

The New York LDS Historian

A Shared Heritage of Selfless Service:

St. Zita's Convent and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at Union Square

By Todd W. Flyr

In the spring of 2001, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) purchased a site extending between West 14th and 15th Streets in Manhattan to accommodate its growing membership in New York City—one of four new meetinghouses and a new temple that will have been built or renovated by the LDS Church in Manhattan in less than a decade. One of these newly acquired sites, the 15th Street side of a former Catholic convent located near Union Square in lower Manhattan between Sixth and Seventh Avenues, has now been renovated, and on Sunday, January 18, 2004, it will be dedicated as an LDS house of worship.

As Church members move into their new sacred space, they are acutely aware that the newly renovated building has a long history of Christian service and devotion. When the meetinghouse is dedicated, that

history of selfless service will become a part of LDS Church history as well.

St. Zita's Convent

Prior to its acquisition and renovation by the LDS Church, the building served as the home of St. Zita's Convent and Home for Women for the Catholic Archdiocese of New York. In 1890, an Irish immigrant nurse named Ellen O'Keefe was concerned about the many women in New York City who were homeless, poor, and otherwise unable to sustain themselves. To help solve the problem, she used her own money to rent a home on West 24th Street, which became known as "St. Zita's Home for the Friendless Women of New York City."



*St. Zita's Convent
144 West 15th Street*



Stone indicating date of construction, on left of main doorway.

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Main Entrance, during renovation

The Home operated under the concept of self-sufficiency. Women who were able assisted with laundry, including “altar linens, surplices, albs, etc.”, and other similar work for the Archdiocese.

In Catholicism, each convent has a patron saint. Because this convent served as a “domestic helper” with church laundry work and mending, St. Zita, the patron saint of domestic servants, was chosen as its patron saint.

With the help of donations, the convent eventually moved to its long-standing location at 143 West 14th Street. It later expanded to include the building immediately to the north, at [144] West 15th Street. In 1903, Miss O’Keefe began the religious training necessary to become a nun and she founded a religious order, The Sisters of Reparation of the Congregation of Mary.

At any given time, the sisters accommodated and cared for up to 100 women, and provided assistance to as many as a thousand women per year. Women could stay as long as they needed. Those who could work were required to do so, but the nuns also provided care for the invalid and sick, even arranging free medical care. For many years, a nun was required to sleep by the front door every evening, in keeping with the policy that the Home was open to women arriving at any time—day or night.

The women admitted to the Home included

those who were ill or elderly, those evicted by landlords, and those who were victims of domestic abuse. No judgment was made concerning why a woman needed shelter and care.

In addition to its role as a shelter for women, St. Zita’s was also a fully functioning convent. This meant that it had catechetical responsibilities. This work included the training of altar boys, as well as the preparation for children and teens for Catholic communion and confirmation. Additionally, women who were interested could train to become nuns. This involved a lengthy multi-year process that ended with the making of “perpetual vows” of poverty, chastity, and obedience.

By the 1990s, the number of sisters joining the religious order had declined, and the remaining sisters grew too old to continue providing sheltering services. Consequently, it was decided by the Archdiocese that the convent should be sold and the remaining handful of sisters relocated to a different convent in upstate New York, in Monsey.

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Exterior of Union Square Building during renovation.

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Various Times and Sundry Places:

Buildings Used by the LDS Church in Manhattan

Written and Illustrated by Ned P. Thomas

At the end of the 20th century, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is actively acquiring real estate and constructing new buildings for its expanding membership in New York City. The structures are a visible measure of the Church's commitment to the city and seem to say that Latter-day Saints feel at home in New York. However, members haven't always been so fortunate.

Since the earliest days of the Church in the city, members have searched for a home of their own, usually meeting in private homes and rented halls. A lull in city church activity followed the westward trek in 1846 and 1847, and for most of the nineteenth century, no organized branches met—at least so far as the records show. But near the end of the nineteenth century, not long after the Eastern States Mission was organized, Latter-day Saints began worshiping again in New York on a regular basis. From that time on, the search for better or larger facilities has been a perpetual challenge.

