

A Brief History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the Casper, Wyoming, Area



EARLY CHURCH HISTORY

Throughout the latter half of the 19th century, members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints gathering to the western United States traveled through Wyoming. Between 1847 and 1869, tens of thousands of Saints followed the Oregon Trail through what is now Casper, Wyoming, to Fort Bridger before heading south to the Salt Lake Valley. In addition to the overland trails that went through Wyoming, Casper is also home to various sites where early pioneer members of the Church operated ferries to help other pioneers cross the North Platte River on their journeys west. One of these sites is where present-day Fort Casper stands.

In 1855, Church members purchased Fort Bridger and Fort Supply and created permanent settlements that helped resupply travelers on both the Mormon and Oregon Trails. Most pioneer companies traveled through Wyoming without incident; however, the Willie and Martin handcart companies of 1856 started later in the year and became trapped in the winter snows approximately 60 miles west of Casper. Some 200 of the 1,075 individuals in the companies died. Others were saved by rescue parties dispatched from Salt Lake City.

CHURCH GROWTH

The first branch (a small congregation) in Casper was organized by December 1920 as part of the Western States Mission. Members met in private homes. In addition to general membership, the branch included a Relief Society and a Sunday School. Members continued to meet in homes and rented buildings until a chapel for regular Sunday worship was built in 1938. Another, larger building was begun in 1953 and dedicated in October 1955.

In response to membership growth, the first two stakes in the region were organized by Spencer W. Kimball and Howard W. Hunter, members of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, on Oct. 14, 1962 (a stake is similar to a diocese). The Wind River Stake included congregations in Lander and Riverton, and congregations in Casper made up the Casper Stake.

Today, members worship in 14 congregations in the Casper area.

THE COMMUNITY AND CHURCH TODAY

Church members in Wyoming have partnered with their local communities to provide service to those in need. In 2015, 270 members of the Casper Wyoming Stake, including 120 youth, volunteered to assist in the cleanup of Lusk, Wyoming, after much of the community was destroyed by floods. Church members have also helped clean up the Platte River Trails and participated in many other projects in the community. Currently, members work in partnership with the First Christian Church and their Sandwich Ministry.

CASPER WYOMING TEMPLE

Members of the Church in the Casper area make regular excursions to temples to make sacred covenants binding themselves and their families to Jesus Christ. The closest temples at the end of the 19th century

were in Logan and Salt Lake City, Utah. As the Church grew and other temples were built, Casper members often traveled to the temples in Idaho Falls, Idaho, and Ogden, Utah. In recent years, members have traveled to the Fort Collins Colorado Temple.

On April 4, 2021, President Russell M. Nelson, the worldwide leader of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, announced plans to build a temple in Casper, Wyoming, along with 19 others throughout the world. "I ponder and praise pioneers — past and present — whose consecrated lives have helped to make this history today," President Nelson said, an allusion — at least for Casper residents — to the pioneers who traveled through the area on their way west.

The groundbreaking ceremony for the temple was held on Oct. 9, 2021. The temple will be dedicated for use on Nov. 24, 2024.

