

# The New York LDS Historian

## The Coming of a Temple to Manhattan

Manhattan Stake President Brent J. Belnap reflects on how local members learned that a Temple would be built in New York City

By Scott Tiffany

On November 10, 1869, more than 130 years ago, *The New York Times* printed a misguided headline, “A Mormon Temple to be Erected in This City.”<sup>1</sup> As it turned out, it wasn’t until two centuries later, in June of the year 2001, that the idea of a temple for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in New York City quietly began to take root

On June 19, 2001, Manhattan’s LDS Stake President, Brent J. Belnap, received an unexpected call from a member of the Church’s Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from Salt Lake City.<sup>2</sup> Elder Robert D. Hales, who grew up in the New York City area, said that he had some questions regarding costs and convenience associated with the previously announced Harrison Temple in neighboring Westchester County.

Elder Hales seemed particularly interested in the travel logistics and associated costs for members residing within the metropolitan area. He inquired how much it would cost members living in New York City to travel to get to the new temple, how many members would need to rent cars versus those who owned, and what the difference in time and money was for members between the announced temple in Harrison and the recently dedicated Boston Temple.

As a former resident of the area, Elder Hales was familiar with the difficulties and time constraints of getting in and out of the city. As there was no direct public transportation from any of the five boroughs to the Harrison Temple site, he seemed concerned to learn that the cost in time and money to members to rent a car and travel 20 to 30 miles north was only slightly less than the relative cost of traveling all the way to Boston.

After answering several very specific logistical questions, it occurred to President Belnap that something much bigger was afoot than working out how much it would cost members within the city to get to the Harrison Temple. He recalls saying, “perhaps too directly,” to Elder Hales, “It sounds like you are considering building a temple in Manhattan.” President Belnap recalls what happened next: The conversation suddenly turned very quiet and the speakerphone in Elder Hales’ office clicked off. There was silence on the other end of the phone line for what seemed like an uncomfortably long period of time.

Thinking that he had said something very wrong, President Belnap said he ‘felt terrible’ that he had been so blunt. He finally ventured to add, “Forgive me if I’ve asked the wrong question.” After another pause, Elder Hales softly replied, “No, President, you’ve asked exactly the *right* question.” Elder Hales then confirmed something that would change the lives of Church members in the metropolitan region: a temple somewhere in Manhattan was a topic of discussion among Church leaders in Salt Lake City.

With the idea of a possible temple in New York City out on the table, the conversation between Elder Hales and President Belnap got down to “brass tacks.” Elder Hales talked “quite openly” about the

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*Artist's rendering of the Manhattan New York Temple*

### 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 will be published in our monograph series. Monographs will be announced in future issues of this newsletter.

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- 70th Anniversary of the New York City Stake
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## The Slow Rise of a Temple in Manhattan

pros and cons of a possible temple in New York City. Among other things, they discussed potential impacts on the members, travel costs and associated logistics, and potential locations.

At the time, President Belnap believed that the actual location was still in question. However, building a temple at the existing New York New York Stake Center, across the street from Lincoln Center, seemed like the most logical choice, since it was centrally located and on a highly visible piece of property, unlike other prospects elsewhere within

the city. Elder Hales suggested that the having a temple in such a central location would allow members from the suburbs to come into the city, attend the temple, and still have time to shop or attend a cultural event.

One consideration was that the stake had only recently completed a much-needed expansion into the fifth and sixth floors of the stake center, having installed a second chapel together with additional classrooms and offices. Also, the Church no longer controlled the ground-floor

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### Recollections of Construction Workers of the Manhattan

*By Sariah Toronto*

## Adrian Flood, Drywall Carpenter

Adrian Flood took a leave of absence in 1992 from his job in County Litrim, Ireland, and came to the States with plans to stay for one year. Twelve years later, he is still here, and can now include building an LDS temple on his résumé.

Adrian has been the drywall carpenter foreman on the temple since January 2003; his team has been responsible for installing drywall on top of the metal studs that form the backbone of the temple's walls. They also installed drywall on all the columns and ceilings throughout the temple.

Asked how this job compares to others he has worked on, Adrian said it has been "unbelievable."<sup>1</sup> It has been remarkable for him in a number of ways.

A particularly memorable moment came near the beginning, when the crews were bringing construction materials into the building. The elevators and stairwells were much too small to accommodate many of these materials, such as 30 foot-long metal studs, so the workers "boomed" the materials into the 5<sup>th</sup> floor, using a boom truck to hoist the enormous studs and other materials up to the 5<sup>th</sup> floor from the street. Also remarkable for Adrian has been the quality of the work required of those building the temple.

"The quality that we have to work for is without doubt the highest that I have ever, ever worked with," he said. "And I have quite a bit of experience."<sup>2</sup>

Seeing the finished product has been a further memorable aspect of working on the temple, for it is "absolutely well worth every hour and every effort we



made. To see the finished product really makes our job worthwhile."<sup>3</sup>

Once the temple is finished, Adrian plans to at last conclude his leave of absence and move back to Ireland, principally so his children can be closer to their relatives. He will take back home with him something from the 16 months he spent working on the Manhattan Temple, as evidenced by his thoughts on the celestial room.

