

# History of the Chapels in San Bernardino of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

(Nick-name "Mormons," aka Latter-day Saints, Saints, LDS)

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Latter-day Saints, nick-named Mormons, are members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. From their beginning, they have been a temple building people. Their first congregation was organized in 1830, and by 1836 they had completed a temple in Kirkland, Ohio. Mob violence drove them away from Ohio and into Illinois where they built the City of Nauvoo on the banks of the Mississippi River. By November of 1845, they had all but completed a second temple. Mob violence again drove them from their homes. They moved to the refuge and safety of the West and began building temples, the most famous of which is the Salt Lake City, Utah temple.

For Latter-day Saints, a temple is a sacred place of religious learning, a place to make covenants with God. They are not chapels or Sunday places of worship.

In contrast to their temple building efforts, the early congregations did not build chapels for weekly worship. They would meet in homes or public buildings or most times outdoors when the weather permitted.

The same was true in the San Bernardino Valley in the mid 1800's.

The first Latter-day Saints to arrive in the San Bernardino Valley were soldiers enlisted in the US Army. In 1847, a US Army battalion, comprised entirely of Latter-day Saint men and a few of their wives who enlisted as laundresses, arrived in California after a grueling 2,000-mile march from Iowa. (They were called "The Mormon Battalion.") They had constructed the first wagon road from Santa Fe, New Mexico to San Diego. These men and women no matter where they marched or where they were camped held worship services, again mostly outdoors.

While stationed at Los Angeles to build Fort Moore, Company C was assigned to guard the Cajon Pass in the San Bernardino Mountains. This assignment did not keep them from their weekly worship services.

Battalion member, Henry G. Boyle, recorded in his journal on Tuesday, June 1, 1847 while camped in the Cajon Pass that the small detachment of Company C assigned to guard Cajon Pass held its own religious services while there. "On arrival here, finding ourselves separated from the gentiles, we retired to a grove and cut poles and prepared a place to hold meetings in, and here we have a meeting once each Sunday, and prayers morning and evening."

So this bowery was essentially the San Bernardino area's first Latter-day Saint constructed place of worship.

In July of 1851, a group of more than 400 Latter-day Saints and African American pioneers arrived in Southern California from Utah. They were the first colonists to settle in California after statehood – a milestone in state history. They had come to establish a settlement for agricultural pursuits and other industries. Previously, men of the Mormon Battalion while stationed in Southern California, (some now leaders of this wagon train) had made arrangements for the Mormon Church to purchase the Chino Rancho from Isaac Williams for a place of settlement. The ranch was located west of and adjacent to the San Bernardino Valley. Once the Mormon colonists had arrived, Williams reneged on his offer. These Utah pioneers were forced to camp in the Cajon Pass, on the edge of the Valley, until they could find another place to settle.

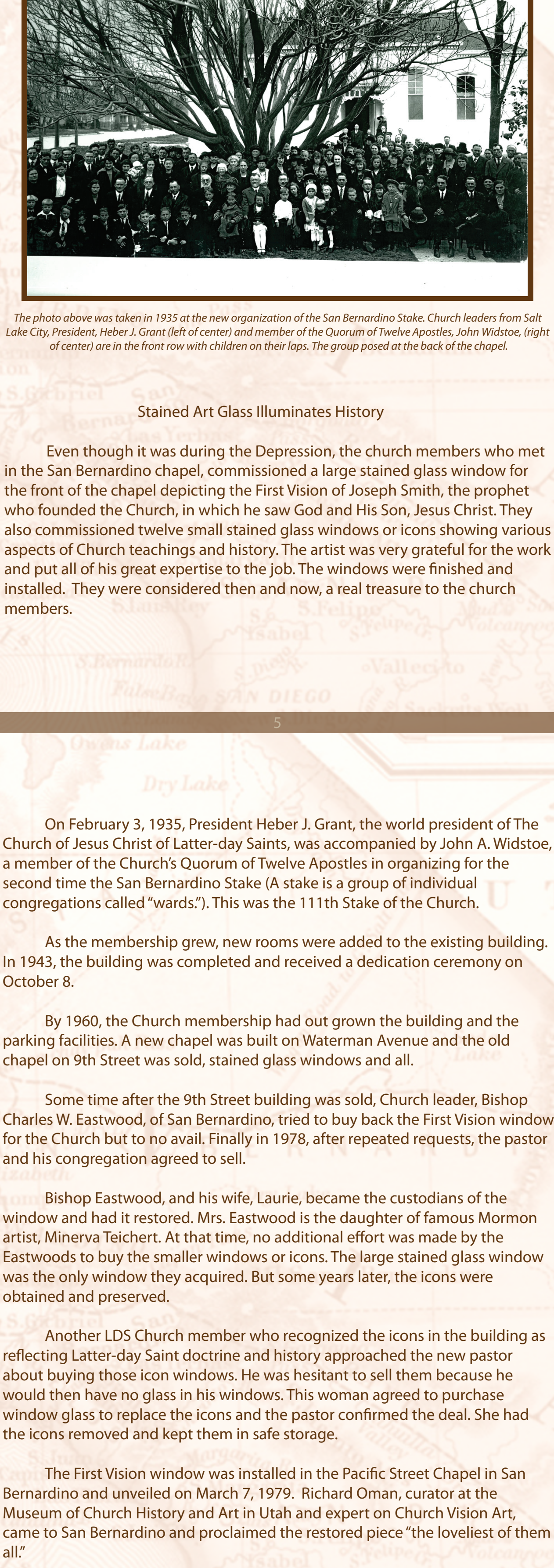
They camped in an area they called Sycamore Grove, which is within today's Glen Helen Park between Mormon Battalion Mountain and Cajon Creek. During their encampment they remained busy with many activities including hatching baby chicks and planting crops. They held school for the many pioneer children that were in the company under a large Sycamore tree. They also held worship services every Sunday and other church meetings under that same tree. That Sycamore tree became the first religious meeting place for these pioneers.

