

Grundy County History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints “The Mormon Church”

The residents of Grundy County and also Warren County were first introduced to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints “The Mormons” in the latter part of the 1800’s.

Missionaries from Idaho, Colorado, Arizona, and Utah, serving in the Southern States Mission with headquarters in Chattanooga, came to Tracy City, Tennessee by train, then they walked to Altamont, then down the mountain to Northcutt’s Cove which was called Larsen at that time and on to McMinnville in Warren County.

Each missionary carried their luggage, or grips, as they were called and an umbrella. Their grips usually contained a Bible, Book of Mormon, tracts (religious pamphlets), shoe brush and blacking, razor and soap, paper and pen, and an extra change of clothing.

The missionaries carried no money and thus depended on the good will of the people who lived along the route they followed for food and shelter.

After the first missionaries came through the area and visited in the homes of friendly persons, they would then tell the ones who came later where they could get food and a nights lodging.

Several families in Northcutt’s Cove were receptive to the message of the restored gospel and some of them were baptized in 1896.

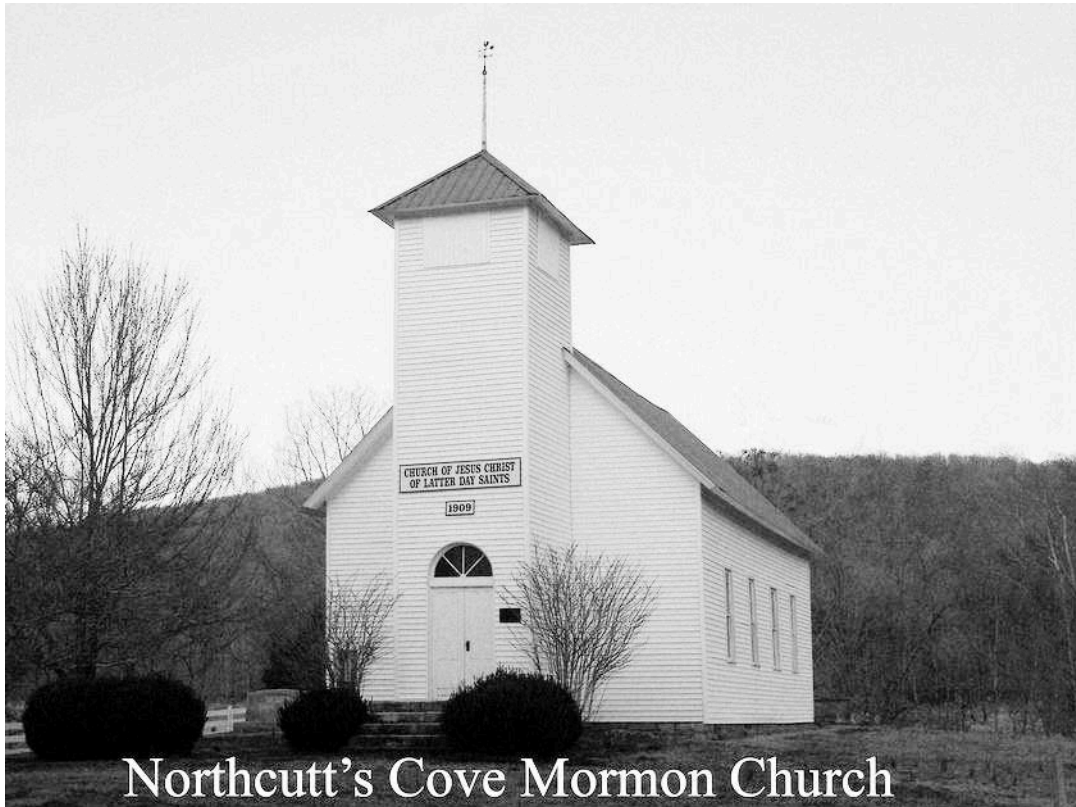
In the years that followed they held their meetings in the homes of the members, but as the membership grew, there was a great need for a building where they could hold their church service.

Plans were made to build a chapel. A building committee was organized as follows: John Tipton, Bill Tanner, Reuben Smartt, Henry Smartt, and Beecher Smartt. John Tipton and wife Belle, donated the land for the building site.

Many members and nonmembers donated material and labor for construction. After many months, the building was erected and Henry Smartt and Albert Fults made the wooden benches for the seating.

The white frame building sheathed with its original weather boards, has a rectangular sanctuary with a vestibule at the front with the bell tower directly above the vestibule. It was completed and dedicated in 1909. The chapel is the oldest “Mormon” church in the state of Tennessee and one of the oldest in the Southeastern United States.