"To go walk into that celestial room is really, really, very spiritual, very, very good. Brings you down to earth. We're so used to the fast life here in New York. It would hold something for every member of the congregation and also for every member of the public who comes in during the open house. It's really special up there."<sup>4</sup>

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### The New York LDS Historian

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# “This is the place the Lord wants”

## The Story of the Temple Site at Lincoln Square

By James Lucas

As one of only a few temples to be built in the heart of a major city, the Manhattan New York Temple has a unique history both as to the site itself and as to how the church came to own this

The site of Lincoln Square has been settled at least since the 1700s, when Dutch New Yorkers established the village of Bloomingdale (Dutch for “vale of flowers”). The name came from the Bloomingdale Road, which was the main road going north up Manhattan Island from the city of New York at the southern end of the island.

The church in the picture of Bloomingdale Village is near what is today West 68<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway, a few blocks from the Temple site at West 65<sup>th</sup> Street and Broadway. As New York City expanded northward in the 1800s, a grid street plan was set out which incorporated little squares where the old Bloomingdale Road (now renamed Broadway) crossed the grid pattern of streets.

The area around the square at West 65<sup>th</sup> Street (named Lincoln after a local landowner rather than the president) quickly filled with working class tenements, especially after the construction of the Ninth Avenue El in 1880. Lincoln Square was dominated by the El station on the block between West 65<sup>th</sup> and West 66<sup>th</sup>

Streets, in front of the current location of the Temple.

In 1902, the first Broadway subway also established a stop at West 66<sup>th</sup> Street. The neighborhood was of mixed Irish and African-American populations and was nicknamed “San Juan Hill.” The name was in honor of the African-American Tenth Cavalry of the US Army which had fought in that battle of the Spanish-American War.<sup>1</sup>

The area was drastically affected in the early 1960s when New York City’s legendary Robert Moses led the demolition of many blocks of buildings to create a new complex of theaters to be named Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts. In part this was seen as an urban renewal project to clear away an area then considered to be poor and dangerous.

Before the buildings were demolished they served as the set for the exterior scenes of the movie version of *West Side Story*, which portrays the ethnic gangs which were thought to dominate the area.

During this time another significant Robert Moses undertaking had a major impact on the Church in the New York area. The Mormon Pavilion at the  
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*Bloomingdale Village in the early 1800s, now approximately West 68<sup>th</sup> and Broadway*



*From the 1880s to 1940s Lincoln Square was dominated by the Ninth Avenue El station which stood in front of the block where the Temple is currently located.*

## “This is the place the Lord wants”

1964-65 New York World’s Fair introduced the Church to many new members. The growth of the Church in the 1960s strained the available Church buildings in the New York Stake (which then included all of the New York and Connecticut areas of the Manhattan New York Temple District).

While there was general agreement on the need for a stake center building, there were different views as to where it should be located. Many thought it should be in Westchester County. Those who thought it should be in Manhattan mostly preferred a location on the East Side, away from the

deteriorating neighborhood of West 81<sup>st</sup> Street where the Manhattan members had been meeting since 1945.

Thus there was perhaps some surprise when Church president Joseph Fielding Smith indicated that the building was to be in Manhattan, and more surprise when local leaders felt inspired to include a West Side site among the options.

In 1970, Harold B. Lee, who was then president of the Council of the Twelve, inspected the proposed building sites in Manhattan. He was accompanied by George Mortimer, a local Church leader and the Church’s attorney. The Lincoln Square site was the last site they visited after seeing several sites on the East Side. Brother Mortimer described their visit to the Lincoln Square site: “I want to walk out on it,” said President Lee, getting out of the cab. After standing on the ground about three minutes, he declared, “George, this is the place the Lord wants. Buy it.”<sup>2</sup>

The Church facilities on the second, third and fourth floors were dedicated by President Spencer W. Kimball on May 25, 1975. In 1998 the fifth and sixth floors, which originally housed a health club, were acquired by the Church and converted into a second set of church facilities including chapel, cultural hall, offices, and classrooms. On August 7, 2002, the Church announced that these floors would be converted into the Manhattan New York Temple.<sup>3</sup>

Today, 34 years after President Lee stood on a rundown parking lot in a decidedly downscale neighborhood and meditated with the Lord, it may fairly be said that the Church probably possesses few

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*Lincoln Square without Elevated Train*

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## Recollections of Construction Workers of the Manhattan

*By Sariah Toronto*

### Manley Ellis, Wall Taper

Manley Ellis, the “Jamaican Taper,”<sup>5</sup> as he was known during the construction of the Manhattan Temple, was responsible for making the temple walls perfectly straight and smooth.

The mason work and carpentry skills Manley brought with him from the “beautiful island”<sup>6</sup> when he came to the States 12 years ago helped him to quickly pick up the trade Manley brought to this job of ‘taping’ in the Temple. The taper’s task is to see that the walls of the building under construction are not only perfectly straight from one corner of a room to the other, but also to make certain that those walls are absolutely smooth, with

no visible or palpable seams between pieces of drywall, and no nicks or bumps.

To achieve these perfectly smooth walls in the Temple, Manley used a specialized knife to apply plaster polish to the drywall. On a typical construction job, a taper such as Manley would apply 3 or 4 coats of plaster to the walls.<sup>7</sup> On the Temple, though, any given wall received closer to 5 or 6 coats before meeting the required standard of quality.

