

A 25-Year History of the Rochester Minnesota Stake: 1996 - 2021

For Zion must increase in beauty, and in holiness; her borders must be enlarged; her stakes must be strengthened; yea, verily I say unto you, Zion must arise and put on her beautiful garments.

Doctrine and Covenants 82:14

Rochester Minnesota Stake Presidents from 1996 to the end of 2021:

Stake President	Darrell W. Krueger	12 Nov 1995 - 5 Dec 2004
Stake President	Thomas N. Spackman	5 Dec 2004 - 25 Jan 2009
Stake President	Robert L. Foote	25 Jan 2009 - 29 Oct 2017
Stake President	Randal J. Thomas	Oct 29, 2017 - currently serving as of 2021

The first volume of the Rochester Minnesota Stake history, created by Veryl Firl, covered the beginnings of our stake from as early as the 1800s until 1995. This history contains an overview of the Rochester Stake units since 1996. Some of those units have continued; some have been added; some of them were transferred to other stakes; some units were dissolved completely; some of them were combined with other units.

This particular history begins where volume one left off: from 1996–2021, a 25-year history. Each unit described begins with the last known bishop/branch president in 1996 and ends with its current leader in 2021.

The information for each unit will be brief as the focus of this history is on the ministry of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints found collectively within the Stake. For more detailed histories of each unit, the reader may check the Stake Annual Histories. Histories up to 1995 can be accessed in the Church Historical Library in Salt Lake City, Utah upon request. Annual histories from 1996 until the most recent year are housed in the clerk's office of the stake center.

James Parry, who was serving as the Rochester District President, provided a short history of the organization of the stake, which occurred on April 30, 1978. We use this account for contextual purposes so that we can update the reader as to the changes of the units within the Rochester

Minnesota Stake. President Parry's comments come from a personal testimony that he shared. For a detailed history, the reader can access volume one of Rochester Minnesota Stake History.

President Parry stated, The late nineteen seventies were exciting times in the Rochester Minnesota District. Preparations to become a Stake had been going on for some time and the reality of becoming such was only enhanced by the arrival of a Mission President with the foresight and the connections in Salt Lake City to make it possible. President Douglas Callister made the making of a Rochester Minnesota Stake as one of his goals before he left the mission. It probably was no coincidence that he was the grandson of Elder LeGrand Richards and that Elder Richards was Chairman of the Committee on new Stakes. President Callister determined that the leadership was here and, although the Stake would be small, the Rochester Minnesota District had been functioning as a Stake for some time.

The Rochester Minnesota District Presidency (President James E. Parry, 1st Counselor Lee Johnson and 2nd Counselor Darrell Rose) was asked to write a letter to the Mission President requesting that we become a Stake. All of us knew that this was the proper time for the Lord to allow the area to grow and become that which it was destined to become. The Rochester Ward and the Austin Branch had been brought back into the District, a necessary move to provide the heart of the future Stake. The stage had been set and now it remained in the hands of the Brethren to make the decision as to whether Stakehood was forthcoming.

The necessary papers were prepared and sent to Church Headquarters in Salt Lake City by President Callister, the Mission President. President Callister later related the consideration of the Stake in the following story. Apparently as the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve discussed the matter there was not complete agreement as to the Stake being formed. It seems that President Nathan Eldon Tanner thought that the Stake would be too small and that we would have to struggle too much. Finally, when the vote was to be taken, President Spencer W. Kimball reached over and raised President Tanner's arm and said, let's make it unanimous. And thus, unanimity was obtained and the proposition that the Rochester



Minnesota Stake be formed was made known.



2021, the Rochester Minnesota Stake building at 2300 Viola Heights Drive

The original stake boundaries extended as far east as the Sparta Wisconsin Branch to as far west as the Fairmont Minnesota Branch. It also went as far north as the Redwing Minnesota Ward and as far south as Viroqua. From the far southeastern part of the stake to the far western part of the stake, one would have to travel 275 miles plus--almost 5 hours of travel time.

It would be during President Krueger's administration that the stake would be greatly reduced and the units were brought closer together. During the beginning of President Krueger's administration, he saw a need to bring the church meetings closer to the members. He began in earnest looking at units that could be created so that members would not have to travel so far. This was not his first attempt at doing this. When he was the bishop in Kirksville, Missouri during the gas shortages in the 1970s and 1980s, he explained, *I started dependent branches. At the end, we had five dependent branches and three additional buildings.* All of these came out of the original Kirksville Ward.

President Krueger continued, *As a Stake Presidency, we wanted the members to be close travel-wise and spiritually to the church. It was in a sense like President Nelson has said, "Family centered and church supported." Family finance strain was also a consideration. The Spirit spoke to us about helping the church be as close to the members as possible and to support families.*

While stake president, he indicated that all the units that they thought of as they deliberated were created. President Krueger's vision included the possibility of creating other stakes. President Krueger said, *I always hoped that La Crosse would qualify to be a Stake Center. I felt the members in La Crosse wanted a stake there. I did what I could to get it started.* President Krueger would go on and divide the La Crosse Ward into two units to begin the establishment and foundation for a possible future stake. Unfortunately, a number of years later, due to large membership loss in both units, the La Crosse First Ward and the La Crosse Second Branch were combined. He goes on and states, *I hope someday, it will merit a Stake Center.*

On July 24, 2003, there was a 25th reunion for all members of the Rochester wards.

The following list includes all units that are or were a part of the stake at some point since 1996.

1. Albert Lea Minnesota Branch
2. Austin Minnesota Ward
3. Dodge Center Minnesota Branch
4. Fairmont Minnesota Ward
5. Faribault Minnesota Ward
6. Kasson Minnesota Branch
7. La Crosse Wisconsin Ward
8. La Crosse Wisconsin Second Branch
9. Mankato Minnesota Ward
10. Mankato Minnesota Madelia Spanish Dependent Sacrament Program
11. New Ulm Minnesota Branch
12. Onalaska Wisconsin Hmong Branch
13. Prairie du Chien Satellite Sacrament Dependent Program
14. Preston Minnesota Branch
15. Red Wing Minnesota Ward
16. Richland Center Wisconsin Satellite Dependent Branch
17. Rochester Minnesota First Ward
18. Rochester Minnesota Second Ward
19. Rochester Minnesota Third Ward
20. Rochester Minnesota Fourth Ward
21. Rochester Minnesota Fifth Ward
22. Sparta Wisconsin Branch
23. Viroqua Wisconsin Branch
24. Waseca Minnesota Branch
25. Winona Minnesota Branch

Albert Lea Minnesota Branch

Historically, we wish to note that the first branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in the entire state of Minnesota was established in Freeborn County in 1875 by Elder Wulffenstien. After its organization, this early branch disbanded and the saints moved to Utah. (For other historical data, see the Austin Unit in volume one of the Rochester Stake History.)

Given the growing size and the distance covered by the Austin Ward, the decision was made to form the Albert Lea Branch. This occurred on May 25, 1997 with Steve Kurth being sustained as its first branch president. The branch was formed from membership from the Austin Ward, which resulted in the Austin Ward becoming a branch.

Once again, a branch was now located in Freeborn County. The Branch held their first meeting in the Albert Lea Minnesota ice arena on June 1, 1997.



The Albert Lea ice arena, which was used for branch meetings

Of that meeting, Branch Clerk Daniel Sweet recorded in part the following, On this the first day of June, 1997, an historic event marks itself. The first meeting of the Albert Lea Minnesota branch of The Church Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Before the meeting the calling sounds of geese break through the silence of this Sabbath day morn. In a force of then, they fly in pairs, dressing the sky with majestic symbolism. They are a small proton of yet a large whole; as we here today are a tiny part of the whole church family....surrounding our temporary meeting house lie soft green fields and one empty parking lot to the east. Presently the amber rays of the morning sun fall across them, illuminating the yellow petals of the dandelions that cover...I take a seat at the front door of the Albert Lea's Ice Arena...Now all is quiet and one can see that the trees and shrubbery that inundate the grounds give signs to Spring's end as they anticipate full bloom. Generally speaking it is a great day to start anything....Sacrament meeting began promptly with President Kurth conducting. With an exact count of 62 members present we opened with singing, "Come, Come Ye Saints." And although our projection left something to be

desired, faces were smiling and the melody was lifted to the Lord. Brother Possin Sr. offered our invocation with such reverence and thanksgiving that I would not be surprised if Heavenly Father was pleased and smiling on our efforts here today...The presiding members today are Branch President Steven Kurth and his counselors, Jim Possin and Alan Clark; overseeing from the Stake today is Brother Johnson and visiting is Brent Spencer who was responsible for finding us a place to have our meetings. Following the passing of the Sacrament and the bearing of testimonies, Brother Sweet concluded with the following, I must say as the gospel moves forward with smiling faces round the world and right here, I am inspired. Today is a great day to do anything not because of the weather, not because of the glorious gathering just recorded, and not because of the growth this shows in church records, however terrific. But because the Spirit of the Lord was here with us today. After all, what else could one ask for shy of returning to the FATHER?