Early Meeting Places

Following the organization of the first branch in July 1837, Church members were "accustomed to meet with two or three other people in a small upper room on Goerck Street."¹ Parley P. Pratt, a member of the Quorum of Twelve Apostles who was living in New York, recorded that they had "hired chapels and advertised, but the people would not hear, and the few who came went away without being interested."²

Discouraged, Pratt determined to leave New York City but was prompted to stay by an outpouring of the Spirit at a prayer meeting held prior to his departure. Elder Pratt was subsequently invited by the Free Thinkers to give a course of lectures

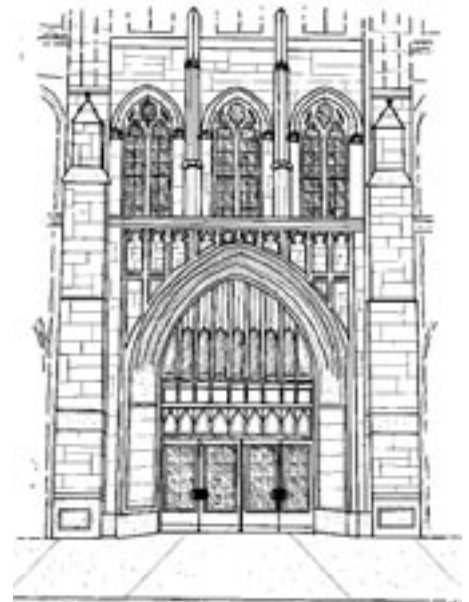
on Mormonism in Tammany Hall, and soon the members had secured "fifteen preaching places in the city, all of which were filled to overflow."³

In 1840, Elders Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, George A. Smith, and others arrived in New York City en route to England as missionaries. They held many "precious meetings" with the Saints, including a general Conference in the "Columbian Hall" located a few doors east of the Bowery on Grand Street.⁴ During this period, regular church meetings were held at 31 Canal Street, near the intersection with Cortlandt Alley (1841-42); 29 Canal Street (1842-43); and 263 Grand Street, between Forsythe and Eldredge (1843-44).⁵

Records for 1845 indicate that the East River Branch was located at the intersection of First and Houston.⁶ On May 26, 1844, Elder C. W. Wandle, direct from Nauvoo, lectured on Mormonism at the Marion Temperance Hall, 183 Canal Street.⁷ Local branch leaders also met every six months for General Conference in a hall at 245 Spring Street.⁸

Between 1840 and 1890, New York City served primarily as a portal through which Mormon immigrants passed on their way West and from which Mormon missionaries departed. The city was

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*2166 Broadway at 76th Street
(1928-1944)*

The New York LDS Historian

is the quarterly newsletter of the New York, New York Stake LDS History Committee. This newsletter contains articles about and notices of the research of the Committee.

More detailed research results are found in our monograph series Monographs will be announced in future issues of the New York LDS Historian.

Current research projects:

20th century overview of the history of the Church in New York City.

Mormon Poet Jon Beck Shank

Mormon exhibits at the 1964 New York World's Fair

New York's Hispanic Membership

If you are interested in volunteering for research, writing, archiving or historical activity planning, please contact Kent Larsen at (212) 927-7932.

Buildings in Manhattan (continued from previous page)

also headquarters of the Eastern States Mission, but Church membership in the area grew slowly. Near the end of the nineteenth century, organized branches began meeting more frequently in rented halls and other public buildings.⁹

Early 1900s

In the early 1900s, New York City Directories list a succession of addresses where Church members met. These addresses include: 70 West 125th Street (1900); 172 West 81st Street (1901-1903); 33 West 126th Street (1905); and Hawthorne Hall, 153 West 125th Street (1906).¹⁰ The Eastern States Mission Home was also located at some of these addresses.¹¹