“There’s no shorthand here. No shorthand. You gotta go to the extreme miles to get it the way it’s supposed to be,” said Manley.<sup>8</sup>



Many times over the course of the job, Manley would apply several coats of plaster to a wall and think he was finished with it. Then someone would pass by with a piece of wood or some other construction material, putting a small, uneven nick in the wall. Manley would then return to the wall and apply another coat of plaster. As he wryly observed in his island singsong, “They definitely looking for something perfect.”<sup>9</sup>

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# Member Volunteers at the Heart of the Temple

By Allison Clark

Since the decision to build a temple in Manhattan was publicly announced, there has been a flurry of activity on the part of the stakes and wards within the new Temple district to prepare for the Temple. For more than a year, members have contributed of their time, talents, and resources to build this temple. Even though members have not joined forces with the construction workers, they have engaged in important labors that have facilitated its construction and arranged for the celebration of its opening and

The projects of members throughout the Temple District have been extensive and varied, ranging from cleaning assignments of the Temple construction site to orchestrating a Jubilee performance by the youth from the Temple District at Radio City Music Hall the night before the dedication. Planning for the five-week long Open House and staffing the Temple throughout have provided countless members in the Temple District an opportunity to serve in the Temple prior to its dedication. In the New York New York Stake alone, over 400 members have volunteered in some capacity.

## PREPARATION

Many Church members throughout the fall and winter of 2004 have periodically cleaned up the construction site to make the work easier for the construction workers, facilitating the tight construction schedule.

Lynn Fisher, a member of the New York New York stake was asked to participate in a cleaning project in anticipation of the visit of several General Authorities and other Church leaders from Salt Lake. Lynn and her group were instructed to clean the tile in the bathroom of the baptismal area. She describes using “mammoth vacuum cleaners sucking up broken tile from off the floor,” in an area that was still “most definitely a construction site.” Beyond the dirt, dust, and grime of

the construction work, she describes that “every once in a while I caught a glimpse of the beauty of a temple; like a beautiful piece of millwork hidden behind some plywood just waiting to be put in place.”

She relates her initial fear that because the Manhattan Temple was to be smaller than other Temples such as those in Washington, D.C. or Boston, the level of detail, quality, and ornamentation “we usually associate with temples” would not be present. But her cleaning experience helped reassure her that although the Temple was small, “all of the detail was there.”

Nancy Philips, a volunteer coordinator from the Brooklyn Stake, shared the enthusiasm of members of her stake in joining in the cleaning projects in the initial cleaning stages in the fall of 2003. “People were lining up to go to clean the Temple,” including families with their teenage sons, a newly married couple that had just been sealed in the Washington D.C. Temple a few months earlier, and many non-English speaking members of the Brooklyn Stake.

In the early phases of the Temple construction, the stake primary in Manhattan planned a service project to show appreciation for the construction workers. Each ward put together their own “thank you” card to give to the workers.

As Sandra Turley, president of the In-



*Manhattan primary children count Temple chair booties*

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## Member Volunteers at the Heart of the Temple Opening

wood First Ward Primary tells the story: “Our primary made a large poster with individual letters from each child pasted on. The children loved writing to the workers and shared their encouragement and love in a way only children can.” Later, in preparation for the Open House, the stake primary counted the booties for each of the chair legs in the Temple. (The young women of the Union Square First Ward in the New York New York Stake re-counted the booties just to be sure!)

Each of the sixteen stakes or districts in the Temple District was asked to provide at least one altar cloth for use in one of the four altars of the Temple. Tara Skouson of the New York New York Stake has overseen the altar cloth project both for her stake and for the Temple District as a whole. Her own stake took a collaborative approach to making the altar cloths. Rather than have one individual crochet the entire cloth, about thirty individuals have created one crocheted square that has become part of the larger whole.

Tara was given little specific instruction for the altar clothes beyond the measurements of the finished cloth and the instructions to use a simple design with a scalloped edge and tight crochet loops with white yarn. In order to provide some uniformity to the many individually created squares, everyone used the same size hook and the same yarn. Tara indicated that many sisters expressed a desire and a willingness to help even though they had never crocheted.

Upon arriving in the New York, New York South Mission with her husband, Sister Rich decided that she wanted to create an altar cloth, unaware that there were specific measurements she needed to comply with. Sister Rich had made altar cloths for other temples, but received no specific instruction on the size of the altar cloths for the Manhattan Temple. After contacting Tara Skouson, Sister Rich was surprised and delighted to find that her cloth matched the specifications to the half-inch. Sister Rich explained that she was “at peace” when working on the cloth and felt it an honor and “special experience to make a piece for the House of the Lord.”

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*President Brent Belnap greets children counting the Temple chair booties*

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## Recollections of Construction Workers of the Manhattan

*By Sariah Toronto*

### Mario Padilla, Electrician

Mario Padilla has worked with electricity since he was 12 years old. This 33-year-old’s latest encounter with voltage and wiring came in his capacity as one of 20 or so members of the electricians’ crew that installed mile after mile of wire in the Manhattan Temple.

Electrical wiring, security systems, lighting, power, telephone wiring—Mario and his crewmates installed it all.