A new chapel was approved at the cost of \$975,000 to begin construction on or before April 1, 2001. During 2001, the boundary between the Austin Branch and the Albert Lea Branch was found to be closer to Albert Lea than Austin. The boundary was then moved east to be more central between the two branches. In 2001, a new chapel was completed in Albert Lea. In February of 2002, it was dedicated by President Krueger.



Albert Lea Minnesota Branch Building

On October 5, 2003, Steven Kurth was released and Roger Wangsness was sustained as the branch president. In 2006, President Wangsness was released and Jared Barnes Petersen was

sustained as the branch president. On March 8, 2009, Jared Peterson was released and Ed Thomas was sustained as the branch president. At the April, 2009 Rochester Stake Conference, it was announced that on May 3, 2009, the Albert Lea Branch would be moved into the Burnsville Minnesota Stake. As of this writing, this Albert Lea Branch is still in operation and is now part of the Lakeville Minnesota Stake.

Austin Minnesota Ward/Branch/Ward

The unit in Austin, which was organized on January 1, 1957, is still in operation. With the start of this historical account from 1996, Bishop Jeffrey L. Anderson was serving as the bishop of the Austin Ward. It was during this year that the Austin Ward added a third phase to their building. This addition was dedicated on March 24, 1996. When the Albert Lea Branch was created in 1997, Bishop Anderson was released and set apart as the new Austin Branch President. Because of the membership needed from the Austin Ward to establish the Albert Lea Branch, Austin became a branch. On April 18, 1999, Robert V. Flatt was sustained as the Austin branch president. During 2001, the boundary between the Austin and Albert Lea branches was found to be closer to Albert Lea than Austin. The boundary was therefore moved east to be more central between the two branches. In addition, in 2001, the Austin Branch began a Spanish speaking Sacrament meeting which was presided over by Brent Christenson. It was short-lived as attendance was so low. On June 8, 2003, President Flatt was released and Brent L. Christenson was sustained as the branch president. On August 22, 2004, the Austin Branch became a ward. Bishop Christenson was released on November 20, 2005 and Mark Stanley White was sustained as the bishop. On June 9, 2013, Bishop Mark White was released and Richard T. Bremner was sustained as the bishop. On December 4, 2016, Bishop Bremner was released and Brian Peter Grush was sustained as the new bishop and still serving as of this writing.

Dodge Center Minnesota Dependent/Independent Branch

Dodge Center Minnesota Dependent Branch

On April 11, 1999, a dependent unit was created from the Rochester First and Rochester Fourth wards in Dodge Center, Minnesota. In attendance at this first meeting were 43 people. A letter that was sent to members living in the Kasson, Mantorville and Dodge Center areas, read in part, *In an effort to bring the church to the people, the Rochester Fourth Ward...is pleased to announce Sunday Services to be held in Dodge Center. These Sunday services will be an extension of the ...Fourth ward and are being held to reduce the travel time needed to attend church...for those members living in Byron, Kasson, Mantorville, Dodge Center, Claremont, West Concord and the surrounding area....we will be meeting in the cafeteria of the old elementary school in Dodge Center.* With the exception of Fast and Testimony meeting on the first of the

month, all meetings were held in Dodge Center at the school. W. Gerald Mast was called to be the leader of the Dodge Center dependent services while Bishop Brian J. Cragun of the Rochester Fourth Ward provided oversight under his mantle of Bishop.



Dodge Center elementary school, where meetings were held from 1999-2003

President Foote recalls that the building was an *old elementary school*. Then someone purchased it and rented the classrooms to various organizations, mainly non-profit social service groups. One large classroom was partitioned off into a chapel, branch president office, clerk's office, Relief Society room and Young Women room. Another classroom down the hall was for the Primary.

Gerald Mast spoke on the trial of faith for the dependent branch, the growth of the satellite unit from its start in April and of the obstacles that had been overcome. He states, as recorded in the 1999 Rochester Stake History, *When we met together last, three weeks ago, I had been notified by the new landlord just before church that we needed to vacate the cafeteria area by October 1st and had asked you all to remember the satellite unit in your prayers. I investigated the alternatives with the Bishop, but they didn't look good. The last alternative was to go back to Rochester. No one wanted to do this. It was a dilemma; how do you recreate something out of nothing? I was absolutely convinced that the Lord didn't want us to fail. I prayed many times that week about what to do. There was no answer. I waited for a miracle. Nothing happened. A decision had to be made by Sunday 26 of September. Early that morning I met with the Bishop and told him that we were at the end of the line, and I didn't know what to do but come back to Rochester. We had just begun to discuss the physical move when there was a knock at the door. President Ferrara had just arrived and had felt impressed to knock. We invited him in and I explained where the satellite stood and within about 10 seconds the tide had turned. Now that we were a prospective branch, President Ferrara felt that money would be available. The Stake*

would take care of us. Things started happening by that evening. By Tuesday, a long term lease had been signed for these rooms and another classroom and modifications arranged. So here we are. This is a clear and positive indication that the Lord wants us to be together, here in these rooms, in Dodge Center.

We are so blessed to have the other side of this faith promoting story as told by President Ferrara, wherein he relates, *I have the opportunity on Sundays without other meetings to consult with Heavenly Father about which unit that I work with to visit. I had been planning to visit a unit outside of the Rochester area that Sunday...but as I prayed and pondered and reflected about it, I came to feel better and better about visiting with Bishop Cragun. When I arrived, the people in the foyer said that Bishop Cragun was having a personal visit, so I waited, but I got fidgety and began to feel uncomfortable about waiting. This was untypical of my normal behavior. I asked them whom he was talking to. They said it was Brother Mast. I decided to wait, but I felt uncomfortable with that decision. When I knocked on the door and interrupted, I realized at the time that it was a good thing that I was there. There were some questions on Brother Mast's mind and on Bishop Cragun's mind that had weighed very heavily on Brother Mast. What I felt in that meeting that morning was how much Brother Mast loves you and his tremendous concern for you here and how his concerns over the possibility that you could not continue because of the changes that were happening with the building caused him concern and pain. As we talked about it, I felt his love and desire to continue, to become a branch out here.*

Dodge Center Minnesota Independent Branch (See also Kasson Branch)

On October 24, 1999, the Rochester Fourth Ward and the Rochester First Ward were divided to create the Dodge Center Branch. As a result, the Rochester Fourth Ward became a branch. During the organizing of the Dodge Center Branch, 37 members were present with additional members from the Stake leadership and additional Rochester Fourth Ward leadership. President Spackman organized the Dodge Center Branch on behalf of President Krueger who was not able to attend.

He read a letter to the congregation from the First Presidency which stated, *Dear President Krueger, consideration has been given to the recommendation to realign the boundaries of the Rochester First and Rochester Fourth Wards to create the Dodge Center Branch, and to change the status of the Rochester Fourth Ward to a Branch. Approval is granted and you are authorized to proceed.* President Spackman went on to say that this was *signed by Gordon B. Hinckley, Thomas S. Monson and James E. Faust, the First Presidency and so I come also representing the Presidency of the Church today.*

As recorded in the 1999 Rochester Minnesota Stake History, President Spackman requested the congregation's sustaining vote for the following, *Creation of the Dodge Center Branch. Gerald*

Mast as Branch President; Garrett Winn as first counselor in the branch presidency, Phil Llacuna as second counselor in the branch presidency, Mat Skidum as the executive secretary and clerk, and Max Aigner as Elders Quorum President. You are now an organized branch of the church. I don't know if it feels any different to you, but I know it does to President Mast and I think it probably does to Bishop Cragun as well. President Spackman then taught about the concept of a branch. He stated, *We all know what a branch is that sticks out on a tree. It's a limb. Jacob 7 gives the allegory of the Olive Tree. It talks about taking branches off the main tree and planting them out in the nethermost parts of the Lord's vineyard. Dodge Center is not the nethermost part of the Lord's vineyard; nevertheless, a branch has been planted here and we expect that branch will put down even stronger roots than you currently have and that it will grow.*

President W. Gerry Mast would serve in that capacity until May 11, 2003, at which time he was released. Of this event, it was recorded that President Krueger summarized, *Here's another historical time in the branch. We're so thankful to President Mast for his service. He was the founder of the branch. We're so thankful for all he has done . . . We extended a call after careful consideration and prayer. We always consider carefully every person in the branch and then kneel in prayer to confirm that this is the man the Lord would have in this calling.* It was then that President Krueger asked for a sustaining vote for Steven D. Jacoby as the branch president.