In 1925, William Woolf, later to become third Bishop of the Manhattan Ward (1942 to 1948), moved to New York City to study electronics at Columbia University. At that time, the Manhattan Branch held its meetings in a “beer hall” on the east side of Broadway above 80th Street. While serving as Superintendent of the Sunday School, Brother Woolf said he would arrive early to “clean beer cans off the steps and straighten things up a little” and “get the place aired out of beer and cigar smoke” before the meetings began.¹² Other rented facilities used by the Manhattan Branch during the early 1920s included Steinway Hall at 109 West 57th Street, Carnegie Hall on 57th Street at 7th Avenue, and Stillman’s Gym, 316 West 57th Street.¹³

Then, in 1928, members moved to a long-lasting home in which history was made. From 1928 to 1944, the Manhattan Ward occupied the ground floor of a hotel located at 2166 Broadway between 76th and 77th Streets (see illustration, p. 1).¹⁴ When the New York, New York Stake was organized on December 9,

1934, its offices were located in this building.¹⁵ Although relatively common at the time, this arrangement ultimately proved unsuccessful because it was discovered that, like other lodgings in town, the hotel was not very profitable without a bar, and most churches (including the Mormons) were opposed to including one.¹⁶ The hotel was later extensively remodeled and reopened as the Promenade Theater in 1969.¹⁷ Today, the only evidence of the building’s historic significance as a religious structure is its original gothic façade.

142 West 81st Street

When the Manhattan Ward finally left its

At that time, the Manhattan Branch held its meetings in a “beer hall” on the east side of Broadway above 80th Street. . . . Brother Woolf said he would arrive early to “clean beer cans off the steps and straighten things up a little” and “get the place aired out of beer and cigar smoke” before the meetings began.

meeting house on Broadway, temporary facilities were arranged in Steinway Hall, where the Church had previously rented space as a Branch. By this time, Church leaders had begun looking for an existing chapel to buy, but sentiment against the Mormons repeatedly caused other churches to withdraw from negotiations at the last minute.¹⁸ A suitable structure was finally found at 142 West 81st Street. However, ward members were counseled that, if they went to look at the chapel, they should not identify themselves as Mormons since members of the Disciples

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The Brooklyn Building: First Chapel East of the Mississippi

by Mark Butler

At the end of the 19th century, Latter-day Saints in Brooklyn faced difficult challenges in their attempts to establish a branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. In 1898, the city of Brooklyn itself was absorbed into the five-borough metropolis of New York City. Similarly, two years later, the Brooklyn Saints ceased meeting on their own, and gathered instead with members in Manhattan.

By 1904, however, the Brooklyn Branch was formed and the Saints began again meeting in Brooklyn for worship. From 1904 until 1918, the Brooklyn Branch met in a series of rented halls, homes, a Masonic Temple and a building housing the Junior Order of American Mechanics. Of one such meeting place, James Knecht, later the president of the Branch, wrote: "This was a vile place." Of others, he wrote "the only places we found were lodge halls over saloons, bowling alleys. The stench of stale beer and tobacco smoke was most offensive." Finally, in 1909 the church began meeting in a hall at the corner of Gates and Bushwick Avenues, described as "the first suitable meeting place" since the organization of the branch.¹

In 1916 the Church acquired property at the corner of Gates and Franklin Avenues, at the edge of the Bedford-Stuyvesant section, and began planning for the construction of a chapel and a mission home for the Eastern States Mission (see illustration p. 4). However, building the chapel was not accomplished without opposition. President Knecht alluded to the difficulty of finding suitable halls to rent,² and the building's dedicatory prayer asked for the softening of the hearts "of those that are bitterly opposed to its erection here...."³

Despite the opposition, construction was completed in 1918, and the chapel was dedicated on February 16, 1919, by Elder Reed Smoot of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. This was a significant milestone for the Church, since the chapel and the mission home were the first buildings

erected by the Church east of the Mississippi since the Saints were driven from Nauvoo over 70 years earlier.⁴

The architecture of the chapel reflected familiar themes in other, more famous Church buildings—in particular the Laie, Hawaii Temple, which was constructed during the same period. The domed ceiling in the chapel approximated the more famous ceiling in the Salt Lake Tabernacle. On the mezzanine railing were familiar Mormon symbols, including the beehive and the seals of the Relief Society and the Mutual Improve-

The chapel and the mission home were the first buildings erected by the Church east of the Mississippi since the Saints were driven from Nauvoo over 70 years earlier.

ment Association, with their themes, "Charity Never Faileth" and "The Glory of God is Intelligence."