After a few months, the pioneers purchased the 35,000 acre Lugo Rancho (which today is the San Bernardino Valley and parts of Redlands and Mentone) and took possession of it on October 1, 1851.

When the colonists moved into the valley, they built a two story adobe structure called the "Council House" where church and other organizational meetings were held. In 1853, they incorporated the City of San Bernardino in a meeting in that Council House. In a flurry of building, they constructed businesses and homes and had a plot of land designated as the "Temple Lot." But still no chapel was mentioned in their diaries.

Many Sunday and other religious meetings were held under a bowery that could accommodate a large congregation. Some meetings were held with nearly 3,000 members in attendance and at other times, smaller groups would meet at various locations including the Council House, the Asistencia and in private homes. During bad weather, meetings were not held at all.

They also held church meetings in two side-by-side school houses they built in San Bernardino. Years later the two school houses were joined by a two story addition as seen in the photo below. The two building were named the Washington and Jefferson Schools.

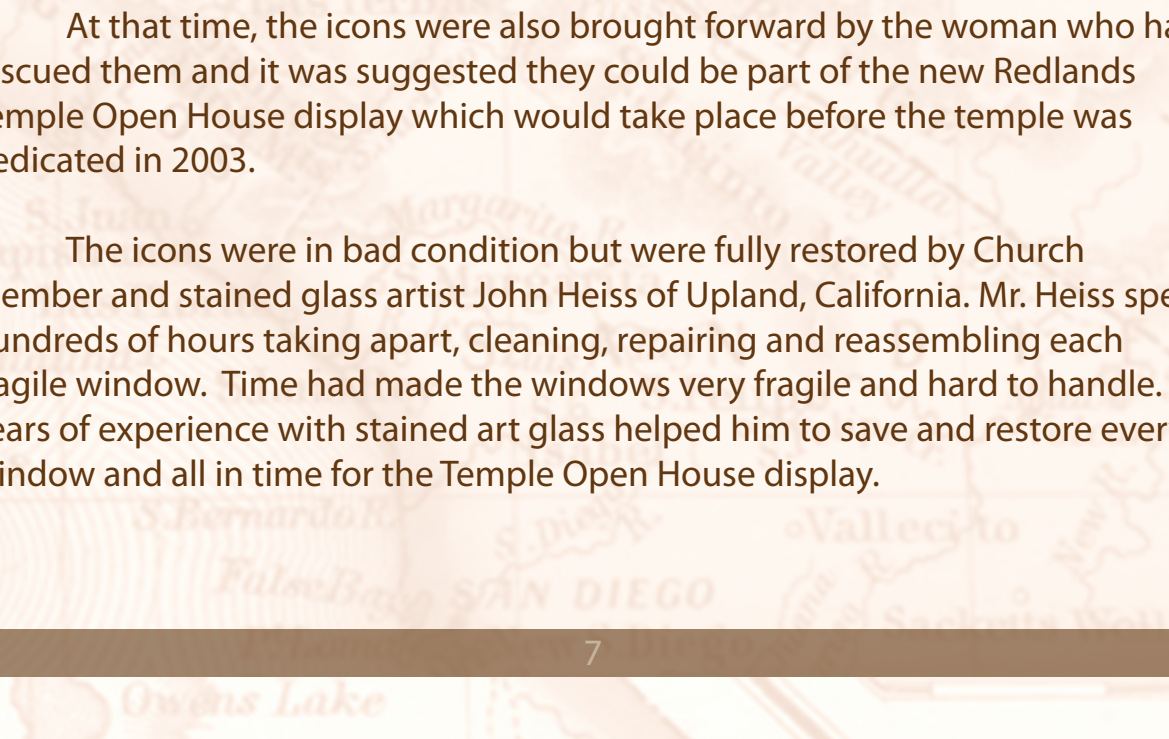


(Photo Courtesy of the San Bernardino County Museum)

These pioneers were requested to return to Utah in 1857 by Church president Brigham Young when a serious threat was leveled against the Church in Utah by the US Government. Johnston's Army was laying plans for an all-out assault on the new Utah colony and the San Bernardino members were needed to help defend it. Approximately 2,000 of the 3,000 pioneers left for Utah. The members who remained were left without an organized congregation.

Not until the 1920's did the Church reestablish congregations in San Bernardino County. In 1925, the first Latter-day Saint chapel was built in Colton in what was the southwest corner of the original Mormon colony of 1851.