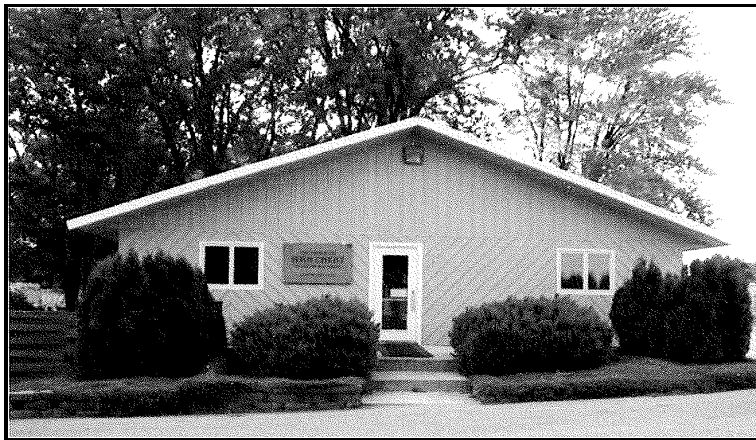
From the time of its creation, the Dodge Center Branch met in the Dodge Center Community Center. In October of 2004, approval was given to purchase land for a new building. On March 27, 2005, President Jacoby was released and Brother Clifford O. Midtovne was sustained as the branch president. In December of 2006, the Stake received news that property had been purchased in Kasson, Minnesota for a future building for the Dodge Center Branch. Because the Community Center continued to need major repairs and upkeep (which the church could not do in this rented building), it became less and less desirable for church meetings; however, there was not enough membership to move ahead with building.

During Stake Conference in 2009, members of the Stake were asked to fast for the Dodge Center Branch so that it would grow and meet the requirements for a new building. These opportunities to fast were held in May and September of 2009. In June of 2009, the Stake Presidency (consisting of President Foote, Cragun and Haddock) sponsored a bus tour and picnic for the members of the Dodge Center Branch to help them realize what a new building could mean. The members rode the bus to Albert Lea to tour the Albert Lea Branch building as it was similar to the one that would be built in Kasson. Of this event, the Stake History records *On the morning of June 13th, we loaded on a very nice coach bus and traveled to Albert Lea. President Cragun provided fun games (Bingo), songs and snacks for the trip. In Albert Lea, we were met at their Branch Chapel by President Thomas (Branch President) and several members of the Albert Lea Branch. They gave us a tour of their beautiful chapel. The members of the Dodge Center*

Branch were awestruck with the beauty and the spirit. The members of the Albert Lea Branch bore heart-felt testimonies of the significance of and blessing of having a beautiful chapel to worship the Lord in each week.

We then got back on the bus and traveled to Kasson to the property owned by the Church where the new chapel for the Dodge Center Branch could be built. Brother Barlow, the high councilor for the Dodge Center Branch, met us there where he had prepared a very nice barbecue picnic lunch. Our Stake President, President Foote, offered a prayer calling upon the blessings of the Lord for the members of the Dodge Center Branch in their efforts to grow the branch and qualify for a new building and also a blessing for their friends, neighbors and leaders in the surrounding communities. President Midtovne had placed stakes in the lawn so that we could see where the church (building) would be and its size. There was also a large framed picture of the Kasson building site with a photo of the Albert Lea Branch building which had been “photoshopped” to show us what it would look like. Each family received a small framed photo of this to take home with us to remind and inspire us of what could be. We then loaded on the bus and traveled back to the Dodge Center Branch building in the old elementary school (Community Center) to see the contrast. It was a wonderful day with the saints from the Dodge Center Branch.

In 2010, membership requirements still had not been met to build the new building; however, an existing building was located and renovated in the city of Kasson, Minnesota where the members could meet. The building was an old real estate office and was very small, but in much better condition than the building in Dodge Center.



Kasson Branch building, the real estate office where members met

On August 1, 2010, President Foote dedicated the new Kasson Branch building:

Our Dear Father in Heaven, we are gathered together on this Holy Sabbath Day, in fasting and prayer, as members of the Dodge Center Branch, for the first time in this new location, to worship thee. We express our great love and gratitude to Thee for the blessing of worshipping in this building, in Kasson, surrounded by peace and beauty. We recognize Thy hand in the recent

events that have made this possible including softening the hearts of the owners and the granting of permits by the city of Kasson. By the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood, I dedicate and consecrate this space, place and location in which we meet unto Thee.

We pray that Thou would watch over and protect this building in which we meet, all of its contents, the people that meet within its walls and the grounds upon which it sits from the natural elements and from the evils of man that all might be safely preserved while Thy saints occupy this place. We assign this place as a gathering space for the members of the Dodge Center Branch. We pray that this might be a sacred space, a place of prayer, a place for feasting upon the scriptures, a place for gospel instruction in which we teach one another words of wisdom, a place for administration of Thy Holy ordinance of the Sacrament, a place for confirmation and Priesthood conferral, a place dedicated to Thy Holy Purposes to bring about Thy eternal work and glory. We dedicate this place as a place of worship where heartfelt testimonies of Thee and Thy Son are borne through the spoken word and music, a place where all within these walls are drawn closer to Thee.

We pray that all that enter in will feel of Thy Holy Spirit and that their faith in Christ might be strengthened. We dedicate this place as a place of instruction where the true principles of the Gospel and the pure doctrine are taught plainly and clearly by the power and gift of the Holy Ghost that all that hear might understand the plan of happiness, salvation and redemption and the path that leads to exaltation and eternal life. We dedicate this place as a place of reconciliation between the members and God and with each other, a place for confession of sin, repentance and forgiveness of those who have sinned and forgiveness by those who have been wounded. We pray that this place will be a sanctuary and refuge from the wickedness of the world. We pray that Thy Saints will find peace and rest within these walls and will emerge from them with great spiritual power and strength to influence this and surrounding communities for good. We bless this place as a home for the Saints, a gathering place to enjoy fellowship and to be renewed and refreshed. We pray that this place and all that takes place within its walls and the members of the Dodge Center Branch will be a beacon to spread the light of the gospel throughout Kasson and all the surrounding communities of Byron, Dodge Center, Hayfield, Claremont, West Concord and others. We pray that the members, blessed with the light and knowledge of the Gospel, will invite all to come unto Christ that they will be able to find Thy sons and daughters who are prepared to receive the Gospel of Christ and draw them to this place.

We pray for the full-time missionaries who are assigned to work here with the members, that they will be pure and holy and teach with the great power of the Holy Ghost unto conversion. We pray that the Branch will grow in spiritual power and strength and also in membership that we might someday soon qualify for a building that we can dedicate unto Thee for Thy work and Thy glory. We pray that this place will be a place of reverence where we demonstrate our deep respect and love for Thee and Thy son and remember our countless blessings and the sacrifices

made for us by those who have gone before us and especially remember the atoning sacrifice of Thy Son and our Savior and Redeemer, Jesus Christ. We pray that this will be a place of love, joy, happiness and selfless service to one another. We love Thee Father. We dedicate not only this new meeting place to Thee, but we dedicate our lives to Thee. We recognize our dependence upon Thee. We recognize that all that we enjoy and love has come from Thee. We love Thy Son and acknowledge His love for us as our Savior and Redeemer. We give thanks to Thee for the Plan of Salvation, that we might all return back home to live forever in Thy presence. We express this love and dedication to Thee in the name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Soon after the move to the new building in Kasson and its dedication, the Dodge Center Branch received approval from the First Presidency to name it the Kasson Branch since the building now resides in the City of Kasson. (See Kasson Branch for continuation of the history of this unit.)

Fairmont Minnesota Branch

The Fairmont Branch, which was organized on November 30, 1952, is still in operation. In 1996, Jonathan D. Wilcox was sustained as the branch president, replacing Michael Lundgreen. President Wilcox would be later released and Dennis Larson would serve as the branch president. In 2000, Jeffrey P. Greene was sustained as the branch president. On October 12, 2003, Joseph Andrew Loughmiller was sustained as the branch president.

At the April 2009 Rochester Stake Conference, it was announced that on May 3, the Fairmont Branch would become part of the Burnsville Minnesota Stake. As of this writing, this branch is still in operation and now is part of the Lakeville Minnesota Stake.



Fairmont Branch Chapel

Faribault Minnesota Branch

The Faribault Branch, which was organized on January 1, 1970, is still in operation. Christopher McGahan was branch president until April 28, 1996 when Jonathan D. Wilcox was sustained as the branch president. On April 28, 1996, the Faribault Branch was moved from the Rochester Minnesota Stake into the Burnsville Minnesota Stake. As of this writing, the Faribault Branch is now a ward and is part of the Lakeville Minnesota Stake.

Kasson Minnesota Branch

The name of the Dodge Center Branch was changed when the meeting place was moved to Kasson. This change occurred on November 28, 2010 at which time Cliff Midtovne was released as branch president and Andrew L. Demetropoulos was sustained as the branch president. On March, 13, 2011, the Kasson Branch held its branch conference with President Foote presiding. At the conference, President Foote reminded the branch members that the branch was organized by President Krueger in 1999. They were working on the design of the new building and if tithing worthiness improved by the end of 2011, they would seek approval to build in 2012.

The branch members worked hard to qualify by giving personal invitations for Sacrament meeting attendance and teaching and encouraging the payment of tithes and offerings. The blessing of their tithes and offerings was the groundbreaking for the new building which occurred on May 18, 2012. President Foote dedicated the new building on January 13, 2013. Richard Reed Pike was sustained as the branch president on May 26, 2013.



