

9/6/2022, John Crawford

The Early History of The English Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

The beginning of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints in Southern Indiana dates back to the latter part of the eighteen hundreds when missionaries brought the "Restored Gospel" to the people of Southern Indiana. One of those missionaries was Elder Wilford Cragun. Here is his story of consecration.

In 1895 Wilford Cragun lived in Pleasant View, Utah near Ogden. He was 42. He and his wife Mary Ann had 10 unmarried children, the youngest was a 10-month-old baby girl. In July 1895 he received a call from Pres. Wilford Woodruff to serve a mission in the Northern States Mission. Mary Ann, his wife, was willing that he should answer this call to serve the church. Br Cragun wrote back to Pres Woodruff:

Dear Brother

I have been waiting so see if I could arrange my affairs to be ready to go on a mission on the date you require as I have a large family and am considerably in debt.

I will do all I possibly can and with the help of the Lord I will endeavor to be ready. of all the Lord has given me I wish to use for the advancement of his work.

*Your Brother in the Gospel
Wilford E. Cragun*

Elder Cragun and his companions walked the muddy roads of Crawford County Indiana in 1895 meeting people, helping them and teaching them about the Church of Jesus Christ. He writes in his journal:

"On October 7, 1895, we went to McDonald's (jrc: Hyrum and Sereptia McDonald) and helped gather apples, had a conversation with him. We stayed there another day and he and his wife were converted. On the ninth I received a letter from my mother, saying all was well at home".

"December 4 my birthday, celebrated by having dinner at Brother Mason's. It stormed vary hard. Saturday had dinner at Hyrum McDonald's. On the eighth McDonald said he was converted I baptized him and Brother Empe confirmed him".

His efforts to love, help and share the Gospel would lead to many McDonalds, Standifords and Crawfords to be members of the Church. But there's more to this story of consecration.

In March 1896 Elder Cragun went to southern Illinois for a missionary conference. They visited a family for dinner. The food tasted peculiar and they thought it was odd that the

family stood watching them eat. They had been poisoned! This is reminiscent of 1832 when Joseph Smith and Newel K Whitney were stranded in Greenville, IN and Joseph was poisoned. In his weakened state, Elder Cragun also contracted malaria. His health situation was dire so he was sent home to Utah by train. Elder Cragun was barely able to get home to his family and died August 8th, 1896, just 11 months after leaving on his mission. What a sacrifice by him, his wife and his family! Generations of those he taught in Southern Indiana have been blessed in this Cragun family consecration of their talents, time and resources – in Wilford Cragun's case he consecrated and gave even his life!

Others of these early missionaries were: Elder John A. Morgan, Elder J.O. Duke, Robert Duke, Joseph Empey, (Elders) Sorenson, Strange, Truman, Garret, Herbert Taylor and Richard Shumway Pace. The faith was kept alive by occasional visits (sometimes years apart) by missionaries.

In January 1947 Sister Pearl Standiford (daughter of Hyrum J. McDonald, an early member) had the idea that enough descendants of these early members were living in and around English to organize and hold meetings, wrote a letter to the Mission President, Creed Haymond, for help in this venture. Following is the answer to this appeal:

Copy of part of the letter – January 10, 1947

Dear Sister Standiford,

I received your letter today in which you made an appeal for help in holding Latter-Day Saint Church services. Your appeal has touched my heart and I am going to help you as much as I can.

We have four missionaries laboring in Evansville. I am sure they can meet with you once a month, and twice if only 2 go at a time. Write me immediately how my missionaries may get in touch with you.

Creed Haymond, Mission President

After more correspondence and a visit by Elders John Chase and Pierce Fast from Evansville, President Haymond sent Elder Chase and Elder Arthur Saddler to locate in English. We held meetings in the I.O.O.F (International Order of Odd Fellows) Hall in English and occasionally in a schoolhouse in Sulphur.

From Church historical records we know that at a 16 August 1948 Northern States Mission meeting, it was approved for Ray Standiford be ordained a Priest by Elder John Chase (a missionary in English). On 28 August 1949 Pres. Creed Haymond of the Northern States Mission held an open-air meeting of the Southern Indiana District at McCormick Creek State Park. The following were approved and ordained: Ray Standiford ordained elder by Pres. Creed Haymond, Thomas Ash ordained an elder by Oren Knudsen, Marvin Wright ordained a deacon by Dale Ogden. There were two sessions of conference. A picnic lunch was enjoyed between the two sessions of this open-air conference. English Branch was organized in 1949 by Pres. Creed Haymond (jrc: the famous runner) and overseen by missionaries for several years. English was

in the Southern Indiana District and was part of the Northern States Mission. In 1949 the Great Lakes Mission was established and English was part of it.

The following is a list of names of missionaries who labored here over a period of four years:

Pierce Fast – first ten days of July 1947

John Chase – first ten days of July 1947 and in August 1947 until September 1948

Arthur Saddler – August 1947 to July 1948

Kemp – July 1948 to January 1949

Bryon D. Jenson – September 1948 to November 1948

In 1949, the English Branch was organized and run by the full-time missionaries.