For over 40 years the Brooklyn chapel fulfilled "a memorable mission," as a center of worship and other activity for Latter-day Saints in Brooklyn, whether natives of the immigrants from "Europe's teeming cities" or the "children and grandchildren of the Western Pioneers."⁵ The Brooklyn building was the place where European church members found "their first welcome, their first friends and often help."⁶

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The Brooklyn Building (continued from previous page)

But, with the shift of population to the suburbs after the Second World War, and the deterioration of the Bedford-Stuyvesant section of Brooklyn, the decision was made to sell the building.⁷ In late 1963, the sale was completed, and the Brooklyn Saints began meeting elsewhere. The building on the corner of Gates and Franklin still stands, however, a symbol

of the faithfulness of the early Saints whose efforts to establish a permanent home in Brooklyn have blessed all who have followed after.

Notes

¹James S. Knecht to F. Artell Smith, December 12, 1938; from *Brooklyn Chapel Anniversary, 1919-1940*, 77.

²James S. Knecht to F. Artell Smith, December 12, 1938; from *Brooklyn Chapel Anniversary, 1919-1940*, 77.

³Dedicatory Prayer, Brooklyn Branch Chapel, February 16, 1919; in *Brooklyn Chapel Anniversary, 1919-1940*, 79.

⁴*Zion in the Brooklyn District: One Heart, Many Voices. A History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Brooklyn and Staten Island, New York, 1837-1997*, 4.

⁵*Brooklyn Chapel Anniversary, 1919-1940*, Foreword, 3.

⁶*Brooklyn Chapel Anniversary, 1919-1940*, Foreword, 3. The names of Branch and Ward leadership during that period reflects the immigrant nature of the congregation: Knecht, Koenig, Petterson, Ostendorf, Tiemersma, Braun, Butschek, Hoemke, Olschewski and Schoessow are just a sample.

⁷The building is currently owned by the Evening Star Baptist Church.

The Brooklyn building was the place where European Church members found “their first welcome, their first friends and often help.”



Brooklyn LDS Chapel, corner of Gates and Franklin Ave. (1919-1963)

Buildings in Manhattan

(continued from page 3)

of Christ congregation (which owned the building at the time) were unaware that their building was being sold to the LDS Church.¹⁹

Originally constructed as a Jewish synagogue, the 81st Street Chapel had once been the long-time home of a Sephardic sect of Jews led by Rabbi Stephen Weiss, a prominent Jewish scholar and author.²⁰ The Star of David figured prominently in many of the building's details.²¹ The interior of the building featured lofty wooden ceilings, exquisite stained glass windows, a magnificent pipe organ, and excellent acoustics. A kitchen, restrooms, and full-size cultural hall were located in the basement.

Although elegant and quite large, the 81st Street Chapel proved to be impractical for use as an LDS meeting house due to its lack of classrooms.²² Small meeting spaces for classes were created at the top of each stairway, and the balcony was enclosed with glass for a cry room/classroom. Eventually, the Church purchased a brownstone adjacent to the east side of the chapel and connected the two buildings via a short passageway. The first two floors of the brownstone were renovated into basic classrooms, and a small library was organized on the first floor. The brownstone's "dungeon-like" basement was used for storage and Halloween party spook alleys.²³

According to Tom and Megumi Vogelmann, resident caretakers of the building at the time, the neighborhood around West 81st Street grew increasingly unsafe in the early 1970's. Church members felt threatened and some were even robbed on their way home from Sunday evening meetings. In addition, Church membership in Manhattan had doubled since 1964,²⁴ and the renovated buildings were fast becoming worn and overcrowded. Two English-speaking wards and the Spanish American Branch now shared the limited facilities.