Asked how working on the Temple compared to other jobs he had worked on, the native of San Pedro Sula, Honduras replied simply, “Tough.”<sup>10</sup>

“In a good way, though,” he added, because, like other temple construction

workers, he learned an incredible amount about his trade over the course of the job. He learned how to use equipment that he was previously unfamiliar with, and how to install many different types of systems, some of which he had little previous experience with.<sup>11</sup>

In addition, the level of complexity of Mario’s various tasks, and the required quality standards (“Everything has to be perfect.”<sup>12</sup>) were higher here than on any other job he had encountered, including the LDS chapel he recently helped build in Woodside, Queens.

Coincidentally, it was not while working on that building in Woodside that Mario first set foot in an LDS chapel. His

cousins in Honduras are members of the church, and when he was 7 or 8 years old, before he moved to the States, he would often attend meetings with them.

When Mario related this bit of personal history to Elder and Sister Farr, the missionaries overseeing the temple construction, they quickly found the closest branch to Mario’s home, and urged him to visit it. He plans to begin attending church meetings, although his wife is Catholic and he’s not sure of how things will play out at home. “But I’m going,” he said.<sup>13</sup>

When it comes to installing air condi-

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# Temple Open House Attracts Thousands

## Local and National Luminaries Visit

By *Richard Lyman Bushman*

“The hottest ticket in town,” an article in USA Today called reservations at the Manhattan New York Temple open house. Judging by attendance, thousands of New Yorkers and people from far off places agreed.

The first tours were given on Saturday, May 1. The special guests invited for the occasion included the construction workers and their families. Many of them knew the Temple inside out already, but not all had seen it furnished and beautified. This was a chance to show their handiwork to their families. The others to come on that first day were nearby residents invited to “Neighbor Day.”

Tours from May 3 to 7 were part of “VIP week,” attracting leading politicians, business leaders, and academic figures. At the Friday reception, Latter-day Saint Senators Harry Reid and Gordon Smith, and Member of Congress Eni F. H. Faleomavaega were present to greet New York congressional leaders Senator Charles Schumer and Congressman Charles Rangel. Tour guides were pleased to show State representative Keith Wright through the building. Michael Wallace, host of “60 Minutes” and a friend of President Hinckley, chatted for over an hour with friends in the Church. Many United Nations ambassadors attended the reception.

Temple tours ended in the ward cultural hall decorated for the first week with sprays of cherry blossoms and greenery. Tables and sofas provided comfortable locations for people to talk following the tours. Many lingered to ask questions and become better acquainted with Church members.

The tour’s thirteen-minute introductory video included many New York touches. Local Latter-day Saints were interviewed on the street about their reactions to the Temple. The Church’s beginnings in New York state and Joseph Smith’s 1832 visit to New York City helped explain why Latter-day Saints honor New York. The boundaries for the Temple’s “neigh-

bors” ran from about 60th to 70th street on the West Side. An individual invitation was sent to each of the 1400 apartments in six residential buildings within those limits. To reach the Temple’s commercial neighbors, the New York New York Stake hand delivered invitations to about 150 businesses, all of which are part of the larger “Lincoln Square Business Improvement District,” a neighborhood consortium to which the Church belongs.

Tours for the general public began on Saturday May 8 and ran through Saturday June 5. As many as 3000 people a day came to the site. The size of the Temple elevator limited each tour to about fifteen people. To allow as many as possible to visit, guides remained at each stop just four minutes on a tour that lasted three-quarters of an hour.

Governor Olene Walker of Utah and Senate Majority Leader Joseph L. Bruno of New York were among those to tour the Temple. Four members of the Quorum of the Twelve, Elders Boyd K. Packer, L. Tom Perry, Russell M. Nelson, and Richard G. Scott viewed the Temple in the first week of public tours. Elder Earl C. Tingey of the Presidency of the Seventy and Sheri Dew, CEO of Deseret Book were in attendance during most of VIP week to welcome guests.

The first Temple Committee meeting was held in September 2002, at which Elder

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*5th Floor Chapel before demolition*

## Temple Open House Attracts Thousands

Spencer J. Condie, North America Northeast Area President at the time and first chair of the “Temple Executive Committee,” presided. The “Temple Executive Committee” is the steering body for all Temple-related activities. It is comprised of the current Area President, a Public Affairs Representative (Bruce L. Olsen), a Temple Department Representative (Robert Reeve), and a Local Committee Coordinator (Brent J. Belnap). With Elder Condie’s release as our Area President in the summer of 2003, Elder Glen L. Pace became chair. When Elder Pace became ill in the fall of 2003, Elder David R. Stone, Second Counselor in the Area Presidency assumed that role. Members of the committee appointed from the temple district took responsibility for audiovisual, community relations, reservations, food, missionary, music, physical facilities, public affairs, history, recommends, security, translation, and volunteer services.

The success of the open house is best measured by visitors’ reactions. At the end of the tour they noted their responses on temple tour cards:

- It was very nice—Beautiful. Thanks so much for opening it up for us to see. It makes it real for the rest of us. I enjoyed it.
- I’m 17 years old. I thank my friend for getting me into coming, it’s a wonderful experience. I learned more about this

church even though I’m not a member (yet). I have to say that this temple is very peaceful.

