

Print Subscription | MormonTimes

Brought to you by **Deseret News**

Church News

THE CHURCH OF JESUS CHRIST OF LATTER-DAY SAINTS

SEARCH CHURCH NEWS

Home Articles Features Viewpoint Callings Archives

Home > Articles > Academy era short-lived, but impact long lasting >

Authorized News Web site of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Thomas S. Monson
Conference
Mormon Tabernacle
Choir

Daily index
Dedicatory prayers
First Presidency
letters
Humanitarian efforts
Missions
Nauvoo
Scriptures
Sports
Suggestions for life's
challenges
Temples
Transcripts of talks
User feedback
Video
World events

Contact us
LDS.org
Meetinghouse locator
Provident Living
Subscribe to Church
News

Academy era short-lived, but impact long lasting

By Kevin Stoker, Staff Writer

Published: Saturday, May 28, 1988

Print | Email | Share

AS 84-year-old Mark Hart walked around the Oneida Academy building in Preston, Idaho, the memories flowed with every step.

"Down here," he said, pointing at the basement windows, "was where we studied ancient history. I remember my ankles used to get so cold in that room." He looked up at the second-floor windows and smiled with delight. His literature teacher, N.L. Nelson, was a retired professor from BYU who had a passion for rambling at length on literary topics. During one lecture, Hart climbed out of those second-floor windows, walked around to the entrance of the building, then came back through the classroom door and took his seat. "The old professor never knew I had been gone."

Hart is one of thousands of Latter-day Saints who received their high school education in schools once sponsored by Church stakes. This year marks the 100th anniversary of the establishment of the Church General Board of Education, which sent out a letter on June 8, 1888, instructing each stake to establish an academy for secondary instruction.

From 1888 to 1909, the Church founded 35 academies in Utah, Idaho, Wyoming, Arizona, Mexico and Canada. These forerunners to the Church Educational System and seminary program provided a spiritual foundation, along with secular training, to President [Ezra Taft Benson](#) and other Church leaders.

Though most of the Church academies are as forgotten as the buildings that once housed them, the impact of these schools continues to be felt through those educated there.

President Benson graduated from the Oneida Academy, as did President Harold B. Lee. President [Spencer W. Kimball](#) was an honor graduate from Gila academy, founded by the St. Joseph Stake in Thatcher, Ariz.

This fact doesn't surprise Mark Hart, who still lives close to the old Oneida Academy, established Oct. 29, 1888. This building isn't used much anymore, and its view is obscured by the present Preston High School building, constructed only a few feet from the academy's front door.

Hart entered the Oneida Academy in 1919, the same year President Benson graduated. The lessons he learned there, he said, have had a powerful influence on his life.

Each day at the academy, he said, began with a devotional. Students studied the scriptures in much the same way they do in the modern seminary program. For example, the Book of Mormon was the course of study one year, and the other standard works followed in subsequent years.

One of his teachers, Thomas S. Romney, a relative of the late Marion G. Romney, taught him about the Old Testament. "His eyes just darted back and forth," Hart remembered. "You wouldn't dare go to sleep in his class."

Hart said the teacher who had the greatest influence on him was Harrison R. Merrill. In 1919, Hart was a freshman in Merrill's English class. A few weeks after school had started, Merrill went down the roll and informed the students of their academic standing. When he reached Hart's name, Merrill said 75, then added, "That's not much better than a D-minus."

"Naturally, I wanted everyone to know how smart I was, so I chirped up and said, 'Well, I think 75 percent is a pretty good grade. I don't know why you're kicking.'"

Related Content

People

- Wilford Woodruff
- Lorenzo Snow
- Harold B. Lee
- Spencer W. Kimball
- Ezra Taft Benson
- George Q. Cannon

This Week's News Articles

- Safe haven gift: Church donation to benefit thousands
- Elder Russell M. Nelson: The gathering of Israel preparing the world for the Second Coming
- 'Calling more servants'
- A personal testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith
- The Book of Mormon: A tool to harvest souls

Church News Most Popular

1. New mission presidents
2. New mission presidents
3. Elder Russell M. Nelson: The gathering of Israel preparing the world for the Second Coming
4. New stake presidents
5. Safe haven gift: Church donation to benefit thousands

Deseret News stories

1. Boy Scouts of America to vote on lifting ban of gay Scouts and leaders
2. 76-year-old Mormon adventurer keeps hiking, diving and an active lifestyle
3. Bear River Massacre's unexpected aftermath includes forgiveness and hope
4. Wright Words: Heaven and Earth collide at Atlanta airport
5. Missionaries got talent: Elders and sisters share musical humor, inspiration on YouTube

MormonTimes stories

1. Mormon recording artist Alex Boyé to take new Luminers' 'Ho Hey' cover out to sea (+video)
2. Wright Words: Heaven and Earth collide at Atlanta airport
3. Bloggemacle Back Bench: Temple videos
4. 'Dr. Smith and the Fantastic Castle' tackles serious subject in a light-hearted manner
5. Boy Scouts of America to vote on lifting ban of gay Scouts and leaders

Hart's friends laughed. Merrill just smiled and went on to the next student. After class the teacher met Hart in the hall and said the young student had left himself open to be cut down to size with his remarks in class. "But you knew I wouldn't do that," Merrill said.

Then the teacher noted that "75 percent might be a pretty good grade for some students, but you are capable of doing much better than that." Those words from a respected teacher became an inspiration to Hart throughout his life.

"The Oneida Academy was a very good school," Hart said.