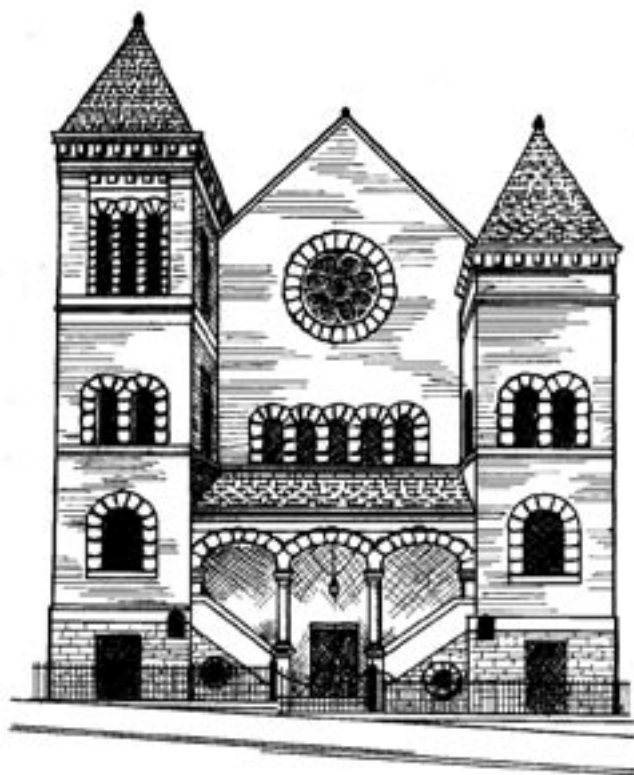
Progress on a new building had been slow in coming. Almost a decade earlier, in January of 1962, the First Presidency announced the purchase of land on 57th and 58th Streets west of Fifth Avenue.²⁵ The announcement, which received na-

tionwide publicity, said a 35 to 40-story building would be constructed for use by the church for a ward, stake and mission complex, as well as leasing the rest of the building for offices and apartments. However, for a variety of reasons, plans for the building didn't materialize and development options on the property were later sold. Meanwhile, Church leaders continued to look for other property in Manhattan.

A Stake Center

On April 13, 1973, President Harold B. Lee announced the construction of a 36-story mixed-use tower on Columbus Avenue between 65th and 66th Streets, directly across Lincoln Square from the Julliard School of Music. The building would include facilities for religious, educational, and cultural activities of the Church.²⁶ The new structure would house two Manhattan Wards, the Spanish-American Branch, stake offices, headquarters of the Eastern States Mission, and a Visitors Center.²⁷ Church facilities would be located in the first four stories with the remainder of the structure to be developed for rented apartments. The new building was intended to be a showcase for the Church on one of the most prominent locations in New York City.²⁸

Although elegant and quite large, the 81st Street Chapel proved to be impractical for use as an LDS meeting house due to its lack of classrooms.



142 West 81st Street (1945-1975)

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Buildings in New York City (continued from previous page)

The \$15 million building was completed in stages with the apartment tower and commercial spaces ready for occupancy in early 1974.²⁹ Church facilities were completed in March 1975, and President Spencer W. Kimball dedicated the building on Sunday, May 25, 1975. By 1988, the Church in Manhattan had grown to eight units, all of which used the same meeting space.³⁰ More convenient meeting facilities were sought out for members who did not live in Midtown. Still, during the 1990s, the building continued to serve stake activities as well as the needs of five or six local units.