- The tour made me think of Jesus and I felt the spirit. I thought the cookies would have frosting with a temple on it. (Juillet Traylor, Age 4.)
- El templo es bellissimo, realmente se respira tranquilidad y respeto. Estoy muy contenta de haber venido a visita la casa del señor.
- El tour fue muy agradable y se siente el amor de dios para sus hijos
- El templo es espectacular, se siente una atmosfera muy espiritual un lugar para refleccionar, conectarse con Dios.
- One would never imagine from outside how beautiful the interior is. Thank you.
- I really enjoyed visiting the temple because I have never been in one before and didn’t know what to expect but I really felt peace in the temple.
- Very impressed with the beauty & serenity of the building. The peacefulness felt and the fellowship of the community. Thank you for the opportunity to experience your wonderful House of Worship.
- I love you and Jesus and I’ll be good every day and I won’t hit and I will give everything spoken and I won’t do anything mean.

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## Recollections of Construction Workers of the Manhattan

By Sariah Toronto

### Alain Fatovic, Air Conditioning

tioning systems in LDS buildings, Alain Fatovic is a veteran.

By the time he began working on the Manhattan temple in January 2003, he had installed piping, steam or refrigeration, grills, ductwork, control wiring and thermostats in 10 chapels in the New York metro area, including buildings in Queens, New Jersey, and several renovation projects in the stake center/temple building.

In spite of his experience working on buildings for the Church, this job was “a big challenge” for Al<sup>14</sup> principally because of the

“highest quality”<sup>15</sup> required for all aspects of the temple. For Al these high standards meant he had to install the wires and ductwork for the air conditioning system in just the right place, so the millwork on the high ceilings would fit as it was intended to. If Al’s ductwork were installed just the slightest bit off, the millwork on the ceilings would not be aligned properly. “We knocked our heads a little bit, but we managed,” said Al.<sup>16</sup>

Throughout the project, Al looked forward to seeing each aspect of the Temple as it was finished. When they first brought in the stained glass, for example, he could not wait to see what it would look like installed. Ditto for the chande-



liers. At the time of our interview, Alain was excited to see what the carpet would look like once it was laid. He had heard there was some sort of intricate design in it, and could not wait to lay eyes on it. “All I do is say, “Wow!” It’s beautiful work.”<sup>17</sup>

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## Service Project on the ‘Big Stage’

By Allison Clark

On Saturday, June 12, 2004, the evening before the Manhattan Temple dedication, youth from the Temple District will gather together for a once-in-a-lifetime activity: performing at Radio City Music Hall at the request of President Hinckley in honor of the Temple’s dedication. To make the occasion even more memorable, the Prophet will address the group in a devo-

This will be a musical and theatrical production created by the youth and for the youth. Erik Orton of the New York New York Stake, artistic director for the event, estimates that about 2000 youth in the Temple District will be performing. In addition, the event will also be broadcast under the direction of a team of talented professionals to Church buildings in the Temple District with satellite reception.

Jubilee events have been organized for the dedication of temples in Ghana, Alaska, and Copenhagen, and for the re-dedication of the Sao Paulo Temple in Brazil. Sister Claudia Bushman of the New York New York Stake is producer of the program. She indicates that in the early phases of planning New York’s Jubilee, there was some thought of securing Yankee or Shea stadium, or using an outside venue such as Central Park or Corona Park in Queens. However, by early March, Radio City Music Hall had been selected.

The Jubilee will consist of six different program segments—each lasting about eight minutes. Youth in two or three stakes of the Temple District will join together for each segment. Between each part, videos will show the youth in rehearsals, thoughts of their feelings about the Temple, interesting New York City Church history, and brief interviews with three Apostles who have lived in the New York City metro region (Elder Hales, Elder Eyring and Elder Perry).

The six live performance segments focus on cultural themes: Mormon Pioneers, the Ellis Island/Immigration Experience,

a Broadway Medley, as well as three different cultures vital to the metropolitan area: African-American culture, Hispanic/Latin culture, and Asian culture. The stake youth groups assigned to each topic do not necessarily correspond with the cultural heritage of many of the youth in those stakes, so youth can explore the music and dance of other cultures. The Jubilee will also feature a primary chorus of 100 and a young single adult chorus of 300 will sing.

At the fireside following the Jubilee, President Hinckley and other General Authorities are scheduled to speak.

Erik Orton described the preparation for the project as “very overwhelming,” but notes that the volunteers and youth involved have “taken ownership” of their parts and seem to be enjoying the work. Sister Bushman estimates that nearly 1,000 adult Church members are involved in bringing this project to life. “This is a larger scale than any of us are accustomed to working in,” she says, “but we all consider it a great opportunity and blessing to sing and dance in Radio City Music Hall.”



*Radio City Music Hall*

## Member Volunteers at the Heart of the Temple Opening

In early March 2004, all of the stake volunteer coordinators gathered together for a meal in a nearby restaurant and a tour of the Temple in its final stages of construction. The purpose of the meeting was a final coordination of efforts, and, more importantly, a chance for these stake volunteer coordinators who had already given so much of their time, to see some of the fruit of their labors. Nancy Phillips from the Brooklyn Stake describes the spiritual impact of that meeting upon her and the others:

meeting upon her and the others:

“Following the first meeting of volunteer coordinators on March 6, we ended our evening by gathering in the Celestial Room, where we sang two hymns together. The music was wonderful, not because of acoustics or singing ability (although both were evident), but because the Spirit was so clearly present with us as we sang. I told myself to listen carefully and take it all in since this was probably the only time I would ever get to harmonize in song in that room. I am sure I wasn’t the only one present

who felt that spirit, because I saw feelings like mine displayed on the faces of many of the others. It was an experience I will always treasure.”