2013, groundbreaking for the Kasson Branch building: President Andrew Demetropoulos, Chris Firl, Cliff Midtovne, President Rob Foote, Tristen Pike and Rick Pike



Creda and Rick Pike



Brother Jones, children and President Foote



January 13, 2012, the Kasson Branch building



President Haddock, President Foote, President Cragun and Grant Wheeler in front of the Kasson Minnesota Chapel

The Dedicatory Prayer for the new Kasson building was given by President Robert L. Foote on Sunday, January 13, 2013.

Our Eternal Father who art in Heaven, we bow reverently before Thee on this Thy Sabbath day in preparation for the dedication of this newly constructed Chapel. Acting in the authority of the Melchizedek Priesthood and in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we consecrate and dedicate unto Thee and unto Thy Son, this, the Kasson Branch Chapel of the Rochester Minnesota Stake of Zion. We pray that the presence of Thy Holy Spirit may be felt by all who enter herein to participate in prayer, to sing hymns of praise to Thee and Thy Son, to receive the ordinances of salvation including baptism, the Gift of the Holy Ghost and the Sacrament, to hear and bear testimony of the Atonement of Christ, to sustain those who are called to serve, and to teach and to learn of the peace, joy and comfort of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

We pray that this Chapel will be a welcoming place for friendship and fellowship and will serve as a refuge from the storm of worldly influences and wickedness. We pray that all who enter herein will return to their homes with strengthened faith in Thy Son, Jesus Christ. We plead with Thee that their lamps of testimony will be filled to overflowing with the oil of conversion and conviction as they teach, learn, discuss and perform the purifying principles and practices of the Gospel. May all the faithful members of this branch be blessed with the power to keep the sacred covenants they have made with Thee and press forward with a steadfastness in Christ, enduring in faith during their time in mortality. Bless the parents in their efforts to fulfill their responsibilities to their children. Bless the children and youth to be true to the faith of their parents.

We dedicate the grounds on which this Chapel stands, with the vegetation that will grow thereon. We dedicate the structure from the footings to the steeple. We dedicate the baptismal font wherein faith in Thy Son, Jesus Christ, will be expressed. We dedicate the facilities used for the ordinance of the Sacrament. We dedicate the class rooms, the library, the serving area, and the offices which will be used for instruction, record keeping, finances, confession, forgiveness, consoling, counseling, benevolence, and reconciliation. We dedicate every other facility belonging to this Chapel to Thee and to Thy Holy Purposes. May this Chapel stand securely against the storms of nature. May no unhallowed hand deface or desecrate it in any way. May all who serve and worship and learn herein do so with singleness of purpose, with love for Thee and for Thy Beloved Son. Father, this structure has been made possible by the faithful tithe payers of this branch and the Stake and the Church throughout the world. Wherever they may be, reward their faith by opening the windows of heaven and pouring out blessings abundantly upon them.

May Thy watch care be over them and may Thy prospering hand direct them as they walk in faithfulness before Thee. Bless Thy cause and kingdom that it shall move forward in this area in fulfillment of Thy word and promise. Bless this Chapel and the members of this Branch that they will be a beacon of light in this part of Thy vineyard and will be a magnet to attract Thy sons and

daughters who have been prepared to receive the restored Gospel in its fullness. Bless the messengers of eternal truth who go out into the world from this Kasson Branch that their testimonies may be certain and unwavering, that they may be led to those who will accept the truths of the eternal Gospel. We thank Thee for the nation and state in which this Chapel stands. We thank Thee for the privilege of worshipping Thee according to the dictates of our conscience, and pray that we may forever enjoy the great blessings of freedom of assembly, freedom of speech, and freedom of worship. With gratitude and with a spirit of prayer in our hearts, we offer our thanks, and our petitions for Thy blessings as Thy faithful sons and daughters in the name of the Redeemer of the world, even the Lord Jesus Christ, Amen.



Kasson Minnesota Branch building

President Demetropulos was released as branch president on May 26, 2013 and Richard Reed Pike was sustained. On November 13, 2016, boundaries were changed for the Rochester Third Ward, Rochester Fourth Ward and Kasson Branch. Several families living in the Rochester Fifth Ward became members of the Kasson Branch beginning January 1, 2017. On May 28, 2017, President Pike was released and Brent Larson sustained. He served until February 16, 2020. On February 23, 2020, Jared Ross was sustained as the branch president. The COVID-19 pandemic closed worship services on March 22, 2020. Members were asked to study the gospel and partake of the sacrament in their homes. On October 11, 2020, the branch held its first virtual sacrament meeting and on October 25, they returned to worship together in the chapel. However, they were only able to meet twice and had to return to virtual meetings to keep everyone safe. On February 14, 2021, the branch was scheduled to meet again in person but poor weather and driving conditions prevented that. They reunited on February 21st.

La Crosse Wisconsin Ward/First Ward/Ward

The La Crosse Ward chapel is not actually in the city of La Crosse but in Onalaska, a city north of La Crosse. Although the building is in Onalaska, the ward name continues to be called La Crosse, the larger of the two cities. Often people ask why we built the church in Onalaska. The first chapel was in La Crosse; the membership outgrew the building and the second chapel was built in Onalaska. The following story sheds light on the current location.

For years, the members in La Crosse would meet at various places including members' homes, rooms above taverns, meeting halls, dance arenas, the YMCA and eventually an old Church of Christ building which the church bought. When we say old it was, it was built in the late 1800s. Time had come to build a new chapel. After much fasting and prayer, the hunt for property began. One failed attempt after another happened. Either the Church Building Committee would not approve the land, the land just did not have utility services or other issues factored in. Land was looked at in La Crosse and even across the river in La Crescent, Minnesota. All attempts failed for one reason or another. In the spring of 1969, Jake Zirbes first moved here from Utah, and worked as the city engineer for La Crosse, Wisconsin. Later, he became the city engineer for Onalaska, Wisconsin. During his lunch hours, Brother Zirbes liked to go for walks. On one of those walks, he felt inspired to walk to the north. He saw a spacious field and inquired about it. It eventually became the site for the chapel. Brother Zirbes moved shortly after the property was purchased. The current site for the building in Onalaska was on the very edge of town. Now it stands in the middle of the town of Onalaska. The members at that time clearly felt that the Lord's hand was involved in picking this site and with this site came a large piece of property that has yet to be fully developed to its potential.



The La Crosse Wisconsin Ward building

Douglas Oba was the bishop until July 21, 1996 when Arthur Peek was sustained as the bishop. That day, Brother Peek, a member of the La Crosse Ward who had been serving as the branch president in the Winona Branch for the past three years, was released as the branch president. He then drove to the La Crosse Ward and sat in the back of the chapel. The La Crosse sacrament meeting had already started. President Krueger arrived and went up to the stand to preside over the meeting. For 45 minutes, Brother Peek had no calling. When President Krueger conducted the releases and sustained Brother Peek as bishop with Chester Hilton as first counselor and Lynn Burbach as second counselor, many of those in attendance started looking around to find out who he was.

One interesting account of how the Lord works is from Bishop Oba. He related that it was necessary for him to release Becky Mangan as Relief Society president as the family was moving to Utah. After several weeks of prayerful consideration and no inspiration as to whom the new president should be, he received inspiration and confirmation to reorganize the Relief Society, Primary and Young Women presidencies. This was done on Sunday, March 17, 1996. By the time a new bishopric was sustained four months later, these presidencies had had the time to feel comfortable and effective in their callings.

On January 31, 1999, under the direction of President Krueger, the La Crosse Ward was divided into two units, the La Crosse First Ward with Arthur Peek as the bishop of the La Crosse Second Branch with Jacque Durnford as the branch president. Bishop Peek was released on September 30, 2001 and Ronald W. Knapmiller was sustained as the bishop of the La Crosse First Ward. In 2003, the boundaries for the ward and branch were realigned with all the ward members living on the Minnesota being moved into the La Crosse Second Branch. There were still sufficient numbers to remain a ward. Of this event, Bishop Knapmiller stated, *I am grateful for President Krueger and know these decisions take much thought and prayer, not to be taken lightly.* Jaydee Dale, a young woman from the La Crosse ward simply stated, *I'm going to miss my friends from Minnesota.*

During the first quarter of 2006, many building upgrades and changes occurred including the removal of all asbestos materials, a complete remodel of the chapel, addition of padded pews, installation of carpeting throughout the entire building, installation of new overflow folding doors, installation of elevator for access to the rostrum and handicapped outer doors, removal of hall coat racks, painting of the entire interior, construction changes to the shower room, resealing of the parking lot, installation of pole parking lot lights and replacement of the roof. In addition, the building acoustics and appearance were enhanced with the addition of fabric wall panels.

On July 29, 2007, under the direction of President Thomas Spackman, the La Crosse First Ward and the La Crosse Second Branch were combined into the La Crosse Ward. With this, Bishop Knapmiller was released and Steven Sorenson was sustained as the bishop. The name La Crosse First Ward was changed back to the La Crosse Ward. Bishop Sorenson would serve until July 10, 2011 at which time Todd Baker was sustained as bishop. Bishop Baker had the distinction of serving as the last branch president of the La Crosse Second Branch before the two units were combined.