Inwood Chapel

On June 14, 1997, ground was broken for a new Mormon meeting house on the corner of Riverside Drive and Payson

Street in the Inwood section of upper Manhattan. Members met for services in the new chapel for the first time on March 26, 2000. This building is the first

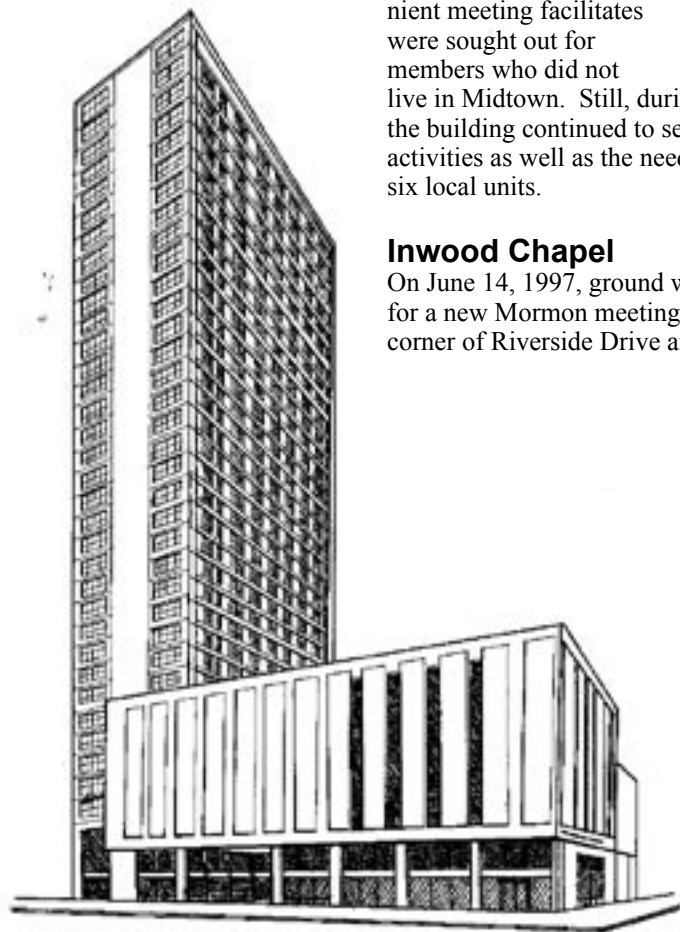
The new building was intended to be a showcase for the Church on one of the most prominent locations in New York City.

new construction initiated by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Manhattan since the current Stake Center at Lincoln Square was completed in 1975. During that same period of time, Church membership in Manhattan grew from about 1,000 members in three units to more than 3,200 members in nine units.³¹

Harlem Building

At its creation in 1997, the Manhattan 9th Branch, or "Harlem Branch," held its meetings at Sylvia's Restaurant, a well-known landmark in Harlem; but space was severely limited and there were recurring schedule conflicts. For a short time, the branch was even forced to abandon its regular meeting schedule and hold only sacrament meetings. Then, in 1998, Church headquarters approved the purchase of a building on West 129th Street near Lenox Avenue in Harlem for use by the Manhattan 9th Branch. One current plan for the newly purchased building, a former Jehovah's Witness chapel, includes extensive remodeling. Another idea being considered is to build a new chapel on the present site or on another lot close by.

To match the continued growth of the Church in Manhattan, plans are currently underway for acquisition of additional meeting space downtown near Union Square, and approval has also been



2 Lincoln Square (Dedicated 25 May 1975)

given for the purchase or construction of a multi-million dollar building on the Upper East Side. With completion of these new buildings, the New York, New York Stake may never again be required to rent facilities or rely upon just one building to house its members. This change is the culmination of many years' struggle, in remarkably similar ways, by successive generations of New York saints to secure a permanent home for themselves amid the towers of the city.

At its creation in 1997, the Manhattan 9th Branch, or "Harlem Branch," held its meetings at Sylvia's Restaurant, a well-known landmark in Harlem; but space was severely limited and there were recurring schedule conflicts.

Notes

¹ Autobiography of Parley P. Pratt, 1985, pg. 145. Goerck Street, now designated Baruch Place, is located near the Williamsburg Bridge.

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid, pg. 261. See also: Brigham Young History, 1801-1804, ed., E. Watson (1968), Pg. 146-147.

⁵ New York City Directories for 1841-1844.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Cyril D. Pearson, *New York, Cradle of Mormonism – Part I*, The Improvement Era, August 1942, pg. 522.