### OPEN HOUSE

In preparation for the five-weeks of open house tours, one Sunday evening in March, a mock tour was held to practice the timing and movement of individuals through the Temple. The stake coordinators were responsible for inviting a handful of members from their units to take some of the first tours.

Nancy Phillips explains that she and Mary Jane Callister, the stake volunteer coordinators from Brooklyn, tried to pick carefully who in their stake would most benefit from this kind of experience.

One of the men they invited was Brother Eleazar Rowe, who had been baptized the Sunday prior to the mock tours, and his girlfriend (now wife), Kelly Johnson. Eleazar describes this experience:

“My first walk through the Manhattan Temple was unforgettable because I was with my future wife. As we stood in the Sealing Room, as in all of the incomplete Temple, the Spirit was very strong and I was so emotionally and deeply touched. As we walked home we could still feel the Spirit. It was an amazing experience. Later, Kelly told me that while we were in the Sealing Room, and as she looked into my eyes, it was the first time she knew without a doubt, how much I loved her. I will ever be grateful for that experience.”

While the Church Public Affairs Office and the local Temple Committee have been responsible for organizing the Open House, local volunteer members have been essential in executing the work. Members from the Brooklyn stake helped in verifying addresses, proofing the VIP letters of invitation, and stuffing them into envelopes. Some of the work was done at home, but some members who live two hours away also had to travel to the Union Square Building to do the work.

Tickets generated through the two Call Centers had to be printed and mailed by a Church volunteer. Brother Ray Oser in New Jersey managed the whole reservation ticketing system, and personally printed and mailed all of these individual tickets.

The staff of the Open House for the VIP week and the four weeks of public tours was also made up of volunteers organized by Steven Quinn, Blair Garff, and Malcolm Draper. Each Stake within the Temple District was assigned shifts (morning or afternoon/evening) to staff each day of the Open House. The number of volunteers requested from each Stake was based upon the membership determined by Sacrament Meeting attendance.

Sixty volunteers were assigned for the morning shifts lasting from 9 to 3, and eighty for the afternoon/evening shifts lasting from 3 until the closing at 7 p.m. on Monday and 9 p.m. Tuesday through Saturday. Adding in all the other workers, from 250 to 300 volunteers were at the Temple each day. The volunteers have done a range of tasks including, ushering, greeting, operating elevators, giving

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*The music was wonderful, not because of acoustics or singing ability ... but because the Spirit was so clearly present with us as we sang. I told myself to listen carefully and take it all in since this was probably the only time I would ever get to harmonize in song in that room.*

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## John and Helen Stone

### New Temple President and Matron

By Sariah Toronto

As a Stake President in the New York City region during the 1990s, John Stone never envisioned that there would be a temple in Manhattan. In his office desk one day he found a letter that a prior Stake President had written to Church authorities in Salt Lake City, asking them to consider the possibility of a temple in the area. The reply from Salt Lake was a request for that Stake President to focus on other considerable matters before him. After reading this correspondence President Stone similarly

One of those pressing concerns for local Church leaders for a number of years has been having adequate space for weekly worship and activities.

“Physical facilities have always played catch-up to the membership in Manhattan,” President Stone said, and for most of the time he was Stake President, he was searching for land for more meeting space. While this search did prove successful in Harlem, the hunt was fruitless on the Upper East Side during the 1990’s.

Perhaps not surprisingly, then, these extensive efforts to provide the Church membership with sufficient day-to-day meetinghouse space eclipsed any thought of a temple. Now that a temple has been built, President Stone calls its existence a ‘miracle.’ With a growing membership in the metro region, including two new meetinghouses and plans for two more in Manhattan alone, President Stone says the new temple represents “a multiplication of the Church’s commitment” to the region.

Having lived in the area more than 30 years, President Stone speaks from experience. An economist by training, President Stone came to the New York area in 1969 to take a job with the Federal Reserve Bank of New York. He and his wife, Helen, had one child at the

time, and the trio set up house in Scarsdale, Westchester County. The Stones called Scarsdale home for the next three decades, during which time they raised a total of five children. Three of those children continue to live in the New York metro area—Greg and Rich in Manhattan, and Megan on Long Island.

President Stone, who joined the Church as a teenager in high school in El Paso, Texas, is no stranger to Church service, both in the New York area and farther afield. He served as a Young Men President, and from 1978 to 1983 he was Bishop of the Westchester Ward. During the summer of 1991, he was briefly a counselor in the Stake Presidency of the New York New York Stake, which at the time was comprised of the Westchester Ward and all units in the Bronx and Manhattan.

In September 1991, he was called as President of the stake, a role he filled until November 1997, when the stake was split into two separate stakes. Two and a half years later, in July 2000, President and Sister Stone were called to preside over the Greece Athens Mission. The mission included the countries of Greece and Cyprus, where young missionaries served, as well as Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, where couple missionaries labored. President and Sister Stone returned to the States in July 2003, allow-



*John and Helen Stone*

ing them a quick breather before receiving their new assignments as Temple President and Matron, in April 2004.

