

PHOTOGRAPH BY DON SEARLE



The Manhattan New York Temple—which will occupy the top floors of this Church building—will be a U.S. \$2 subway fare away for many New York City Saints.

Church Blossoms in the Big Apple

By Don Searle, Church Magazines

New York City is the kind of place that draws visitors. At a sacrament meeting in Manhattan, you might talk with a sampling of members and find that most see themselves as temporary residents, here only to begin or advance a career.

But attitudes toward the city are changing, says President Brent J. Belnap of the New York New York Stake, which covers the borough of Manhattan. More members from other areas are putting down roots and raising their families in the city, and the number of native New Yorkers among members is also growing.

President Belnap and his wife, Lorinda, are examples of the shift in attitude. Now senior vice-president and general counsel for a division of an

international financial institution, President Belnap came to New York nearly 18 years ago to study law. After marrying President Belnap and living in Manhattan for five years, Sister Belnap thought of their life there as temporary. Then she awoke one morning in 1997 thinking, “I like living in Manhattan. It’s all right if we stay and raise our children here and send them on missions from here.” Shortly afterward, her husband was called as stake president.

Michelle Larsen of the stake’s Inwood First Ward is originally from Louisiana, and her husband is from Maryland. They came to the city when Sister Larsen, now a scientist studying the causes of tuberculosis, was beginning her graduate work. Her husband owns a book

importing business. New York City, she says, “is a very friendly place. It’s just a whole bunch of little neighborhoods strung together.” There are many educational and social opportunities for their children. “We like the energy of the city. It’s home.”

Young Latter-day Saints in New York City are a minority in their schools, but there is strength for them in the Church. Ellen Comp, director of an afternoon television program and a member of the Manhattan First Ward, says that the possibilities Mutual offers to her children are “exciting.” She notes that Latter-day Saint families in Manhattan cultivate friendships in the ward and stake in order to have associates with similar values, particularly for their children. “We work at being friends.”

Schoolteacher Ross McDonald, a member of the Inwood First Ward originally from El Paso, Texas, admits to having reservations about rearing children in the city because of some of the problems in public schools. While he sees many parents in the stake who find ways to deal with those public school difficulties, others choose to send their children to private schools. Still, he enjoys his teaching and leaves it to his wife to decide if she wants to stay. So far she does. Andrea McDonald, who grew up in the suburbs of Salt Lake City, has come to love the vibrancy of Manhattan. A dancer and musician, she says there are more opportunities than she could ever have imagined.

And there will soon be a temple, located in a Church-owned building across the street from the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts, just west of Central Park. After the temple is dedicated on June 13, Sister Larsen says, “I can get on the A [subway] train, ride down to 59th Street, get off, and walk to the temple. It’s amazing just to think about it.”

The subway fare will be U.S. \$2. That compares with as much as U.S. \$100 in costs to travel to the next nearest temple in Boston, Massachusetts, President Belnap says.

In the past, one of the Church’s biggest challenges in Manhattan has been temporal success among the members, President Belnap says. Many become successful in business, law, or entertainment and are often drawn



The Canal Street (Chinese) Branch is one of seven units that have been formed in the New York New York Stake since the early 1990s, bringing the stake's total to 12.

away from Church activity. "But the stronger the Church gets, and with the temple here now, we are going to be able to retain more of these people."

Members in the entertainment industry, for example, are challenged daily. Sandra Turley, who performed the role of the adult Cosette in *Les Miserables* on Broadway, says those challenges can be met. Problems come when people lower their standards to perform on stage, she says. A performer can learn in advance what a role will require and avoid ones that may lead to compromise.

When President Belnap came to Manhattan, there were five units: four English-speaking wards and one Spanish-speaking ward. Now the stake has twelve units, including two Spanish-speaking wards, wards for both older and younger singles, a branch in Harlem, a deaf branch, and a small Chinese branch that meets in an office suite in Chinatown.

Dolores Zecca of the Manhattan First Ward, baptized in 1996, is one of the local members who grew up in the area. A former stake missionary, she is one of the Latter-day Saints on a committee to help to strengthen the Church in Harlem, where a new meetinghouse will soon be built. Last Christmastime she was energized by a project to help police collect toys for needy children. A letter from the local precinct commended Sister Zecca and Harlem member Herbert Steed for their work, adding, "This is an example of the type of positive interaction we have begun to develop and wish to continue."

Sister Zecca looks forward to "being able to go [to the temple] as often as I like." She still recalls the first time: "Oh, what a feeling!"

It is a feeling that she and other New York City Saints hope to recapture again and again. ■

State of Illinois Expresses Regret for Expulsion of Saints

By Elisabeth Liljenquist, Church Magazines

A delegation of Illinois government officials met with Church leaders and members of the media on 7 April 2004 to officially express regret for events that happened nearly 160 years ago.

Beginning in early 1846, approximately 20,000 Saints were forced out of Illinois, which was the start of what would become the "largest forced migration in American history," according to Resolution 793 of the Illinois House of Representatives. Passed with unanimous consent on 1 April 2004, the resolution expresses regret for the murder of Joseph Smith in 1844 and the ultimate expulsion of the Saints from their beloved Nauvoo.

The resolution recognizes that "biases and prejudices of

a less-enlightened age in the history of the State of Illinois caused untold hardship and trauma for the community of Latter-day Saints by the distrust, violence, and inhospitable actions of a dark time in our past."

The idea for the resolution came from Chicago Alderman Edward Burke while he was vacationing in Utah with his wife, Anne, an Illinois Appellate Court Justice. At a dinner with Governor Olene S. Walker, Alderman Burke heard about the Church's history in Illinois from Governor Walker's husband, Myron. "I am embarrassed to say that was the first time I learned about Nauvoo and the details of what happened," said Alderman Burke. "I thought that, number one, the people



Left to right: President James E. Faust and President Thomas S. Monson accept a copy of the resolution from Illinois Lieutenant Governor Pat Quinn and State Representative Dan Burke.