Today this chapel still stands in Northcutt's Cove as a monument to the faith and hard work of the early members of the church in this area. It is located north of Altamont on the Northcutt's Cove road near where the cove reaches the Cumberland Plateau.



Northcutt's Cove Mormon Church

A cemetery is located to the east of the chapel which primarily contains graves of the early members of the congregation. It is still used on occasion for the burials of local "Mormon" families.

One day two missionaries came by, on their way to the cove and stopped at the Hiram Fults' home and asked for a drink of water.

After a short rest and a cool drink of water, they discussed their mission for the church with some of the family members, left some pamphlets; then they continued their journey to the cove.

After reading the literature and discussing the message the missionaries had brought to them, they were so impressed that one of their daughters walked approximately one mile to the home of her brother Lewis Fults to share the message with him and his family. They were very interested and as the missionaries continued to come through this area they would stay several days and nights with the Fults family.

On August 11, 1914, Lewis F. Fults and wife, Elizabeth, were baptized into the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints by Elder Sprague.

The Lewis Fults family lived in the Harrican [sic] community until 1920 when they moved to Altamont. For several years they were the only

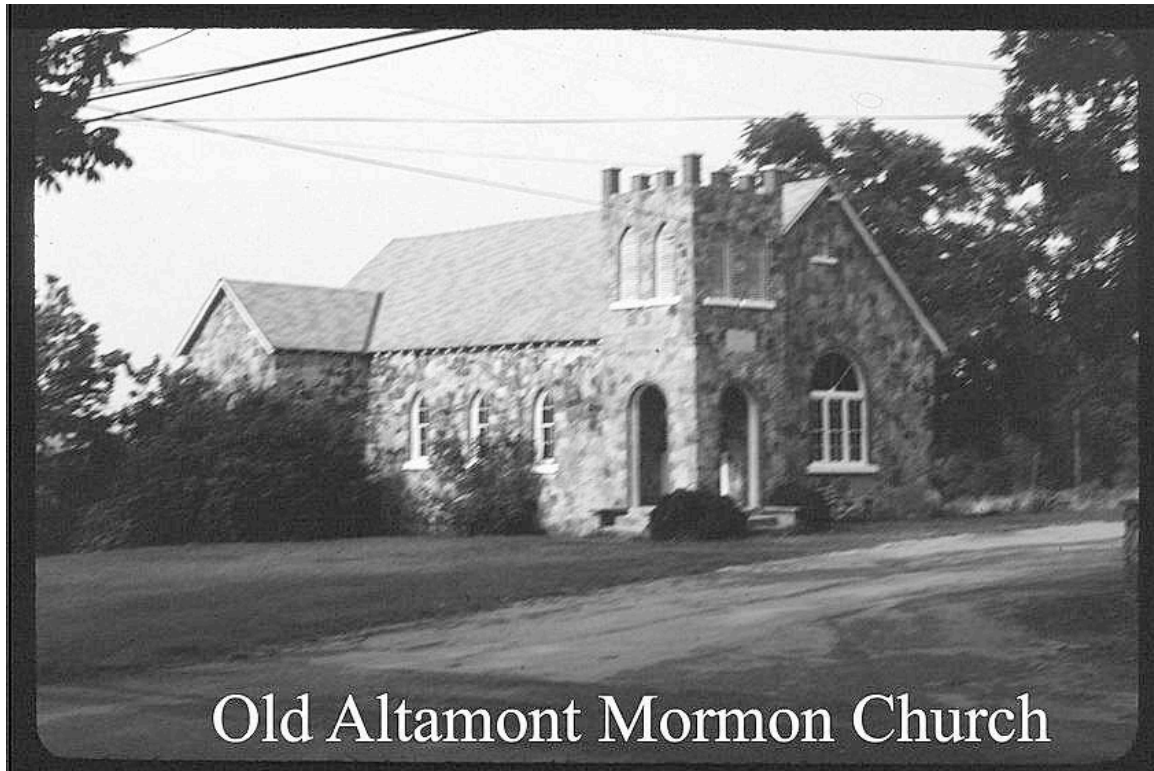
“Mormon” family living in Altamont. As time passed and the missionaries continued to visit the area, others joined the church and some members moved from the Cove to Altamont. At this time, there was no place to hold their meetings, so the church gatherings were held in a member’s home.

Later, Brother Lewis Fults got permission to have Sunday School and the Conferences in the Court Room of the Grundy County Court House.