Five years later, the first chapel in the City of San Bernardino was built in 1930 at 9th and F Streets and housed a large congregation.



The photo above was taken in 1935 at the new organization of the San Bernardino Stake. Church leaders from Salt Lake City, President, Heber J. Grant (left of center) and member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles, John Widstoe, (right of center) are in the front row with children on their laps. The group posed at the back of the chapel.

## Stained Art Glass Illuminates History

Even though it was during the Depression, the church members who met in the San Bernardino chapel, commissioned a large stained glass window for the front of the chapel depicting the First Vision of Joseph Smith, the prophet who founded the Church, in which he saw God and His Son, Jesus Christ. They also commissioned twelve small stained glass windows or icons showing various aspects of Church teachings and history. The artist was very grateful for the work and put all of his great expertise to the job. The windows were finished and installed. They were considered then and now, a real treasure to the church members.

On February 3, 1935, President Heber J. Grant, the world president of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was accompanied by John A. Widstoe, a member of the Church's Quorum of Twelve Apostles in organizing for the second time the San Bernardino Stake (A stake is a group of individual congregations called "wards"). This was the 111th Stake of the Church.

As the membership grew, new rooms were added to the existing building. In 1943, the building was completed and received a dedication ceremony on October 8.

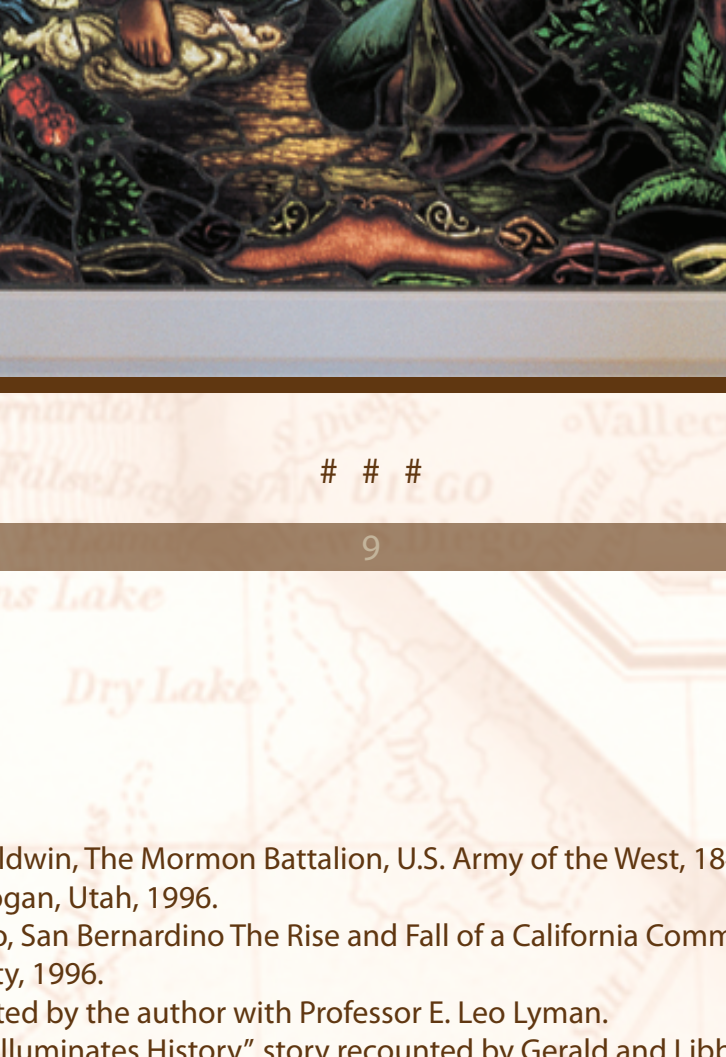
By 1960, the Church membership had out grown the building and the parking facilities. A new chapel was built on Waterman Avenue and the old chapel on 9th Street was sold, stained glass windows and all.

