

Historical Sketch of the Short Hills Ward, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon)

Like most branches of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, the Short Hills Ward had very small and humble beginnings. It started as a small missionary branch in Newark in July 1922 when G. Stanley McAllister, then a Mormon Missionary, now a vice president of Lord and Taylor, was appointed presiding Elder. Sunday Services were held in Achtelstetter's restaurant on Broad Street, i.e. in rooms above the restaurant. There were about 15 members of the church in this area at that time.

A little later a few New Jersey families joined the church and a small group of converts from Holland came to America and added to the branch. In 1928 it moved to the Masonic Hall at the corner of 6th and Orange streets. The membership reached about 200 that year. Mid-week meetings were held at the Robert Treat Hotel.

In 1932 a small tract of land and a recreational club house at 40 Whittlesey Avenue were purchased by the church and remodeled to use as a little chapel. Here the membership grew over the years to about 450. Growth would have been much greater, except that many of the converts moved west to join the main body of the church in Utah and surrounding states. This little chapel drew members from many miles-- from as far as New Brunswick, Mendham, Leonia, etc., as well as from Newark, the Oranges, Elizabeth and surrounding communities. A branch was established at New Brunswick and later another at Leonia.

In 1953 the Whittlesey Avenue site, where the building had become inadequate for the membership, was torn down to make way for the Garden State Parkway. A seven-acre tract of land was purchased by the church on White Oak Ridge Road in Short Hills. Plans were drawn up for the present fine building which has cost nearly \$300,000 and is now ready for dedication. Pending its construction, temporary arrangements were made with the Board of Education in Springfield to use the new Florence Gaudineer Junior High School as a meeting place. This use commenced in the fall of 1953 and continued until the summer of 1955 when the new building on White Oak Ridge Road was suitable for use, though still incomplete in many details.

The ground breaking ceremony for the new building was held in October, 1953. Chairman Hill of the Township Committee, Millburn, welcomed the newcomers to Short Hills and a number of other community leaders attended and extended their good will and best wishes. The excavation, concrete foundations and masonry work, also the heating and plumbing facilities were contracted. The remainder was built by the careful labor of over a hundred doctors, lawyers, engineers, scientists and craftsmen of the Mormon faith-- and by a few of their friends who were not members. The value of the labor contributed exceeded \$50,000. The Cash contributed by the local members was considerably more. As of March 1, 1956, the building was finished in all but a few minor details and was completely paid for. No Mormon chapel is ever dedicated until it is clear of all forms of debt.

The first regular meeting in the new building was held in July 1955. The junior Sunday School facilities were then unfinished but were soon made available. They are a miniature replica, in most respects, of the main chapel. The latter accommodates about 300 persons. It has choir spaces for (and a choir) of 60 members-- none of them paid but a number highly trained. None of the officers or leaders receives any salary or pay of any kind. The members perform all the functions and duties such as preaching the sermons, leading the singing, playing the organ and other musical instruments, etc.

The present leader is Bishop E. M. Thomas, a lawyer with Esso. Other leaders are scientists at Bell Telephone Laboratories, engineers at Western Electric, Kelloggs, Air Reduction, executives of Beneficial Management Co. of Morristown, Colgate Palmolive, and numerous other well known institutions. Present membership of the Short Hills Ward is about 600 and it is growing rapidly. Members are scattered throughout nearby Essex, Union and Morris counties.

Contrary to some rumors that have been passed around, the public is not excluded from services at the chapel. The general public is welcome to attend any and all meetings. Services are held Sunday morning at 10:30 and Sunday evening at 6:30 the year round and all our friends and neighbors are welcome.