

Tom Joyce

A HISTORY OF THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY
SAINTS IN THE MT. AIRY AREA

Soon after the Church of Jesus Christ was restored, and duly organized on April 6, 1830, elder Jedediah M. Grant, a missionary, introduced the "Church" to the people of Surry, Stokes, and Rockingham counties in North Carolina and Patrick county in Virginia.

One of the first members of Surry county was Sister Elizabeth Shelton. She was baptised and confirmed in 1854 by elders A. Gregg and Jackson Taylor. Elder Henry G. Boyle organized the Surry County Branch on March 18, 1868. Dr. Anderson Grigg was called to be the presiding elder. On July 7, 1869, the Surry County Branch became the Pilot Mountain Branch. Brother Swain King was the leader.

Due to the emigration of many of the saints to Utah, the Pilot Mountain Branch was de-organized May 3, 1870. Church records show that during the early years of the Church, new members were encouraged to move to "Mormon" settlements in the west where they could enjoy the constant influence of the Church. Therefore, the duration of the branches and Sunday schools were short-lived; with many closings and interruptions. The Pilot Mountain Branch was reactivated April 30, 1876 by elder George Teasdale and elder John Rex Winder, Jr. Brother William Hill was ordained an elder and sustained as branch president.

The Mt. Airy Branch was organized on July 28, 1879 by North Carolina conference president Jonas N. Beck. The organization took place at the home of William B. Shelton, who was called to preside over the branch.

At the time of these early organizational meetings there was a lot of anti-Mormon sentiment, however most citizens deplored the actions of the persecutors. Consequentially, over the years a

friendlier climate developed.

From 1894-1898, there was a period of eastward expansion. With this decrease in emphasis of the emigration of the saints to the west, many local branches and Sunday schools were organized in North Carolina. A Sunday school was organized in a bowery on the premises of Brother James Monroe Shelton of the Flat Rock section. Brother Shelton was appointed Sunday school superintendant.

Surry county continued to be a fruitful field of labor for LDS missionaries and on August 21, 1900, elder James Monroe Hiatt was called to preside over the Mt. Airy Branch. He continued to be a pillar of strength in the community and Church until his death in July, 1941. Brother James Monroe Hiatt presided over the branch until January 28, 1940 when (James C. Hiatt), one of his sons was called to replace him. These great men along with William Henry Hiatt, James Monroe Shelton, Ephriam A. Hiatt, Jacob F. Hiatt, Jesse Lafayette Hiatt, John H. Jones, Calvin J. Jones, James M. Chappell, Wilford Hiatt, James W. Brinkley, and David L. Hiatt were the nucleus around which the Church grew in the Mt. Airy vicinity.

(LATTER-DAY SAINT)

→ WAS ALSO VERY PROMINANT IN SURRY COUNTY EDUCATION - PRINCIPAL OF FRANKLIN SCHOOL FOR MANY YEARS -

At a general conference held in Mt. Airy on August 25, 1912, president Charles A. Callis of the Southern States Mission, dedicated a new church building. The chapel was a one room building approximately 35 feet wide and 40 feet long. A stand was in the back of the chapel with pews on each side. Benches were arranged down each outer wall, and in the center. It was heated by two pot-bellied stoves and lighted by kerosene lamps down each side and behind the pulpit. Buildings of this type construction may still be seen throughout the rural areas surrounding Mt. Airy and throughout North Carolina. An addition to the building was added in 1940, which doubled the meeting

— LOCATED BEHIND THE PRESENT BUILDING IN SHELTON TOWN

area and for the first time provided for separate classroom space. A coal furnace was installed in the basement for heat and for the first time electric lights were added. Four classrooms were also placed in the basement. This renovated building which was located just east of the present building by the large hickory tree, housed the branch until the present chapel was completed and dedicated in 1957.

(In the fall of 1915, the Mt. Airy Branch Relief Society was organized.) Sister Sarah Chappel was called as president. Sisters Selena Brinkley and Nancy Inman Hiatt were her counselors. Sister Gracie Darling Hiatt was secretary. The Relief Society gave the women of the Church an organized way to serve in compassionate service and also a way to help each other progress in the Gospel of Jesus Christ as the individual talents of all were utilized. Other outstanding women of this era were: Susan Midkiff Hiatt, Susan Jones, Pearlmae Mae Love, Stella Hiatt Williams, Margaret Sutphin Hiatt, Cora Lee Koontz, and Mary Laster. Many other women also shared their talents in active service over the years. One of the favorite projects of the Relief Society was the making of warm, colorful quilts.

In the 1930's and 1940's, cottage meetings were frequently held throughout the various communities of the area. Some were held in homes of Church members, while others were held in the homes of friends.

It was not until the mid thirties that temple work began to be actively done by the members. David L. Hiatt was the leader in this effort. The first trip was in 1935 by car. In 1936 and 1938 a model A Ford school bus was used to take several families at a time. The west was the only location of temples at the time.

This is the Women's Auxiliary program of the Church

"Temple Work" is an important aspect of Mormon life - It is the desire of all Mormons to be married "for time and eternity" in one of the Temples and to perform ordinance work, such as baptism for deceased ancestors - Members have to make great sacrifices to do this until the early 1970's when a Temple was constructed in Washington, D.C.

