond any doubt, by the members who attend there and fill the callings.

This ward has a rich history. We have had four (sorta) buildings, and a period of time where the Wyoming Ward was temporarily dissolved and split up. A few of the original members are still in the Ward. (Carey, Lewis, Morse, Barry). Others have also been here for 3 decades or so. (York, Aamodt, Jefferson, Higbee, Judy Thurber, Guild, and others.)

The Beginning:

The Stake in 1979 was led by a great man, later temple president in Chicago, Glenn Goodwin. He organized the Wyoming Ward in the late summer of 1979 from the then existing Grand Rapids Ward, meeting at a small stake center building on Bradford St, just south of what is now Cornerstone University.

An old Protestant chapel on Bellevue St. was bought. The first Wyoming bishop was a Hawaiian member, Russell Figuera. He only served about 6 months but was gone most Sundays for his job. His first counselor, Jim Carey, replaced him as bishop in early 1980.



The very first meeting in the Belview Steet building was held on Sept 16, 1979. The day before, Tammy and Blair Morse were married in that building, the first ceremony of any kind there. The day prior to the wedding there had been a late evening painting party by the sisters of the ward to paint over rainbows on the chapel walls which had been left by the members of the church which had previously owned the building. A great feature about that old building was a glass enclosed "Cry Room" in the back of the chapel. Parents could sit in that room with crying children and not only hear, but also still watch the meeting going on.



Otherwise the building left much to be desired. There was a low ceiling basement that was maybe 7 or 8 feet tall at most with poor egress and lighting. The ward began with about 80 members but grew steadily.

Strong Core of Early Members and Growth:

Ironically one of the problems in the ward was indeed its success. As members moved into the ward and converts joined, by the mid 80's the church was outgrowing the building. Following Bishop Carey's term, Bishop Kent Price took over. (He would later become the Stake President replacing Glenn Goodwin and would actually make the decision in about 1989 to discontinue the ward pending the acquisition of a larger building.)



The Wyoming Ward grew faster than any other ward in the stake, eventually having 15 missionaries out at the same time. Converts were joining and this growth actually led to the wards dissolution as we no longer fit the old building we had adopted in 1979.

Following Bishop Price's call into the Stake Presidency, the Ward was led by Bishop David Ploehn, then Bishop Jack Eveland.

The Diaspora Years:

The ward was dissolved in about 1989 during Bishop Eveland's time and was split up between the Grand Rapids and Grand Valley Wards. We had outgrown our building but not quite enough to earn a new building of our own. For eight years, the Wyoming Ward members were split apart. Friendships endured and members longed to be reunited into our own Ward again.

In about 1996 the word came that the Ward would be reconstituted. Bishop Dan Stevens was called as the first "new" bishop of Wyoming, The new chapel stands today on 56th Street near Byron Center Ave, about 10 miles from the original chapel. What became of the original Wyoming building? It is now a Korean Pentecostal Church.

Reunited in our new building:

What a joyous day it was when the new official Wyoming Ward boundaries were redrawn and most of the dispersed members still in other wards were fully back together again.

In the summer of 1997 the new "Old" Wyoming ward dedicated their current chapel. Since in the 8 intervening years many changes in membership had occurred, it was different, but still the immediate stride of fellowship, kindness, and love could be felt. An almost palpable sigh of relief was felt as the members fell back into the happy rhythms of friendship forged over formative years lovingly remembered.

After Bishop Stevens (1996-2001) was released, Bishop David Pace served (2001-2006), then Bishop Garth Aamodt (2006-2011), then Bishop Allen Smith (2011-2013) who was called as the new Stake President. Bishop Joe Openshaw has been serving to the current time. That's 36 years in a brief nutshell. What a great Ward!