Given President Stone’s background and Church experience in the metro region, the new Temple President is uniquely positioned to comment on the effect the temple will likely have on the Church membership. “It will grow” he says because “people feel safe and uplifted when there’s a temple. That’s why we need it.”

President Stone’s wide-ranging Church service notwithstanding, the calling as Temple President has been unique for him because he says he has never before felt so much celestial help in going about his work, even in the short time he has been filling this role. He says even simple things like getting a good night’s sleep, or finding a parking spot when in a crunch, have evidenced that angels are on his right and on his left, and that “the Lord really wants this temple to open.”

As he prepares for that opening, President Stone’s focus has been on the 97<sup>th</sup> Section of the Doctrine and Covenants and on the first and great commandment, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37). He says of his calling and service in the temple, “I want to be an instrument in

## Member Volunteers at the Heart of the Temple Opening

shoe-covers, and serving refreshments. The approximately 550 tour guides were selected by the bishops and stake presidents within the Temple District. They report that members of their wards and branches were very eager to help in staffing the Open House, often at personal sacrifice.

Barrett Richards, the Stake coordinator of volunteers from the Plainview Stake on Long Island, said that many individuals from his stake, which is located at some distance from the city (as far out as the Hamptons), are taking vacation time in

order to help with the Open House, or finding ways to utilize their linguistic talents during the Open House by helping groups that speak foreign languages. In fact, many of the time slots for Open House tours are designated for languages besides English, including many in Spanish and Chinese.

The coming of the Manhattan Temple has already brought joy to many members' lives as they have made individual and personal sacrifices of their time and talents to see it come to fruition. Through-



*President Harold B. Lee*

### “This is the place the Lord wants”

properties of the quality and visibility of the Lincoln Square site. The Lincoln Square neighborhood has become one of the world's most prestigious locations, with not only Lincoln Center but also the headquarters of ABC and Time Warner located within blocks of the Temple. We have no indication that the Church leaders who were inspired to select this site knew that a House of the Lord would

someday rise on this piece of solid Manhattan schist, but we can know now that the Spirit of the Lord has long been on this sacred ground.

<sup>1</sup> Neil Kittredge (Beyer Blinder Belle, Architects & Planners) History of Lincoln Square 1700-2000 (unpublished 6 pp.)

<sup>2</sup> Personal recollections of Harlan Clark and George Mortimer interview with the author.

<sup>3</sup> Ned Thomas, Evolution of the First Manhattan

## The Coming of a Temple to Manhattan

leases between the stake center foyer and the American Folk Art Museum space. (The ground leases would be acquired in the spring of 2002.)

As it turned out, plans for a temple within the existing stake center were further along than President Belnap had first realized. In August 2001, less than two months later, Elder W. Craig Zwick and Elder Spencer J. Condie of the North America Northeast Area Presidency presented a rough schematic drawing of a “small” temple within the fifth and sixth floors of the existing stake center. Still, President Belnap was not allowed to tell anyone of the project. Under normal conditions, not discussing a possible temple in Manhattan would be hard enough.

Yet, for President Belnap, maintaining silence proved perhaps most difficult during the dark days following Septem-

ber 11, 2001. After the destruction of the World Trade Center, President Belnap received an odd invitation from an unlikely source. Holly Hinckley, a member of the stake and granddaughter of President Gordon B. Hinckley, asked President Belnap to schedule an appointment for him and his wife to meet briefly with her grandfather in Salt Lake City.

As the Belnaps were already traveling to Salt Lake City for the upcoming General Conference, an appointment was scheduled on the Friday before the October 2001 Conference sessions. Given the ‘unofficial’ nature of the request, President Belnap made the appointment through the president's secretary, assuming that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the impact of 9/11 on the Church members in New York City.

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## The Coming of a Temple to Manhattan

On Friday, October 5, 2001, in Salt Lake, President Belnap and his wife, Lorinda, were ushered into President Hinckley's office by Don Staheli, the president's personal secretary, where a map of New York City was rolled out. Most of their fifteen-minute meeting focused on the "feasibility, desirability and necessity" of having a temple in New York City.

The Belnaps left the Prophet's office feeling like the prayers of the local members had been answered. The following two days, while seated inside the Conference Center, they quietly hoped for, and even expected, an announcement to be made in General Conference—although nothing was said over the pulpit about the temple. Presumably, the idea of a temple in the city was still not yet fully decided.

A few weeks later, on Saturday, November 10, 2001, following the Saturday training session of stake conference, President Belnap dedicated the new fifth and sixth floor chapel and meetinghouse space in the stake center. As Church members celebrated the event, President Belnap was also pleased. Yet at the same time, he attended the dedication with the odd, hidden hope that the new chapel would soon be dismantled to make room for a temple.

Then, two months later, his hopes were confirmed. On Saturday, January 12, 2002, the LDS Church's Presiding Bishop, H. David Burton, came to New York City to visit sites for the temple and three sites for proposed new chapels in Manhattan. In connection with this visit, President Belnap was asked to put together a thorough, confidential analysis of the transportation and financial issues of getting to the Harrison Temple versus traveling to a temple in Manhattan from New Jersey, the five boroughs, Long Island, upstate New York, and Connecticut. Not even President Belnap's stake counselors were privy to the plan.

Then, on Saturday, March 23, 2002, President Hinckley came to visit potential temple and other new meetinghouse properties in the New York City area. He was visiting the Northeast for another regional meeting in Boston.

