

The Creation and Growth of the Pilot Mountain Branch

Winston-Salem Stake President D. Ewell Hinsdale convened a special priesthood meeting in late January of 1985. The purpose of the meeting was to announce a vision for church growth in Mt. Airy and Surry County. President Hinsdale announced a plan for the immediate creation of a Pilot Mountain Branch and a Dobson Branch (to be formed out of the existing Mt. Airy 1st and 2nd Wards). Many of the priesthood spoke in support of the plan including Talmadge Hiatt, Don W. Hiatt, Paul Lewis, Leon Hiatt, and Gary Tilley.

President Hinsdale asked Alan Simmons and Gary Tilley to look for a suitable temporary meetinghouse. On February 9, 1985, a local attorney and realtor, Ken Smith, advised Brother Tilley and Simmons that the old Needham home on Main Street of Pilot Mountain would be available for leasing to the prospective Pilot Mountain Branch. The home had been most recently converted to use as a funeral home. The next day, February 10, 1985, the following priesthood leaders met at the Needham home site: Leon Hiatt, Don W. Hiatt, Ewell Hinsdale, Alan Simmons, and Gary Tilley. After looking at the site, discussing adaptability of the home to Church use, and having earnest prayer together, President Hinsdale asked that we begin the process necessary to lease the site.

By late-March, 1985, lease arrangements were nearly complete for the Needham property. On April 27, 1985, several prospective members of the Branch met at the Needham building to clean and prepare the site. Present were Jeff Boles, Dean and Joyce Simmons, Edith Sheets, Norma Koontz, Cassie Boles, Connie and Gary Tilley. Later that day, Calvin Koontz came to look at the mechanical systems, lighting, etc.

The Pilot Mountain Branch was organized on May 5, 1985, at the Needham building and meetinghouse on Main Street, Pilot Mountain. President D. Ewell Hinsdale presided over the creation of the new congregation. Gary C. Tilley was called and sustained as the Branch President. Alan Simmons was called as 1st Counselor and Romie B. Boles as 2nd Counselor. Calvin Koontz was called as Branch Mission Leader and Frankie Koontz as Elders Quorum President. The Branch began with about 80 members of record. The event was historic because it was really the re-creation of a branch that was created somewhere in the near vicinity over a century ago (1869) but was later dissolved because so many of the faithful saints emigrated to *Zion* in the west.

Soon after the Branch was formally organized, efforts began to secure a site for a permanent meetinghouse. By early July, 1985, an offer to purchase a 3-acre site on Golf Course Road had been made to Bobby Lovill of Town and Country Builders. The offer was accepted and the members began efforts to raise approximately \$15,000 as the "local share" necessary to begin construction of a new "Phase II" meetinghouse. Many personal sacrifices were made in order to raise the local monies. The Branch received formal approval in early January, 1986, for the new meetinghouse to be built.

Harlan Hawks was baptized as the ~~first~~ convert to the Pilot Mountain Branch on August 24, 1986. The baptism was conducted in the outdoor pool at the home of Calvin and Minnie Koontz. Elder Doug Dahl baptized Brother Hawks.

An official groundbreaking ceremony for the new Golf Course Road meetinghouse was held on October 5, 1986. Those present included several Church leaders and the mayor of Pilot Mountain, R. Wilson Smith. Blue Ridge Enterprises of Mt Airy was awarded the general contract.

The new Golf Course Road meetinghouse was completed in late August, 1987, and the first use of the meetinghouse for regular worship services was held on August 30, 1987. By then, membership had expanded to about 125 members because of approximately 20 baptisms and the addition of the King area (Stokes County) to the branch boundaries. An open house was held at the new meetinghouse on September 20, 1987, with many members and friends of the community present.

The new meetinghouse was formally dedicated on January 17, 1988. The stake presidency (President D. Ewell Hinsdale, Bruce E. Smith, and Dwight Stuckey) was present for this special event along with the mayor of Pilot Mountain, R. Wilson Smith.

Bennie Harris was sustained as the Pilot Mountain Branch President on September 9, 1990, at the release of President Tilley. Alan Simmons was sustained as first counselor and Romie B. Boles as second counselor.

The Pilot Mountain Branch became the Pilot Mountain Ward on February 7, 1993. Brother Jeff Ray was called to preside as Bishop of the newly created ward. Counselors to Bishop Ray during his tenure were J.C. Haymore, Romie B. Boles, Doug Haynie, Doug Cox, and Alan Simmons.

Romie B. Boles succeeded Bishop Ray and was sustained on September 1, 1996, with Alan Simmons as 1st Counselor and Randall Gentry as 2nd Counselor. During the tenure of Bishop Boles a special committee was organized to boost sacrament meeting attendance to the 200 mark. The committee consisted of Bennie Harris, Chairman, along with Jeff Boles, Randall Gentry, Rise Harris, Joyce Simmons, and Sherri Simmons. Many less active members were brought back to the fold during this period.

Jeff Long was sustained as Bishop on July 26, 1998, at the release of Bishop Boles. Alan Simmons was called as 1st Counselor and Randall Gentry as 2nd Counselor. Later Ken Vogler was called as 2nd Counselor. The Pilot Mountain Ward is currently a vibrant, growing ward.