⁸ Times and Seasons, Vol. 3, 1842, pg. 844

⁹ Dick Owen, *Famous Churches of Our City*, Sunday News, March 3, 1957, pg. 37.

¹⁰ Trow's New York City Directories 1900, 1901, 1903, 1905, and 1906. See also *A Brief History of the Church in New York City* by William Cottam.

¹¹ In 1917, the Church constructed a permanent Mission Home and an adjacent chapel at 273 Gates Avenue in Brooklyn. William L. Woolf

mentions that a Mission Home was situated at 155 Riverside Drive, overlooking the Hudson River, in 1938. See William L. Woolf, *The Church in New York City*, The Improvement Era, December 1938, pg. 730.

¹² William L. Woolf Oral History, interviews by William G. Hartley, 1973-74, typescript, pg. 22, Oral History Program, Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.

¹³ Ibid. See also *New York City Directories*, 1920-1935 Editions.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ William L. Woolf, *The Church in New York City*, The Improvement Era, December 1938, pg. 730

¹⁶ Ibid. A number of buildings with space reserved for religious meetings on the ground floor and hotel rooms included on the upper floors were constructed in Manhattan during the late 1920s.

¹⁷ Playbill, Volume 90, Number 3, March 1990

¹⁸ William L. Woolf Oral History, pg. 22.



Sylvia's Restaurant, 328 Lenox Avenue (1997-1999)

Evolution of the First Manhattan Stake Center

by Ned Thomas

On January 5, 1971, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced the acquisition of a 25,000-square-foot site on Columbus Avenue between 65th and 66th Streets, directly across from the newly constructed Lincoln Square.¹

When President Harold B. Lee, then First Counselor in the First Presidency, first visited the site, he reportedly remarked, "... this is the place the Lord wants us to be."² At that time, a parking lot and an assortment of older structures occupied the property. President Lee explained that the building would be a joint venture of the Church and a private developer who would hold a management lease on a 36-story apartment tower and other commercial areas of the buildings. The religious portion of the building would be located in the first four stories and provide facilities for the spiritual, educational, and cultural activities of the Church's two Manhattan Wards and the Spanish-American Branch.

The apartment tower was completed in early 1974 and the chapel was completed in March 1975. Church president Spencer W. Kimball dedicated the chapel on May 25, 1975. The buildings were designed and constructed from materials that complement the architecture of Lincoln Center.

Since construction, the building has undergone major renovations that have altered its original design. The open-air

pedestrian plazas on the ground level were redesigned and completely enclosed to provide indoor exhibit space for the Museum of American Folk Art. In the early 1990s, the Church's second floor Visitor's Center was closed and replaced by an expanded Family History Center. In November 1998, a major remodeling and construction project was begun on the fifth and sixth floors of the Church's portion of the building to alleviate overcrowding. This space, which had originally been occupied by a health club for residents of the adjacent apartment building, was redesigned to allow construction of a second full-size chapel, cultural hall, classrooms and office space. This configuration was unique in that two complete ward buildings were essentially stacked on top of one another.

On August 7, 2002, after relatively brief service as a regular church facility, it was announced that these upper floors would be converted into a Temple, a special church facility for sacred ceremonies which unite families forever. Completion



Dedication Program, Lincoln Center Building, 1975

and dedication of the Temple is contemplated in 2004.

Notes

¹ The New York Times, Jan. 6, 1971.

² Building Dedication Program, May 25, 1975

Buildings in New York City (continued from previous page)

¹⁹ Ibid, pg. 23

²⁰ Tom and Megumi Vogelmann, interview by Ned and Cherlynn Thomas, May 16, 1999.

²¹ Ibid.

²² The 81st Street building still exists and continues to be used by a predominantly African-American Baptist congregation.

²³ Today, the building is used as a non-LDS church by an African-American congregation.