The academy system was directed by the Church General Board of Education, which included Church and education leaders Lorenzo Snow, George Q. Cannon, Wilford Woodruff, Anthon H. Lund, Horace S. Eldredge, BYU Pres. Karl G. Maeser and Amos Home. In 1888, the Church was operating four schools - Brigham Young Academy in Provo, Utah; Brigham Young College in Logan, Utah; Salt Lake Stake Academy in Salt Lake City; and Fielding Academy in Paris, Idaho. During the board's first year, it recommended that each stake organize a board of education "to take charge of and promote the interests of education in the stake."

"We feel that the time has arrived when the proper education of our children should be taken in hand by us as a people," the board stated in a letter. "Religious training is practically excluded from the district schools. The perusal of books that we value as divine records is forbidden. Our children, if left to the training they receive in these schools, will grow up entirely ignorant of those principles of salvation for which the Latter-day Saints have made so many sacrifices."

Historians differ on the number of academies started in 1888. In the most recent book on the subject, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education*, published in 1988, the author, William E. Berrett, claims 18 academies were established in 1888. In explaining the discrepancy, Berrett wrote that some of the academies underwent name changes, some operated only briefly and other reopened on dates later listed as the original date of their establishment.

Academies organized in 1888 that are operating today as colleges are the Bannock Stake Academy (Ricks College) in Rexburg, Idaho; Sanpete Stake Academy (Snow College) in Ephraim, Utah; St. Joseph Stake Academy (Weber State College) in Thatcher, Ariz.; and Weber Stake Academy (Weber State College) in Ogden, Utah. BYU and LDS Business College were founded before 1888 as Brigham Young Academy and Salt Lake Stake Academy.

By 1905, 22 LDS academies enrolled 54 percent of the secondary school population in Utah. These Church schools provided most of the secondary training for LDS youths until the advent of public high school in 1891. But after the turn of the century, public schools began multiplying, and enrollment at the academies declined.

"As the number of public schools increased," Berrett noted, "Church members found themselves supporting a dual system of education."

By 1922, the academies were closed, in the process of being turned over to local governments or included in the Church educational system.

Today, 100 years after the Church urged each stake to establish secondary schools, only one is still fulfilling the original goal of the academies - the Juarez Academy in Colonia Juarez, Mexico.

The other academies may be gone, but their purposes of training the spirit as well as the mind lives on in Church colleges, seminaries and institutes throughout the world.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

LDS academies

Academy Location Date

Union Academy (soon discontinued) Salt Lake City, Utah 1860

Brigham Young Academy Provo, Utah 1875

(Brigham Young University)

Brigham Young College Logan, Utah 1877

Salt Lake Stake Academy Salt Lake City, Utah 1886

(LDS Business College)

Juarez LDS Academy Colonia Juarez, Mexico 1888

Beaver Stake Academy (Murdock) Beaver, Utah Oct. 16, 1888

Sanpete Stake Academy Ephraim, Utah Oct. 18, 1888

(Snow College)

Bear Lake Stake Academy Paris, Idaho Oct. 29, 1888

Millard Stake Academy Milliard Utah Oct. 29, 1888

Oneida Stake Academy Preston, Idaho Oct. 29, 1888

Panguitch Stake Academy Panguitch, Utah Oct. 30, 1888

St. George Stake Academy St. George, Utah Nov. 1, 1888

(Dixie College)

Summit Stake Academy Coalville, Utah Nov. 19, 1888

Bannock Stake Academy Rexburg, Idaho Nov. 22, 1888

(Ricks College)

Morgan Stake Academy Morgan, Utah Nov. 24, 1888

Uintah Stake Academy Vernal, Utah Dec. 18, 1888

Weber Stake Academy Ogden, Utah Dec. 18, 1888

(Weber State College)

Cassia Stake Academy Oakley, Idaho Dec. 25, 1888

Sevier Stake Academy Richfield, Utah Dec. 25, 1888

Snowflake Stake Academy Snowflake, Ariz. Dec. 25, 1888

St. Johns Stake Academy St. Johns, Ariz. Dec. 25, 1888

Box Elder Stake Academy Brigham City, Utah Dec. 29, 1888

Parowan Stake Academy Parowan, Utah April 12, 1890

Davis Stake Academy Davis County, Utah June 28, 1890

Malad Stake Academy Malad, Idaho July 3, 1890

Juab Stake Academy Nephi, Utah July 12, 1890

Emery Stake Academy Castle Dale, Utah Sept. 15, 1890

Wasatch Academy Utah Oct. 25, 1890

Randolph Academy Randolph, Utah Nov. 3, 1890

St. Joseph Stake Academy Thatcher, Ariz. Feb. 10, 1891

(Eastern Arizona College)

Rich County Academy Utah Sept. 17, 1891

Diaz Academy Mexico Sept. 24, 1891

Alberta Stake Academy Raymond, Alberta Oct. 19, 1891

Grantsville Academy Grantsville, Utah 1892

Maricopa Academy Mesa, Ariz. Oct. 9, 1895

San Luis Academy Sanford, Colo. 1907

Big Horn Stake Academy Cowley, Wyo. 1909

Source: William E. Berrett, A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education; Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Printing Center, 1988, p. 191. Some of the locations only reflect the headquarters of the stake, not the specific site on an academy.

Latest Church News Stories

1. Safe haven gift: Church donation to benefit thousands
2. Healing power of Christ
3. WWII veteran receives medals for service
4. New stake presidents
5. Relief Society: Trust to follow His plan



20 Years Ago...



Revelations are often 'impressively personal'

Published: Saturday, Jan. 30, 1993

The revelations directed individually to John Whitmer (D&C 15) and Peter Whitmer (D&C 16) are identical in wording. Yet, as the heading to Section 15 points out, "the message is intimately and...

Recent Photo Galleries



Elder Russell M. Nelson:
The gathering of Israel preparing the world for the Second Coming



WWII veteran receives medals for service