With Bishop Baker's release, Todd Lawson Ebbert was sustained as the bishop. As of the writing of this history, Bishop Ebbert currently serves as the La Crosse Ward bishop.

La Crosse Wisconsin Second Branch

On January 31, 1999, the La Crosse Second Branch was created with Jacque Durnford as its first branch president. The Branch boundaries included all the members of the La Crosse Ward who were living in the Wisconsin area south of the La Crosse River as its north boundary with the east boundary as the Sparta Branch and the south boundary as the Viroqua Branch. The west boundary was the Mississippi River. In 2002, President Durnford was released and Richard Mikat was sustained. On January 15, 2003, with President Krueger presiding, it was announced that the La Crosse First Ward members living in the town of La Crescent, Minnesota and other Minnesota boundaries areas would become part of the La Crosse Second Branch and should start attending the La Crosse Second Branch meetings. In 2005, President Mikat was released and B Leon Scott Madeux was sustained as the branch president. On April 22, 2007, President Madeux was released and Matthew Baker was sustained as branch president.

Of this event, Brother Baker relates, My family and I moved into the branch in early June 2004. I had just completed my commitment to the Army and was coming to La Crosse to do a one-year fellowship in Minimally Invasive/Bariatric Surgery at Gundersen. We lived on the south side of La Crosse so geographically belonged to the branch. Rick Mikat was branch president at the time. We enjoyed the small, intimate feeling that comes with a small branch. My wife served with Raquel Petree in the Young Women program for a time, mostly working with the Robinson girls, since they were the only active YW at the time. Just a few months after starting my fellowship I was offered a job to stay on as staff at Gundersen. While I always thought I'd end up back in Utah, jobs there were not quite what I was looking for and we eventually accepted the offer and started looking for a house to buy. I was called to be a Primary teacher for a short time until Brother Mikat was released and Leon Madeux was called to replace him as branch president. I was called to be his first counselor and John Colton was called as second counselor. I enjoyed working with these good brethren. Leon was all about the members and their needs, and didn't worry so much about the meetings. He would often leave bishopric meeting, PEC or ward council

meetings early to go pick up members so they could attend church. These were usually less active or just people that didn't have cars.

Eventually he took a new job in the Twin Cities and moved his family up there. President Spackman, our stake president at the time, called me to be the new branch president in the spring of 2007. I requested John Colton as my first counselor and Lynn Burbach as my second counselor, and they were called. I remember not long after being sustained, Cory, the 8 year old grandson of the Michael's, died from cancer. That was the first funeral I had to organize and conduct. I was quite nervous as I had never done this before and the stakes seemed to be higher because it was a child. It was a very difficult time for the branch. A short three months after being sustained as branch president, the branch was dissolved and rolled up into the ward, creating a single, larger ward in La Crosse in the summer of 2007. The ward had had a lot of key families move out the previous few months and the ward was struggling to fill positions without over-taxing the faithful members. Steve Sorensen was called as the bishop, replacing Ron Knapmiller, and I was called as first counselor with Jacque Durnford as second counselor. Thus, ended my short tenure as branch president. I had mixed emotions about the whole change. I really enjoyed the closeness we shared as a branch and worried we might lose some of that in a bigger ward. I didn't really know that many members of the ward that well, so there was the fear of the unknown I suppose. But I was excited about combining the youth since the branch youth program was so anemic in numbers and my kids were coming up on that age soon. I was hopeful that a more robust youth program would be better for youth engagement and provide a more rich experience for them.

In 2007, the two units were combined back into one due to the loss of extensive membership, (close to fifty families in just a few months) which devastated both units. (See La Crosse Wisconsin Ward/First Ward/Ward history dated July 29, 2007.)

Mankato Minnesota Ward

The Mankato unit, which was organized on January 1, 1970, is still in operation. The reconstruction of the Mankato meetinghouse was ready for the substantial completion inspection by July 1, 1996. The members moved out of the building during the final construction and met for sacrament service which was held in the Loyola facility for six months. After that, they met in the Seventh-day Adventist Church. After two busy weeks by the Ward members cleaning, moving and organizing, the newly redone meetinghouse was ready for the first meeting which was held on Sunday, August 18, 1996.

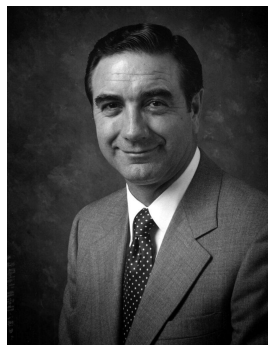
The 1.2 million dollar Mankato renovation and addition was dedicated on September 8, 1996. The presiding authority at the dedication was Elder J. Richard Clark of the Seventy. In President Krueger's talk, he focused on the following three topics: search after the word of God, keep the commandments and enlarge our memories and preserve our memories by writing in our

journals. Elder Clark focused on the three banners that differentiate God’s chosen people: they worship the true and living God, they set aside one day in seven to worship God and they return one tenth of all they earn to the Lord.



Mankato Minnesota Ward building

The following is the dedicatory prayer by Elder J. Richard Clark for the Mankato Ward building.



Elder J. Richard Clark

Our Heavenly Father, in the name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, and through the power and the authority of the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood which I bear, representing this congregation and the authorities of the Church, we present before Thee, this house, to dedicate it, because it is now finished and occupied, but more than anything else, Heavenly Father, we want to consecrate it to Thee for the privilege and opportunity of worshiping in Thy name. May we consecrate it through our faith. May we consecrate it through our obedience to the commandments. That we may be able to demonstrate that we have made a covenant with Thee, and that we are honest in keeping our covenants. That we may show our love for Thee, knowing that Thou hast made many promises for those who are true and faithful to those covenants.

We pray that from this pulpit we'll be taught the restored Gospel of Jesus Christ, in its purity, with the power of the Spirit, so that those who come here to worship Thee may be taught, and may be fulfilled and enriched through the great doctrines of the Church. We pray that those who preside in representing the people in an administrative capacity may be inspired of Thee, that the love of Thee and for the people may be manifest in their service and dedication in blessing and nurturing the lives of the people. We pray that all the members of this Ward, now and in the future, will take pride in their relationships in establishing a standard of moral purity, of doctrinal purity, of dedication to Thee, so that it may be a standard for all members of the Stake to follow. We pray that those who teach the principles of the gospel to our precious children and to all members of the Church may be able to teach and testify so that each one may be edified who comes to the classes.

We pray that Thou wilt bless this building that it may be protected from vandalism and from the forces of nature. That when the weather is inclement, it may be a haven of warmth and friendliness and cordiality. That those who carry burdens of despair in their hearts and on their shoulders, who come here, may feel the warmth and love of the membership of this Ward, and none will leave this building a stranger. That they may know that herein resides Thy Holy Spirit. We pray that the people in this community may come to realize that this building is a symbol of a dedicated people who are serious and intense in their desires in righteousness. From this building may be called many who will go into the mission field and represent the restored gospel. And those who come here to worship may renew their covenants and to verify and witness before all present that they are not ashamed to take upon them the name of Thy Son Jesus Christ that we promise to keep his commandments and to be a witness at all places and in all times so that in keeping the commandments we will honor Him and honor Thee.

Father, we thank Thee for the prosperity that has made this building possible. We thank thee for the realization that we have a living prophet to whom we can look for guidance and direction and example. Please bless us all today that we may review our lives, that we may ask ourselves if we are doing all that we can and all that's expected of us so that we'll be honest and true to

our covenants. We are so grateful for so many things and we express the feelings of our heart as we dedicate this building unto Thee. By the power of the Holy Priesthood we rebuke the evil one and all who would try to destroy the faith of those who reside in this Ward and who come here for religious worship. Help us to revere Thee. Help us to have reverence for this house. Helps us to learn how to worship and how when we come into this chapel that we will control the conversation and distracting influences of any kind so that when we come here to worship, we may feel Thy Spirit to be with us. That we may recognize and appreciate the music that is being played, to help us prepare for a worship experience as we come to this chapel. Now we dedicate it to Thee that it may be used for holy purposes and perform its functions to prepare a righteous people, a people who are pure in heart, who are committed and diligent in service unto Thee, so that there may be a people prepared to receive Thy Son upon his return. These blessings we pray for and expressions of our appreciation as we dedicate these buildings to fulfill these ends and desires in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and through the authority of the Holy Melchizedek Priesthood. Amen.

Bishop Ralph Call served until December 1, 1996 and Mark Adkins was sustained as the bishop. Bishop Adkins was released in 1999 and Marshall Madsen sustained as the bishop. The Mankato Ward was transferred from the Rochester Minnesota Stake to the Burnsville Minnesota Stake at a special Sacrament meeting held on October 10, 1999. As of this writing, the Mankato Ward is still in operation and is part of the Lakeville Minnesota Stake.