In 1939 a lot on the North side of the Court House was purchased from the Alto Lodge No. 478 F&AM in the hope that a chapel could be built on this site.

For several years Lewis Fults had been impressed with the beauty of a church building in Monteagle, Tennessee that was rock veneered and had a bell tower at the entrance. So he proceeded to design a chapel for Altamont in a similar manner.

With money and labor donated mostly by members and several “working missionaries” sent here by the church, the chapel was finally becoming a reality. The native stone for the veneer was gathered from the nearby creek beds.



The chapel was dedicated in November 2, 1947 by Elder Henry D. Moyle.

Inserted here is an article by Gordon B. Hinckley, the Fifteenth President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, about the construction of the Altamont Chapel:

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“Salt of the Earth....” January 3, 1948

*Persistence Wins For Southern Leader
By Gordon B. Hinckley*

All men dream. Some men work to make their dreams come true. The labors of Lewis F. Fults over the past 25 years have brought the fulfillment of a dream that has proved a blessing to the Church and to the community in which he lives.

Altamont, Tennessee is a town of only 300 people. Almost half of these are members of the Church. Twenty-six years ago when Elder Fults and his wife moved to the community, they were the sole members. The only knowledge the people of the area had of the Mormons came from the occasional passing visits of two missionaries moving through the county, each carrying a heavy suitcase and an umbrella. Brother Fults dreamed of the day when there would be a congregation and a chapel in which to meet. And then he set to work to make his dream a reality.

He became postmaster, and operated a general store and filling station. He forced his opinions on no one, but those who traded with him, received more than letters and groceries and gasoline. They learned something of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

He ran for the office of county registrar, and was elected and is now serving his fourth term, each of four years. For the past ten years he has also been mayor of Altamont for which he receives no pay beyond the gratitude of his fellow citizens.

As many people of the community and the county observed him at work and listened to his philosophy they began to realize that he had something which they wanted. With the aid of missionaries serving in the area, he brought some of them into the Church. The congregation of which he dreamed slowly became a fact.

But that was only half his dream. They needed a chapel. He consistently hammered at the idea and in 1938 President William T. Tew of the East Central States Mission, secured from the Church an appropriation of \$1,000 with the understanding that the Altamont Saints would furnish whatever else was necessary to complete the project.

Members and non-members turned out enthusiastically to begin work on a spring day in 1939. But excavation for the foundation had to be cut through solid rock which underlaid a thin layer of topsoil. Enthusiasm died, and only three men continued at the tedious job of drilling, blasting, cutting, and then moving the debris in wheelbarrows.

The task seemed too great. Everyone was discouraged, but Elder Fults determined in his mind and prayed in his heart that somehow the work would be completed. Meanwhile weeds grew in the shallow excavation, and people suggested that the hole be filled and that the idea forgotten.

Then this man of quiet determination went to work alone, literally chipping away at the stone that stood between him and his dream. His spirit became infectious. Others again pitched in. Then came the war. Costs soared, the young men went into the Army, and many of the older ones went to work in other places. The thousand dollars dwindled, but the project had gone so far that the Church added another two thousand to complete it.

Elder Fults schemed and shopped to keep costs down. He went to 25 different mills to save \$300 on the doors and windows. As county registrar in the building adjacent to the chapel site he had a little free time now and again, and always kept his tools handy to put in a few strokes as opportunity arose.

The outside walls were constructed of native stone much of which was gathered out of the mountains, and hauled on sleds drawn by mules. Hardwood flooring was impossible to buy during the war, and so he purchased oak tie siding, stacked it and allowed it to dry for several weeks, and then had it cut and planed by a local mill.

Elder Fults pays glowing tribute to those who faithfully worked on the project. But the fact remains that he laid most of the rock veneer, laid the brick trim around the windows and doors, did much of the inside finish work, and more important than all else, pleaded and coaxed, crusaded, and schemed to see the building begun and completed.

On November 2 of this year Elder Henry D. Moyle of the Council of the Twelve dedicated the chapel. People gathered from near and far, many of them not members of the Church, bringing baskets of food for a day of rejoicing. A dream had come true.

Today Lewis F. Fults sits in his office in the moldering old red brick courthouse of Grundy County. Many people call in to do business with mayor-registrar. But the thing that forcibly catches their attention is the little church building over the way, neatly framed in the office window. They invariably ask questions. And Lewis Fults, the builder and the branch president, knows the answers. A few tracts are on the table. The visitors leave with a desire to read and learn more.