The Prophet, his personal secretary and

security guard, Elder Zwick, President Belnap, and Richard Hedberg first visited the Harrison Temple site in Westchester County. President Belnap recalls the Prophet was intimately familiar with precise details about the site: He rattled off information regarding square footage, drainage, utility lines, elevation, and could identify exactly what the orange spray paint lines on the property meant.

After this visit, the group traveled to view the new Inwood chapel and met Bishops Mark E.

Johnson (Inwood 1) and Matthew B. Day (Inwood 2). From Inwood, the group drove past the proposed sites for new chapels in Harlem, on East 87<sup>th</sup> Street, and in a convent near Union Square.

As they traveled down Second Avenue, the Prophet remarked how "unhappy" everyone looked. They also drove by Ground Zero where the World Trade Center towers once stood. The Prophet commented "how terrible and how horrendous" the events were that took place on September 11<sup>th</sup>. Late in the afternoon, the group ended their day at the Manhattan stake center to review that location.

After walking through the building, the group met in President Belnap's office to review and discuss what they had seen. According to President Belnap, it appeared certain that a decision to build a temple in New York City had been reached. On the following day, Sunday, March 24, 2002, President Belnap supposed a temple announcement might be made at the special regional meeting that was broadcast to what would be roughly considered the future temple district. Many local members also hoped the Prophet would shed light on a temple in Harrison or even in Manhattan.

'Wishful speculation' concerning a temple in Manhattan had floated within the New York New York Stake for a long



*Church members help dismantle the fifth-floor chapel.*

time, especially after September 11, 2001 and a series of legal setbacks had delayed the groundbreaking for a temple in Harrison.

"Although I was as guilty as the next person in expressing aloud how nice it would be to have a temple here in Manhattan, I stopped making off-hand comments once I knew that a temple was a distinct possibility," said President Belnap. "Once I stopped joining in on the casual conversation, I thought for certain that people could read my mind. Thankfully, no one ever asked me 'point blank' whether a temple was coming to New York City."

Yet, on the day of the special regional meeting, nothing was said formally.  
*Continued on next page*

## The Coming of a Temple to Manhattan

Addressing a full house in the New York New York Stake Center, the Prophet did promise that “within two years,” members in the city would have access to a temple, and challenged the members to



*Fifth-floor construction where the terrestrial and celestial rooms of the Temple were built. The space housed racquetball courts when the building was first built in the 1970s.*

begin preparing now. But he did not give any specifics. The stake’s focus for 2002 was “Preparing for a Temple in Our Midst” and the topic of a temple was a focal point in stake and ward lessons, meetings and service projects.

Then in July 2002, many Church members were surprised to learn that the new chapel and meeting space on the fifth and sixth floors of the stake center would be closed for ‘reconstruction.’<sup>3</sup> Rumors spread quickly of what

might be in store. Many Church members hoped a temple would finally be in their midst.

The answer came on Wednesday, August 7, 2002. With no press conference and no special meetings, the First Presidency announced in a press release that a temple would be built in New York City in the present stake center. At the time, President Belnap was vacationing with his family in Utah. Arriving late one evening at his parents’ home in Ogden after spending the day in Salt Lake, he was surprised to learn that he

had an urgent message from President Hinckley’s personal secretary, asking him to call President Hinckley that evening at his home.

President Hinckley told President Belnap that an announcement had gone out earlier that day. The Manhattan New York Temple was now official. The next morning, President Belnap fielded a phone call from a reporter from *The New York Times* while sitting in the lobby of the Joseph Smith Memorial Building in Salt Lake City.<sup>4</sup>

On August 9, 2002, more than 130 years after its first article announcing a temple in New York City, *The New York Times* ran a headline about the Latter-day Saints constructing a house of worship: “Mormons Plan a Temple Opposite Lincoln Center”. And this time, the article was accurate.

<sup>1</sup> *The New York Times*, November 10, 1869.

Special thanks to Kent Larsen for uncovering this interesting article.

<sup>2</sup> Stake President Brent J. Belnap’s recollections taken in an interview with Scott D. Tiffany on November 13, 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The stake high priests’ quorum meeting and “luau” were held on the fifth floor of the stake center on the last Saturday before the fifth and sixth floors were officially closed down. A new outdoor “patio” that exited off the fifth floor above the current stake offices was used for the first—and only—time.

<sup>4</sup> President Belnap says he wanted to be back in New York in time for Sunday’s meetings, particularly to see the reaction of the Church members, but instead he and his family decided to continue their vacation for nearly two more weeks.

### Notes for Recollections of Construction Workers

<sup>1</sup> Adrian Flood, interview by Sariah Toronto, 25 March 2004

<sup>2</sup> Ibid

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Elder Farr, interview with Sariah Toronto, 18 February 2004

<sup>6</sup> Manley Ellis, interview with Sariah Toronto, 25 March 2004

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Ibid

<sup>9</sup> Ibid

<sup>10</sup> Mario Padilla, interview by Sariah Toronto, 25 March 2004

<sup>11</sup> Ibid

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Alain Fatovic, interview with Sariah Toronto, 25 March 2004

<sup>15</sup> Ibid

<sup>16</sup> Ibid

<sup>17</sup> Ibid