Mankato Minnesota-Madelia Spanish Dependent Sacrament Program

It was on December 1, 1996 that the Mankato Ward developed a Spanish dependent sacrament program in Madelia Minnesota. Upon the Stake President's approval, the Spanish membership in the area of Madelia was organized and met in the Spanish speaking missionaries' apartment. Madelia was over 25 miles from Mankato and attendance was limited due to the distance.

Brent Sauser recorded the following in the 1996 Rochester Minnesota Stake History: *We had our first meeting at Madelia today (December 1, 1996). Present were five adult sister investigators, one adult brother investigator, Brother Carolan and his daughter Athena, the six members of the Sauser family, Sister Castro, and Elder Magadan and Elder Peterson, totaling 23. It was a very spiritual meeting. After the meeting, the following were present during Brother Carolan's dedicatory prayer: the Sauser family, Athena Carolan and the two Elders. Everyone present felt the great outpouring of the Spirit. We all felt very grateful to be part of such a historic beginning.* It is recorded in the 1997 Rochester Stake history that Madelia is supported by the Mankato Ward and that *the Spanish Sacrament meetings are still being held in Madelia every other week. Membership is strong, and the saints are grateful for the blessing of worshiping in their native language.*

The dependent sacrament unit continued to meet for a few weeks in the missionaries' apartment when they decided to look for a building for their meeting. After pondering and praying, the stake presidency felt that it would be better to meet in St. James, a nearby city. A building search began. However, after more pondering and consideration, it was felt that those attending the Madelia program should return to meet with the saints in Mankato. Currently, a large Spanish-member population attends the Mankato Ward. They have two sets of Spanish speaking missionaries that provide translation for the Spanish-speaking members. Because of the large Spanish-speaking population, on April 27, 2014 a Spanish-speaking unit was created north of Mankato in the Lakeville area which is in the Lakeville Minnesota Stake.

New Ulm Minnesota Branch

The New Ulm Branch was formed on June 29, 1997 with membership from the Mankato Ward. Richard Bensen was sustained as its first branch president. President Krueger in his talk stated, *It's a big day for us. We have approval from the First Presidency to create a New Ulm Branch today. Since I became Stake President, we've created the Preston Branch. We thought there would be 23 people attending, but their average attendance has been 43. We created a Fourth Ward, and when the Third and Fourth Ward split, we got 25 to 35 more people attending. This month we created the Albert Lea Branch. We thought there would be 40 people, but they have averaged a little over 70. Now I understand that the New Ulm Branch should have been established 20 years ago and so this is a little overdue, and we understand that this will be a great blessing to them and for the community.* On April 26, 1999, President Richard Benson was released and Keith Johnson was sustained as the branch president. The New Ulm Branch was eventually transferred to the Burnsville Minnesota Stake at a special sacrament meeting held on October 10, 1999. The New Ulm Minnesota Branch continued until February of 2005 when it was determined it would be better if they returned to the membership of the Mankato Ward. As of this writing, there is no longer a branch in New Ulm, Minnesota.

Onalaska (Hmong) Wisconsin Branch

President Neal A. Taylor served as the branch president of the Onalaska Hmong Branch from its creation on September 22, 1989 until its closure. It was organized under the direction of then President Richard A. Robb. On August 23, 1997, under President Krueger, the Onalaska Hmong Branch was discontinued and the members were transferred to the La Crosse Ward. A series of events and lack of Hmong leadership from its members led to the closing of the branch.

Of the closing of the Onalaska Hmong Branch, President Neal Taylor writes, *"[In 1997], the Onalaska Hmong Branch was merged with the La Crosse Ward. It would be a few years later when the La Crosse Ward was divided into the La Crosse First Ward and the La Crosse Second Branch. There were not enough Melchizedek Priesthood holders to create two full wards. The Hmong members attended the units where they lived.* President Taylor goes on to say, *Presently,*

there is no Onalaska Hmong Branch, no La Crosse Second Branch, no Hmong members attending the La Crosse Ward. The Onalaska Hmong Branch is only a faded memory of a few of the "Old" timers of the La Crosse Ward. The majority of the La Crosse Ward members have no idea that the Onalaska Hmong Branch ever existed. So why was the Onalaska Hmong Branch closed?

Of this President Taylor reflects, "The Hmong Branch was essentially doomed when a gang related shooting occurred in the parking lot of the church in Onalaska. This occurred after one of the most successful activities the Branch ever held. A youth dance was sponsored by the youth of the Hmong Branch for the Hmong youth for the La Crosse Hmong community. Around 200 youth and adults had been in attendance including Hmong parents as chaperons. The Onalaska Police were notified of the activity and agreed to patrol the area. The shooting occurred after the dance was over. A few of us were in the building cleaning up. We heard shots in the parking lot and went outside just as a car was speeding away. Another car was still in the parking lot. Several shots had been fired into the windows of the car. People were in both the front and the back seat. Miraculously, none of the passengers received any injuries from the bullets or the broken glass. The shooting car that sped away was apprehended shortly thereafter by the police. The cars involved were from two rival street gangs that started in the Twin Cities. Naturally, this was headline news. The event was carried by the La Crosse news media for several days. Even the Church Headquarters called to talk to me (Neal Taylor) about the incident. The Mormon Church became known as the "gang church" among the Hmong community. The Hmong Branch never recovered and attendance gradually diminished. Stake missionaries were not replaced when their time was up. Full time Hmong missionaries had little success. I think this was a major factor in the decision to discontinue the Hmong branch.

There were other reasons the branch was closed. The branch was mainly dependent on stake missionaries serving in leadership and teaching positions. The majority of the membership was women and children as most of the husbands and fathers had been killed in the Vietnam War. President Krueger related, *President Nelson, in an area meeting with the stake presidents, talked about not having division in the wards. There was no Hmong leadership in the branch. The branch merged with the La Crosse Ward.*

Although it eventually closed, the Hmong Branch brought blessings to the living and the dead. One of those who attended the branch was Susan Yang. As a child, she attended church on her own. She later graduated from college and was sealed in the St. Paul Temple to a returned missionary. Her husband became the bishop of the Twin City Hmong branch. Additionally, two Chicago Temple trips were made with both the Onalaska Hmong Branch members and the St. Paul Hmong Branch members. These were the first Hmong saints to have the temple ceremony in the Hmong language. The translations had been delivered to the Chicago Temple just a few

days before. Many widows gathered family history to bring to the temple so those ordinances could be performed for them and their family.

Prairie du Chien Wisconsin Satellite Sacrament Meeting Group

On December 9, 1998, a small satellite program was started in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin. In December, Brother Timothy Fitzner was sustained as a satellite Sacrament meeting leader. Commenting about the satellite branch at a Rochester meeting in the stake, President Krueger stated that *“we have a satellite in Prairie du Chien from the Viroqua Branch. It’s a family unit with two or three families who live 45 miles away from the (Viroqua) Chapel. They have the most powerful music in the stake – a CD player with speakers. They said that they feel like they have their Sundays back . . . We’re trying to bring the Church closer to the members.”*

According to the Rochester 1999 stake history, the result was that the fold came from around Prairie du Chien, across from Iowa and also from the Madison Stake near there . . . It is working very well. The supplies come from our Viroqua Branch and they are counted right in with our Viroqua folks in the records. They come up to Viroqua on Wednesday night for seminary and other meetings and so are not left out of anything.

In 2001, the Prairie du Chien satellite of the Viroqua Branch became part of the Madison Wisconsin Stake. Brother Timothy Fitzner provided the following: *We were changed to the Madison Stake on May 20, 2001 and became a dependent unit under the Platteville, Wisconsin Branch with Tim Fitzner called as a third counselor in the Platteville Branch presidency so we could have Priesthood authority presiding in Prairie du Chien. On December 9, 2001 we had a special meeting in Platteville and the Prairie du Chien Branch was created with Tim Fitzner as branch president and Charles Clark as his first counselor and Steve Price (a resident of Madison) as his second counselor. On March 21, 2007 they first looked at the land and on April 17, 2007 a leader from Salt Lake visited and land was approved [for the construction of a chapel].*



Prairie du Chien Wisconsin Branch building with the prison in the background

President Fitzner went on to say, *We spent some time looking at a number of possible sites and ranking them. It was strange. I had located about every open spot there was in town and I could not really decide which would be the right place. I had always thought that once I had seen and especially walked on it, we would just know. Well, I called a realtor about one property to ask for some more information. When he understood what we wanted he volunteered that he himself had some land that, while not officially listed, he would be happy to sell us. On paper it sounded a bit odd as it was right by the medium security prison, but once we drove out to it, Shelley and I had our confirmation. It was a beautiful spot with trees, green, nice condos across the street and open fields nearby with a ball diamond and tennis courts and a town recreational facility all on the same street. When we walked on it we felt like we were walking on temple grounds. The spirit was very strong. Leaders from Madison, Milwaukee and Salt Lake thought the location by the prison was not a good idea, but when they came to the area they too felt the spirit and all approved the choice.*

In 2019, Art Peek from the La Crosse Ward was asked to speak to the Branch members about the early 1840s saints who came past Prairie du Chien to harvest pine lumber for the Nauvoo Temple. Brother Peek saw that the branch was on a sure foundation. As of 2021 the Prairie du Chien Branch is a thriving unit in the Madison Wisconsin Stake.