Karl Goodman, Jr. – November 1948 to July 1949

Dale Ogden – January 1949 to January 1950

Harold Cropper – July 1949 to March 1950

Dick Nowers – January 1950 to March 1951

Karl Kleinman – March 1950 to October 1950

Darrel Allington – October 1950 to February 1951

Ripplinger – March 1951 (only a few weeks)

David West – March 1951 (only a few weeks).

In 1951 we were left without missionaries except for occasional visits from the supervising Elders, and the District Presidency. We struggled along alternating our meetings between I.O.O.F. Hall in English and a school in Sulphur due to transportation problems. Eventually we were meeting only once a month at English.

In 1953 we were almost ready to give up. But as is often the case in life, just as the future looked dark, amazing things were about to happen. Church historical records show that a meeting was held in English, Sunday 6 Dec 1953. 19 people were present. Elder Ray Standiford conducted, District President Thomas Jones presided. Donald Standiford gave a closing prayer in the 10:30 am Sunday School meeting. Ray Standiford conducted the 11:50 am testimony meeting. The opening song was, "I Know That My Redeemer Lives". The English Branch was organized. The following were sustained and set apart: Ray Standiford as branch president, Calvin Ash as 1st counselor, Donald Standiford as 2nd counselor. The closing song was "High On A Mountaintop". To this point missionaries had led the branch. This was the beginning of local priesthood leading the branch.

We made new arrangements for transportation and began holding services every Sunday again with fair attendance.

In 1955 we organized Relief Society, The Mutual Improvement Association and Primary and began plans for building a chapel.

On July 18, 1956, the groundbreaking services were held at the new chapel site on Level Heights (in English). Southern Indiana District President Robert Smith of the Bloomington Branch gave the address. A pitch-in supper was served. There were 54 present – members and friends.

President Ray Standiford was set apart as building supervisor and Sister Lucy Longest was set apart as building project clerk. Construction of the new Chapel was begun July 27, 1956.

September 22, a group from the Bedford Branch, Brothers Thomas Mason, Thomas Jones, Emmet Hollowell, William Roy Mum, Billy Logbry, Earl and Clifford Garland came and donated work on the chapel. This was greatly appreciated. Of note, it wasn't just members of the church that helped build this first chapel. Reverend Bill Askren, known lovingly in the community as "Brother Bill" also helped in the construction.

By October 1956 we were holding services in the new basement. Prior to this we had been meeting in a garage President Standiford had built on a lot adjoining the chapel site.

In May 1957 missionaries were again sent to English, Elders Stephen Burton and Calvin Cottrell. Elder Burton was here a few weeks and was replaced by Elder David Baumgartner. He and Elder Cottrell labored here until August.

By September 1957 the construction work on the chapel was almost completed. Our first dedication goal was June 1958. Due to the illness of President Standiford the work was delayed. Then there was another delay while waiting for the completion of the water system for this part of the town.

But our goal was finally reached June 2, 1960. The chapel was dedicated by Elder Alma Sonne, Assistant to the Twelve Apostles. Other speakers were President Frank Brown of East Central States Mission, President and Sister Rintzes of the Linton Branch and Brother Ogden of the Vincennes Branch. President Ray Standiford of the English Branch conducted the meeting. Attendance was estimated at one hundred and fifty. Special songs were sung by Mrs. Roma Shields and son Billy and Teddy Linton, non-members.

We extend our thanks and appreciation to all who helped make this possible. First of all, to our Heavenly Father for without His help our goal could never have been realized.

(Written by Pearl Standiford (with some additions of information by John Crawford). Read at the dedication exercises by Gertie Brown.)

A lot has happened since those early days. In the mid-1900's the English Branch covered much of the middle part of Southern Indiana and was part of the District based out of Evansville. In the early 1970's the branch became a part of the Louisville Stake. On October 24, 1982, English became part of the newly formed New Albany Stake. In the early 1990's the branch moved to a new building on White Oak Hill Road near Marengo, Indiana.

As is often the case in the gospel, the church grew by dividing. The English Branch members have faithfully moved forward in growing the church. Members of the English Branch worked tirelessly with members living around Tell City and eventually the Tell City Branch was

formed on November 21, 1979. English Branch members worked with members in the Huntingburg area. The Huntingburg Branch was formed May 4, 1980 and has now become the Jasper Ward. The Paoli Branch was started in 1983 and disbanded after a while but has now been re-established. A portion of the English Branch became a part of the Corydon Branch, now a ward, when it was started September 21, 1997. Through the years English became a ward and later became a branch again when Paoli Branch was re-established. The early English Branch members and missionaries surely look down at the church in Southern Indiana today and feel gratitude for the progress made. We look to them with gratitude for their faith and perseverance in the work of the Lord as well as the great blessings they have brought into all of our lives.

SOURCES

"Early History of The English Branch of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints", written by Pearl Standiford and read at the dedication of the chapel south of English by Gertie Brown.

"Northwestern Mission, Wilford Elisha Cragun, 1895-1896", his missionary journal and story

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"Moving Forward With Faith – A History of the New Albany Ward of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints" by Donna Faye Alldaffer