There was a division of the Mt. Airy Branch on October 1, 1938. Under the direction of North Carolina District President, elder Frank L. Walker the Granite City Branch was organized with elder Calvin J. Jones as president. The two branches were reunited on January 28, 1940. Elder James C. Hiatt was called to be the branch president. His life of teaching and coaching high school athletics fitted him well for the activities of the young people of the branch. He, along with his brother William Vestal Hiatt led a thriving, achieving boy scout troop, which won many top honors in the Old Hickory Council. This tradition is continuing today with several men having devoted considerable time and effort to the young men of the Church.

On April 17, 1935 North Carolina was divided into East and West districts. Bother James L. Bennett, Sr. of Durham became the first local elder to be appointed a district president. Brother David L. Hiatt of Mt. Airy and Brother Kenneth L. Duke of Durham were chosen to be his counselors.

Brother Luna A. Hiatt was called to preside over the Mt. Airy Branch on January 8, 1950. He served the membership until September 20, 1953, when the office of branch president fell upon the head of Brother V. Talmage Hiatt. It was under his leadership that the present ward chapel was erected. It was dedicated on Sunday, February 24, 1957 by elder Sterling W. Sill, as assistant to the Council of Twelve Apostles.

A chief means of raising funds for the construction of the chapel was building fund suppers. Many of them were held with much success. The Cox Construction Co. and donated labor by local members built the chapel. Meetings were held in the building prior to its dedication. The first Sunday

school meeting was held in it on November 11, 1956. Brother Wilbur D. Hiatt became the (branch president) on September 1, 1957. Junior L. Hiatt and Joseph A. Sechrest were called as counselors. Brother Grady Kirkman continued as branch clerk.

- Equivalent to the ^{Pastor} minister of a Protestant congregation

With the organization of the Greensboro Stake on September 13, 1961, the (Mt. Airy Branch) became the (Mt. Airy Ward.) Brother Wilbur D. Hiatt was sustained as its first bishop.) He held this position until Brother V. Talmage Hiatt was called to be the bishop on March 30, 1969. Brother Paul R. Lewis succeeded brother Talmage Hiatt as bishop and served from 1974 to 1977.

A small unit

full congregation

equal to Pastor

The membership in the area continued to grow and in December of 1978, the Mt. Airy Ward was divided into two wards. The area north of highway 89 became the First Ward with Eldon Cluff called to serve as bishop. The area south of highway 89 became the Second Ward and Gary C. Tilley was called as its bishop. In September, 81 when bishop Cluff returned to his home in the west, Henry L. Seivers, Sr. was called to preside as bishop of the First Ward. Then in September 82, Donald W. Hiatt was called to serve as the bishop of the Second Ward.

When Wards grow to a certain size they are generally are divided and members attend a particular ward by geographical boundaries

In May of 1985 there was a further realignment of ward boundaries and a further division of wards. The Pilot Mountain Branch was organized with Gray C. Tilley called to be the branch president. A branch composed of members in the Dobson, White Plains and Elkin areas became the Dobson Branch. Monty Hiatt was sustained as the branch president. The Mt. Airy area became the First Ward with bishop Henry Seivers continuing to serve. The area east and north of Mt. Airy, Flat Rock, and Ararat, VA became the Second Ward. Joseph G. Sloop was called to serve the Second Ward as bishop.

Later changes (November, 86) have seen Henry Seivers released as First Ward bishop and Larry D. Johnson called to serve in that capacity. In Dobson, Monty Hiatt was released as branch president and replaced by Carroll Wray. Then, president Wray was released with brother John Griggs presently serving as the branch president.

The influence of the members of the Church continues to grow in the area. Today, there is increased activity in the two wards and branches of the Church in the Mt. Airy area. The Pilot Mountain and Dobson branches have new chapels and Mt. Airy is beginning construction on a new building. The present membership is approximately:

Mt. Airy First.....	275
Mt. Airy Second.....	290
Pilot Mountain.....	165
Dobson.....	100
Total.....	830

Since elder Jedediah M. Grant began his missionary work in Surry County, hundreds of missionaries have taught the Gospel to thousands and many have joined the church. These conversions along with natural increase make up a long roll of members in the area. Most of them have been actively engaged in the work of carrying on the priesthood and Church auxillary organizations of the Church. Many have served full time missions. These varied activities have helped the members grow spiritually and share their testimonies with others. While sharing gospel experiences with other members, Sister Martha Hannah Shelton related this story. When asked by a somewhat inquisitive neighbor about why she and Monroe joined the Church, she replied, "I just don't know how we came to stumble upon the truth."

Selfless dedication, based upon such testimonies, by hundreds of men, women, boys and girls has made the Church strong in the Mt. Airy area.

Junior L. Hiatt July 1989

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Decided new Building needed to built in western side
of Town - Due to growth this is more central location

located AT the corner of US 601 & old 601
1989 - 4 1/2 Acres, purchased from Kester Sink

MARCH 1990 - Blue Ridge Enterprises was Award Bid to
Build Building - This Company has built
several LATTER-DAY SAINT ~~CH~~ Chapels in
the Area over the LAST 3 YEARS -

~~NOT~~ Ground Breaking late April, early May -