²⁴ Franklin Whitehouse, "Mormon Center Planned Here," *The New York Times*, January 6, 1971

²⁵ Skyscraper Church Planned, *Church News*, Jan. 20, 1962, pg. 7, 14. See also Franklin D. Richards, *Conference Report*, Apr. 1962, pg. 49.

²⁶ Church Plans Skyscraper, *Church News*, April 14, 1973.

²⁷ The Visitor's Center concept resulted from the success of the Mormon Pavilion at the 1964 New York World's Fair.

²⁸ Tom and Megumi Vogelmann, interview by Ned and Cherlynn Thomas, May 16, 1999.

²⁹ New York Skyscraper Progress Continues, *Church News*, August 3, 1974. Original commercial tenants on the ground floor included Long John Silver's Seafood Restaurant and Empress Travel.

³⁰ N.Y. Meetinghouse Houses Entire Stake, Bulges at the Seams, *Church News*, June 11, 1988

³¹ Estimates of church membership obtained from the New York NY Stake clerk's office.

A Shared Heritage of Selfless Service

(continued from page Union Square 2)

Renovation into an LDS Church

After the convent was put up for sale, the Archdiocese of New York received a competitive bid that would have required redesigning the space for commercial

residents, commenced immediately.

In August 2002, LDS Church leaders publicly announced that several floors of its six-story meetinghouse located at 2 Lincoln Square would be converted into a temple, which would require the closing of one of two heavily

used chapels in the Lincoln Square building. The temple announcement thus placed even more pressure to conclude the renovation of the convent into a new meetinghouse as expeditiously as possible.

At the time of the temple announcement, seven wards and one branch met at the Church's Lincoln Square building each Sunday. Two of these wards and one branch were subsequently moved to the 15th Street meetinghouse, which was named for near-



Union Square Building, Rear View

and residential development. However, the Sisters of St. Zita's, who believed the convent to be "sacred ground," wanted the facility to pass into the hands of a religious organization that would respect certain Christian teachings consistent with its time-honored mission. After a lengthy legal challenge from another bidder, the convent was sold in 2001 to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Given the burgeoning membership of the Church in Manhattan, plans to renovate the 15th Street side of the former convent, which had served primarily as dormitory and cooking quarters for the convent's

by Union Square. The Manhattan Fifth Ward and Manhattan Sixth Ward became the Union Square First

and Third Wards, respectively, and the Manhattan Seventh Branch became the Union Square Second Branch (for the Deaf). These three congregations met for the first time in their new quarters on Sunday, November 23, 2003.



Interior of Chapel during renovation

Whereas the original façade of the building has been left largely intact, the interior has been extensively remodeled. The renovated building occupies five floors and includes a chapel on the top floor, a large amount of classroom space, offices for up to four congregations on



Baptismal Font

the main floor, a library with instructional materials, a mini family history center for genealogical research, a baptismal font and a large hall in the basement for social events, and an outdoor courtyard behind the building for recreational activities.

A regional Employment Resource Cen-

ter for the Church also calls the building home. The Employment Center, which serves members of the community during the week, is one way in which a tradition and spirit of service and self-sufficiency continue within the building. As the building is dedicated, the histories of two religious faiths in New York City with a tradition of service are merging. Members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, who are now meeting in what was once a Catholic convent, look forward to a

future of continued growth and opportunity to bless the lives of the people of Manhattan.

Notes

¹ Pamphlet "St Zita's Home", (undated) produced by "The Sisters of Reparation of the Congregation of Mary", p1.

² Pamphlet, "St Zita's Home", p2.

³ New Advent website, entry on St Zita: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15762a.htm>, The Catholic Encyclopedia, Volume XV Copyright © 1912 by Robert Appleton Company, Online Edition Copyright © 2003 by K. Knight

⁴ Pamphlet, "St Zita's Home", pp 1-2.

⁵ New Advent website, entry on St Zita: <http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/15762b.htm>

⁶ Booklet, "Help Us To Help Them", (undated) pp 2-5.

⁷ NY Post, December 26, 2001 — 'Nun of the Above' to Developer's Plans, by Lois Weiss



Rear view of 14th Street buildings