Some time after the 9th Street building was sold, Church leader, Bishop Charles W. Eastwood, of San Bernardino, tried to buy back the First Vision window for the Church but to no avail. Finally in 1978, after repeated requests, the pastor and his congregation agreed to sell.

Bishop Eastwood, and his wife, Laurie, became the custodians of the window and had it restored. Mrs. Eastwood is the daughter of famous Mormon artist, Minerva Teichert. At that time, no additional effort was made by the Eastwoods to buy the smaller windows or icons. The large stained glass window was the only window they acquired. But some years later, the icons were obtained and preserved.

Another LDS Saint member who recognized the icons in the building as reflecting Latter-day Saint doctrine and history approached the new pastor about buying those icon windows. He was hesitant to sell them because he would then have no glass in his windows. This woman agreed to purchase window glass to replace the icons and the pastor confirmed the deal. She had the icons removed and kept them in safe storage.

The First Vision window was installed in the Pacific Street Chapel in San Bernardino and unveiled on March 7, 1979. Richard Oman, curator at the Museum of Church History and Art in Utah and expert on Church Vision Art, came to San Bernardino and proclaimed the restored piece "the loveliest of them all."



The photo above shows the First Vision window as installed in the Pacific Chapel in San Bernardino.

When the Church announced in 2002 that they would build a temple in Redlands, Laurie Eastwood was successful in getting permission from the President of the Church to remove the First Vision window from the Pacific Chapel and reinstall it for permanent display in the temple foyer.

At that time, the icons were also brought forward by the woman who had rescued them and it was suggested they could be part of the new Redlands Temple Open House display which would take place before the temple was dedicated in 2003.

The icons were in bad condition but were fully restored by Church member and stained glass artist John Heiss of Upland, California. Mr. Heiss spent hundreds of hours taking apart, cleaning, repairing and reassembling each fragile window. Time had made the windows very fragile and hard to handle. His years of experience with stained art glass helped him to save and restore every window and all in time for the Temple Open House display.



Photo Left: John Heiss shows restored icon of the San Bernardino Pioneers entering the valley.

Photo Below: Five of the icons



In today's San Bernardino Stake\*, there are three chapels in the City of San Bernardino and one in Crestline and another in Arrowhead. The congregations attending services at these chapels have over 3,100 members combined.

The San Bernardino Valley, originally the Lugo Rancho and then Mormon colony land, has a total of 21 LDS chapels including those in San Bernardino, where over 16,000 members worship.

\*December 2010

Sources:  
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Lyman, Edward Leo, San Bernardino The Rise and Fall of a California Community, Signature Books, Salt Lake City, 1996.  
Interviews conducted by the author with Professor E. Leo Lyman.  
"Stained Art Glass Illuminates History", story recounted by Gerald and Libby Quinn.  
San Bernardino Chapel photo was provided by Gerry and Libby Quinn.  
Stained Art Glass Window in Pacific Chapel photo was provided by Gerry and Libby Quinn.  
Photos of John Heiss restoring icons and photos of icons were taken by Marilyn Mills.  
1860 map of California provided by Marilyn Mills.

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There are a total of twelve of these icons or smaller stained glass windows. Two of these icons are currently located in the LDS Chapel in Highland, California.