Preston Minnesota Branch

The history of the Preston Branch began in the summer of 1996. Two cottage meetings were held under the direction of President Krueger at the home of Beth Jensen in Chatfield, Minnesota. On September 22, 1996, the Preston Branch was organized with members from the

Rochester First Ward, the La Crosse Ward and the Winona Branch. Brent G. Larson was sustained as its first branch president on September 22, 1996. There were 53 people in attendance.

The newly created branch met in an old commercial building in the central part of town. It was below the missionaries' apartment next to a funeral home in Preston at 145 Fillmore Street West. It was a unique room measuring 20 feet by 70 feet. The only non-emergency door opened up right in front of the sacrament table, so there was no sneaking in from the back if you were late. President Krueger, in his talk to the new branch, gave a prescription for the branch's success: pray at least two times a day, study the scriptures every day, have personal worship daily, don't judge others, bring your extended families into the church and do your home and visiting teaching so that you can be the best in the stake in this area.

President Krueger offered a prayer to dedicate the area (Fillmore County) wherein he stated, *...consecrate, dedicate and bless this area for the teaching of the gospel. Help us serve with our hearts, might, mind and strength. Pour out Thy Spirit into this area. Bless all those who come into this branch...*" President Brent Larson wrote that *the new branch presidency planned to meet during the interim two weeks (fall General Conference) to attempt to organize the branch more fully. In the meantime, remodeling was to begin on the chapel area, removing some walls and creating an additional classroom in addition to enlarging the chapel area considerably. The entire first floor was to be repainted and most of it was also re-carpeted. The Stake redirected funds to the new Preston Branch which were originally allocated to other units in order to make the remodeling project possible so that the Preston Branch could have a suitable meeting place. We are grateful to those units in the Rochester Minnesota Stake that have been asked to sacrifice on our behalf. We pray that we will prove worthy of those sacrifices and the faith of all involved in the great beginning of a new unit in Zion.*

Early in 2000, work began on modifying an existing structure of the old Federal Land Bank at the intersection of Highways 52 and 16. Brother John McKenzie had been commissioned by the Church to obtain and remodel the facility. On September 24, 2000, Preston's new chapel was completed. The next Sunday, October 1, 2000, Brent Larson was released and Keith Allen Barnhart was sustained as the branch president. Only a short time later, President Barnhart was released and on June 17, 2001, Steven Paul Voigt was sustained as the branch president.

The Preston Branch building was dedicated on June 4, 2006 by President Thomas Spackman. Of this dedication, President Spackman stated, *We are dedicating this building at a late date. You may ask why, and I don't know. You have to apply to dedicate a building. This is a milestone for the Preston Branch.*

He then dedicated the building as follows: *Our Father in Heaven, we gather today in thy name, having renewed our covenants through the sacrament. We express our gratefulness to thee for all our blessings, for the restoration of the gospel in these latter days, for a living prophet, for scriptures to guide and direct us as we seek to return to thy presence. We're grateful for temples which dot the land in which we can make those covenants that will help us return to thee. We thank thee for families; we thank thee for love, for all those wonderful things that we have in our life which come from thee.*

Now, as we meet in this building today, we dedicate this building unto thee as the Preston Branch Chapel, and we ask thee to bless the building, the grounds, all the systems which are part of its functioning. The foundations, and even the shrubs and the bushes and grass which grows here. That thou wilt bless all these parts that they might be protected from the damages of nature or man. That they might be part of a whole in which thy spirit can reside. And we bless this building likewise that it will be a house of prayer, a house of faith, a house of fasting, a house of learning, that all who come might feel thy spirit, might be taught of thy spirit, that our testimonies and our desires and our understandings will be strengthened and grow that we will fill the expansion of our souls as we are here and talk and learn together. And through the power of the priesthood at this time, Heavenly Father, I also bless this county, this town, this area which is within the Branch boundaries, that thy spirit will move upon those who live here, that they might have a desire to know thee better, to do thy will better, to bring about a greater measure of goodness, and that those who seek thee might be brought in contact with the church through the members, through other means, that those who are seeking the truth might come to a testimony, and join with us in the Branch in making covenants to thee to serve thee and to love thee and to love their fellow man.

Likewise, we dedicate ourselves to greater service to one another. That in our families we will be kind and loving and seek only for the best of each other, that we will see the good in each other and seek to cultivate and nourish that, and that even though we are aware of faults and failings, and can sometimes injure one another, that those will pass to the side, that we will recognize that we have potential to grow and do better. Now we ask all these blessings and dedicate this building unto thee and we do it in the name of thy son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

On December 9, 2007, President Voigt was released and Todd C. Christensen was called as the branch president. On March 4, 2012, the Preston Branch was discontinued and its membership was included in the Austin Ward, the Rochester First Ward and the Winona Branch. The branch was discontinued due to declining membership.

Red Wing Minnesota Ward

The Red Wing Ward, which was organized on March 5, 1961, is still in operation. While in the Rochester Stake, the Red Wing Ward was meeting in a small church building in Hager City, Wisconsin, across the Mississippi River from Red Wing. In 1996, Bishop Craig Dugstad was released and James Lash was sustained as the new bishop. On April 28, 1996, the Red Wing Ward was moved out of the Rochester Minnesota Stake and became part of the St. Paul Minnesota Stake. Eventually, a new building was built in the city of Red Wing and the Red Wing Ward was moved from the St. Paul Minnesota Stake to the newly created Oakdale Minnesota Stake. As of this writing, this ward is still in operation.



The Red Wing Minnesota chapel

Richland Center Wisconsin Dependent Branch

February 6, 2000 was the first meeting of the Richland Center Dependent Branch at the home of Brother and Sister Mark Winchester. The membership was around 10 members. On February 20, 2000, the meetings were moved from the Winchester home to the Wagner home as the Winchesters were often out of the country due to work commitments. The Wagners had just moved into the area and their home was more conveniently located. In conversations with the Madison Stake, it was felt that Richland Center members would be better served by a closer stake than the current Rochester Stake. The length and breadth of the Rochester Stake went from Fairmont, Minnesota in the west to the Richland Center, Wisconsin in the east, a total distance of 250 miles. In 2001, it was decided that the Richland Center unit would become part of the Madison Stake. As a satellite branch, the new supporting unit was the Baraboo Ward. On

August 26, 2007, the Richland Center unit became an independent branch. Meetings were moved from members' homes to auditoriums, nursing home conference rooms, remodeled storage units, the community ice center and eventually to its current location at a small one-story office building. As of this writing, this unit is still in operation with close to 100 members.

Rochester Minnesota First Ward

The Rochester First Ward Unit, which was organized on September 5, 1937, is still in operation. Currently, the Rochester Ward is assigned the ministering responsibilities over the St. Mary's Hospital. Bishop Michael R. Hinckley was released on February 25, 1996 and Robert L. Foote was sustained as the bishop. On March 31, 2002, Bishop Foote was released and Randal J. Thomas was sustained as the new bishop. Bishop Randal Thomas was released on January 13, 2008 and Dennis Payne was called as the bishop. Due to a change in Bishop Payne's employment, he was released on July 10, 2011 and Darren Q. Calley was sustained as the bishop. On December 3, 2017 Bishop Calley was released and sustained into the new Rochester Stake presidency and Ronald W. Roberts sustained as the Rochester First Ward bishop. Currently, the Rochester Minnesota First Ward meets at the building located at 1002 16th St SE.



The Rochester Minnesota First Ward building

Rochester Minnesota Second Ward

The Rochester Second Ward, which was organized on January 5, 1986, is still in operation. Bishop Michael E. Johnson was released and C. Brent Spencer was sustained on January 24, 1999 to serve as the bishop. On Father's Day, June 15, 2003, Bishop Spencer was released and Michael J. Ross was sustained as the bishop. On July 23, 2006, Bishop Ross was released and Brent G. Larson was sustained as the bishop. In 2007, the Rochester Second Ward was designated as the magnet ward for all single adults and assigned responsibility for the ministry needs of the Federal Medical Center. On May 25, 2014, Bishop Larson was released and Michael L. Kendrick was sustained as the bishop. Bishop Kendrick was released as bishop when he was called to serve in the Rochester Stake Presidency on November 26, 2017. William Fleming was sustained on November 26, 2017 as the bishop of the Rochester Second Ward and was released on November 14, 2021. Quinn P. Peterson is now serving as the bishop. Currently, the Rochester Minnesota Second Ward meets at the Stake building at 2300 Viola Heights Drive.