The pick-and-shovel, trowel-and chisel, saw-and hammer days are over for Lewis Fults. He is 61, and a little tired. But he is happy. The dream of his younger years has come true. Altamont, county seat of Grundy County, has a congregation of Latter-day Saints. Altamont has a Latter-day Saint chapel. Prejudice is gone and the people of Grundy County know the truth about the Mormons, largely because of his pioneering efforts. He is happy in the satisfaction of a task unselfishly and well done.

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Services were held in this building from 1946 until 1981. As the membership grew to over two hundred and the congregation gained recognition as a WARD in the Mormon Church, it became evident that a larger chapel would be needed to accommodate the growing number of members and the additional activities required by ward status.

A program was begun to acquire the necessary resources to construct a larger facility. Fund raisers were held, auctions of donated items were conducted (it was reported that one family actually donated the bed in which they slept) and the central Mormon organization provided funds along with design and construction expertise.

In 1980 the ground was broken for the church building. The first two phases of construction were completed and occupied in the spring of 1981. The third phase was completed in December 1981 which completed the structure. The building meets very rigid construction codes and is designated as an emergency shelter for the community.



The Altamont Mormon Church is located approximately one mile west of the old chapel on Highway 108 out of Altamont toward Viola.

Upon moving into the new building in December of 1981 the organization of the Ward was as follows: Bishop Earl David Campbell, First Counselor Gary D. Miller, Second Counselor Jerry Killian, Ward Clerk Arthur D. Killian, Secretary Ronnie Jones, Relief Society President Linda

Stone, First Counselor Karleen Barrett, Second Counselor Evelyn Presley followed by Debbie Richardson, and Secretary Jeweldine Whitman.

Many of the current members of the Altamont Mormon Church are descendants of the original converts of Northcutt's Cove.

The Altamont Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints continues to serve the church members and the community at large.

**Submitted by: Ralph & Bonnie Rieben
Members, Grundy County Historical Society**

Reference Material

1. Original 1939 Deed
2. Notes Concerning Varying Dates for Completion & Dedication
3. Note on Building Use as a Temporary Courtroom

FOR AND IN CONSIDERATION of the sum of Fifty (\$50.00) Dollars, cash in hand to us paid by Heber J. Grant, President and Trustee in Trust of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, we, Chas. W. Smith, and J. M. Mears, Trustees of Alto Lodge No. 478 F. & A. M. by an order of said Lodge, and being the only acting Trustees at this time of said Lodge No. 478, have bargained and sold, and by these presents do transfer and convey unto the said Heber J. Grant, President and Trustee in Trust, of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, his successors and assigns, a certain tract or parcel of land in 2nd. Civil District Grundy County, State of Tennessee, as follows:

Being the lot lying North of the Court House in the town of Altamont, Tenn., running from Main Street to Cumberland Street extending North about 50 feet to the South Boundary of Werner Greeter's Lot, and west with his lot to Main Street, or highway No. 56, and further described as follows:

Bounded on the North by property of Werner Greeter; on the South by Street; on the east by Cumberland Street; and on the West by Main Street, or State Highway No. 56, and known as the "Line Hobbs Lot".

TO HAVE AND TO HOLD the said tract or parcel of land, with the appurtenances, estate title and interest thereto belonging, to the said Heber J. Grant, President and Trustee in Trust for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, and his successors and assigns, forever. And we do covenant with the said Heber J. Grant, President and Trustee in Trust, for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints that we are lawfully seized and possessed of said land in fee simple; have a good right to convey it, and the same in unincumbered. And we do further covenant and bind ourselves as Trustees of Alto Lodge No. 478 F & A. M. and our successors to warrant and forever defend the title to said land to the said Heber J. Grant, Pres. and Trustee in Trust for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, his successors and assigns, against the lawful claims of all persons whomsoever, as Trustees of said Alto Lodge No. 478 F. & A. M. and no further.

WITNESS OUR HANDS, this 14th day of September, 1939.

CHAS. W. SMITH

J. M. MEARS

STATE OF TENNESSEE)
GRUNDY COUNTY)

Personally appeared before me, Hubert Lusk, Clerk of the County Court of said County, the within named Chas. W. Smith, one of the bargainors, with whom I am personally acquainted, and who acknowledged that he executed the within instrument for the purposes therein named.

WITNESS MY HAND, at Office this 15th day of September, 1939.

(COURT)
(SEAL)

HUBERT LUSK, Clerk

STATE OF MISSOURI)
BUTLER COUNTY)

Personally appeared before me, Verlin Shain, a Notary Public in and for said County and State, the within named J. M. Mears the bargainors, with whom I am personally acquainted, and who acknowledged that he executed the within instrument for the purposes therein contained.

WITNESS MY HAND and official seal, at my office in Fisk Butler County, Missouri, this 21st day of September, 1939.

VERLIN SHAIN, Notary Public.

My commission expires May 17, 1940.

(N.P.)
(SEAL)

Filed for registration September 25, 1939 at 7 O'Clock A.M. and recorded same day.

Louis R. Pugh Register.

TENNESSEE
GRUNDY COUNTY
BOOK 22 - PAGE 297

NOTES ON THE DATES OF THE OLD ALTAMONT MORMON CHURCH



There has been considerable discussion on exactly when the building was completed and dedicated. There are two stone plaques incorporated into the wall of the church bell tower. One has a date of 1944 the other has a date of 1946. In the article which we gathered some of our information from that was produced by the local Relief Society of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints there is date of dedication as 1947. After much discussion with the elder members of the church, it is now our belief that the church building was intended to be completed in 1944, but because of some unforeseen condition the completion was delayed and they inserted another stone plaque with the later date (1946) as the date of completion. The dedication of the building would, of course, come some time after the building was complete.

There was an article, "Salt of the Earth..", which appeared in the LDS Church News by Gordon B. Hinckley which stated "On November 2 of this year.....". This article has a date of January 3, 1948 leading some to believe that the church was dedicated in 1948. However, upon closer examination it appears that Gordon B. Hinckley probably wrote the article in 1947 and that it did not appear in print until January 3, 1948. This seems logical to us; therefore, the dedication date (1947) that was in the Relief Society Article appears to be correct.

Using this information, it appears that the dedication took place on November 2, 1947 and was performed by Elder Henry D. Moyle of the Council of the Twelve.

Ralph & Bonnie Rieben

NOTES ON OLD MORMON CHURCH COURTROOM

After the fire on May 3, 1990, which destroyed the Grundy County Courthouse in Altamont, all Grundy County offices were temporarily located in the former Coalmont Bank building in Coalmont, Tennessee except for the Circuit Court Clerk's office which was located in a house trailer placed in front of the Old Mormon Church in Altamont, Tennessee. The Mormon Church was first used as a courtroom in June of 1990. Some changes were made to the interior of the building to accommodate its use as a courtroom. None of the changes "renovations" to the Mormon Church building were permanent, but were built in such a way that they could be completely removed without changing the integrity of the church building. This was a stipulation of Nicky Lockhart in order to get permission to use the building as a courtroom. Mostly the renovations referred to for this courtroom were for the construction of a platform (bench) for the judges and a bar (fence) to separate the audience from the courtroom proceedings.

The Grundy County Commission (The Legislative Body of Grundy County) held its meeting in the Altamont City Library. In October of 1990 Grundy County entered into a lease agreement with the City of Altamont to renovate the City Hall so as to use it for a Temporary Courthouse. This included the renovation of the old school auditorium for use as a courtroom.

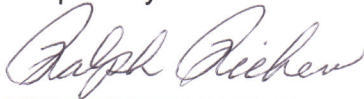
At this time the Grundy County commission started meeting in the temporary courtroom at the Altamont Mormon Church as the city hall building was undergoing renovation. The first meeting of the County Commission in the Mormon Church courtroom was on December 17, 1990 and the commission continually used this courtroom as their meeting place through the meeting in October 28, 1991.

The renovation of the Altamont City Hall was completed in October and all of the Grundy County Offices were moved to the Altamont City Hall. This included all the offices located at the Coalmont Bank Building, the Circuit Court Clerks Office at the Old Mormon Church, and the courtroom that was in the Old Mormon Church. The first meeting of the County Commission was held in the Renovated Altamont City Hall on November 25, 1991. This was used as the temporary Grundy County Courthouse until the New Grundy County Courthouse was occupied in June 1996.

The clerk, in his minutes, refers to the temporary courtroom for both the Old Mormon Church courtroom and the Altamont City Hall courtroom. This causes this confusing; However, I have included documentation for the commission meetings which should help in determining the dates the Old Mormon Church was used as a courtroom. Also note, the commission first met in the Altamont City Library, then later at the Old Mormon Church courtroom, and still later at the renovated Altamont City Hall courtroom.

I am using the Grundy County Commission meeting dates to verify the use of the Old Mormon Church as a courtroom. Also, the Altamont City Hall is the old Altamont Elementary School that Grundy County gave to the City of Altamont in June 1986.

Compiled by:



Ralph Rieben, Chairman from Sept. 1990 to this date
Grundy County Commission
August 19, 2008