The Rochester Second Ward meets in the Stake Center

Rochester Minnesota Third Ward

The Rochester Third Ward Unit, which was organized on January 5, 1992, is still in operation. Bishop Robert Brey continued to serve in his capacity as bishop until November 2, 1997 when he was released and Wayne M. Barrett was sustained as the new bishop. On September 2, 2002, Bishop Barrett was released and DeVaughn L. Rackham became the bishop of the Third Ward. During 2005, the Rochester Third Ward was designated as the ward for the Spanish members to attend with translation services being provided for those who need it. Bishop Rackham was released on February 24, 2008, and D. Wayne Woolley was sustained as the bishop. In 2009, the Spanish speaking and the English speaking quorums were integrated into one quorum. The Third Ward was also assigned responsibility for the Bishop Storehouse. Bishop Woolley was released on June 15, 2014 and J. G. Fletcher was sustained as the bishop. On August 30, 2020, Bishop Fletcher was released and Paul Widman was sustained as the bishop. Currently, the Rochester Minnesota Third Ward meets at the Stake building at 2300 Viola Heights Drive. (See Rochester Minnesota Second Ward Photos.)

Rochester Minnesota Fourth Ward/Branch/Ward

The Rochester Fourth Ward was created on March 9, 1997 with members from the Rochester Second and the Rochester Third wards. Brian J. Cragun was sustained as the bishop. On October 28, 1999, the Rochester Fourth Ward split and two units were created: the Dodge Center Branch and the Rochester Fourth Branch. Prior to this, Dodge Center was a dependent unit under the supervision of the Fourth Ward.

Bishop Cragun was released as the bishop of the Rochester Fourth Ward and sustained as the Rochester Fourth Branch President. On September 22, 2002, President Cragun was released and Paul A. Kay was sustained as the branch president. On October 14, 2002, meetings were moved to the Stake Center while remodeling of the ward building on 16th Street occurred. New carpeting and refinishing the brick walls in the entire building would take eight weeks. During this time, all four Rochester units held their meetings at the Stake Center.

On February 16, 2003, the Rochester Fourth Branch became a ward. Of this event, President Krueger related, *What a wonderful day. We submitted the plan to Salt Lake City. The idea to change the boundaries was turned down a couple of weeks ago. I said to look at the number of priesthood holders. To be a real stake, we need to have five wards, and we only have four. The boundary committee turned it down. We agreed to wait for 300 members. This past week, we received approval for your unit to become a ward again.*

On February 16, 2003, President Kay was released and sustained as the bishop until his release on May 2, 2004. Michael G. Haddock was then sustained as the bishop. Bishop Haddock was released on March 1, 2009. Steve McMaster was sustained as the new bishop and would serve

until May 2, 2010. Bishop McMaster was released when he moved to Idaho and Brother Mark S. Fredrickson was sustained as the bishop. On August 10, 2014, Bishop Fredrickson was released and Scott D. Frei was sustained as the bishop. Bishop Frei would serve until September 8, 2019 when Kolby Hoelzle was sustained as the bishop. Currently, the ward is assigned transient members. Currently, the Rochester Minnesota Fourth Ward meets at the 2300 Viola Heights Dr Rochester Minnesota building. (See Rochester Minnesota Second Ward photos.)

Rochester Minnesota Fifth Ward

The Rochester Fifth Ward was created on December 28, 2008 with membership from the Rochester First Ward and the Rochester Fourth Ward. The boundaries for all of the Rochester wards were changed. The first bishop of the Fifth Ward was Thomas R. Fleming. Bishop Fleming was released on June 22, 2014 and Mark C. Brown sustained as the new bishop. Bishop Brown was released on October 13, 2019 and Jonathan Fillmore was sustained as the bishop. Currently, the Rochester Fifth Ward is assigned the Rochester Methodist Hospital and its ministering needs and is the unit where the Chinese and Sudanese members come. The Rochester Minnesota Fifth Ward meets at the 1002 16th St SE Rochester, Minnesota building.



The Rochester Fifth Ward building on 6th Street in Rochester, Minnesota

Sparta Wisconsin Branch

The Sparta Branch, which was organized on August 11, 1974 from the La Crosse Ward, is still in operation. Kurt Euller was branch president until January 1, 1996 when Max Jakeman was sustained as the branch president. A newly built Sparta meeting house was occupied in November of 1995 with an open house held on May 4, 1996 and building dedication on May 5, 1996.



Sparta Wisconsin Branch building

It is a first phase building with the same floor plan and dimensions as the Fairmont meetinghouse. On June 1, 1997, Max Jakeman was released and Bradford O. Whitney was sustained as the new branch president. President Whitney was released on May 24, 1998 and E. Charles Busby was sustained as the branch president. On January 4, 2004, Charles E. Busby was released and Craig Bartholomew was sustained. On June 28, 2009, President Bartholomew was released and M. Michael Suzuki was sustained as the branch president. In early spring of 2011, President Suzuki moved to Canton, Michigan to be near family. Kurt C. Euller was sustained again as branch president on May 1, 2011. On April 19, 2015, President Euller was released and Walter Edward Rakow was sustained as the new branch president. President Rakow was released and Jared Perrine was sustained as the branch president.

Viroqua Wisconsin Branch

The Viroqua Branch, which was organized on December 7, 1980, is still in operation. Bertis W. Gebert was released as branch president on May 18, 1997 and R. Timothy Fitzner was sustained to serve as the new branch president. President Fitzner was released on December 20, 1998 and Robert Ghormley was sustained as the branch president.

It is important to note that in December of 1998, a dependent branch in Prairie du Chien, Wisconsin was created with Brother Fitzner sustained as a satellite Sacramento meeting leader. In February 2000, another dependent unit was created from the Viroqua Branch in Richland Center, Wisconsin.

On April 17, 2005, President Ghormley was released and Brother Robert L. Ortloff was sustained as the branch president. Sadly, President Robert Ortloff passed away on January 9, 2009. On January 24, 2009, Brother Gene Hunter was sustained as the branch president. Sadly, in May of 2010, President Hunter passed away. Robert Ghormley was sustained again as branch president on May 30, 2010. On June 11, 2017, President Ghormley was released and Howard Lavern Lindgren was sustained as the branch president.



Back of Viroqua Wisconsin Branch meetinghouse



Front of Viroqua Wisconsin Branch meetinghouse

Waseca Minnesota Branch

On October 25, 1998, the Waseca Branch was organized from the Albert Lea Branch and Brother Gary Judd was called as its first branch president. The Waseca Branch was transferred to the Burnsville Stake at a special Sacrament meeting held on October 10, 1999. The Waseca Branch is now part of the Lakeville Minnesota Stake. This unit continued to grow and as a result of increased membership, they were able to build a new Church designed edifice in which the members currently meet. As of this writing, this branch is still in operation.



Waseca Minnesota building

Winona Minnesota Branch

The Winona Unit, which was organized on December 13, 1953, is still in operation. Arthur Peek served as Branch President until July 21, 1996 when he was released as Branch President and a little over an hour later was called to serve as bishop for the La Crosse Ward. Clark Thompson was then sustained as the branch president. President Thompson was released on November 30, 1997. At this meeting, President Krueger announced that the Winona Branch boundaries had been extended west to include the St. Charles and Eyota communities, which were originally part of the Rochester First Ward. Kirt J. Melton of St. Charles was sustained then as the Winona branch president. In October 2001, the Winona Branch temporarily met in Stockton, Minnesota as they waited for the addition to the chapel to be completed.

Of this temporary meeting place, on September 30, 2001 President Melton wrote in part, *This is the last Sacrament meeting that we will attend in this building (current Winona Branch building). Take a look around. When we return next spring it will not be the same. May God be praised for the gift of this beautiful little structure, which has served the Saints in this area so well for so long....we should take every opportunity between now and then to prepare ourselves spiritually to accept this new house of the Lord in a spirit of gratitude and thanksgiving....This is a symbol of God's goodness to and love for His children in this area....During the next few months, beginning on October 14, 2001, we will meet in the Stockton Community Center located on D Street in Stockton....It is my testimony that the Lord decided we should meet there. The Stockton building had been examined several weeks ago and ruled out....Last Saturday and Sunday nights, I dreamed about the Stockton building. Sunday night's dream seemed to last the whole night. I was exhausted on Monday morning. I asked my wife to go with me to examine the Stockton facility. When we saw it, the decision was very clear. There was no reason I should dream about the Stockton Community Center for two nights in a row save it be the Lord was trying to teach me something. I promise you if we bring a spirit of gratitude with us, we will be blessed as we meet there. We will thoroughly enjoy our time there and when we leave, we will be a little sad.*



Winona Minnesota Branch building

The Winona Branch building was finished in May of 2002 and dedicated by President Krueger on July 14, 2002. On September 5, 2004, President Melton was released and Gregory R. Thackeray was sustained as the branch president. President Thackeray was released on March 4, 2007 and Troy J. Gunnell was sustained as the branch president. President Gunnell was released on August 17, 2008 and Joshua Petersen was then sustained as the branch president. On August 30, 2009, President Petersen was released and Alan Robert Neefe was sustained as branch president. Stake President Robert Foote and his counselors traveled to Winona on August 17, 2014 and released President Neefe who had served for five years as the branch president. Brother Alan F. Leonhardt was then sustained as the new branch president and released on September 26, 2021. Aaron Young was sustained as the new branch president.

So ends this 25-year historical account; so begins the next 25 years.

If you have any updated information, corrections, or additions, please contact the current Stake clerk.