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Church Magazines

Inspired by the Lord, members of this small Kentucky branch have experienced great success in family history work.

A Bountiful

People in Bardstown, Kentucky, have a deep sense of history, for they live right in the middle of it. Bardstown was settled in the 1780s and is one of the oldest towns west of the Appalachian Mountains. On its historic central square sits an old inn looking much as it did more than 200 years ago. Just a few blocks north is the Civil War Museum with its original period buildings. A little to the east sits Federal Hill mansion, the early 19th century plantation believed to be the inspiration for the state song, “My Old Kentucky Home.” On the outskirts of town are found monuments to historical events—where duels were fought during an age of honor and where armies clashed during the Civil War.

Steeped in history, Bardstown bridges the gap between now and then, between who we are and where we came from. Coupled with the gospel, such feelings have inspired members of the Bardstown Kentucky Branch to connect with their past in ways that have led to extraordinary success with their family history.

If success were measured by numbers, this little branch—with 55 members in sacrament meeting on a good Sunday—has done amazingly well over the past few years. In 2007, branch leaders had a goal to prepare 1,000 names for temple work; they submitted about 6,000—so many they had to send nearly 4,000 to Church headquarters in Salt



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Lake City so the temple work could be performed by others.

The numbers may be impressive, but the effort behind that work is the real story. As leaders consider the process, they say they have felt the hand of the Lord preparing the members of the branch for many years. Branch members have magnified their call to be saviors on Mount Zion (see Obadiah 1:21) even as they have developed deep, personal connections to their ancestors. As branch member John Charles explains, “What

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Harvest in Bardstown



you see here, you might call miraculous. It's a result of what happens when the Lord tells you to do something, and you do it."

Inspired Leadership

"The Spirit guided us right from the start," says Matthew Hubbard, the branch president. "Leaders started receiving impressions at about the same time. I remember being impressed that we needed to do family history work. Then Dale and Norma Hettinger and John

Top, left: Maryann Hahn and John Charles; Top, right: John and Angelika Charles with Norma and Dale Hettinger; Above: Jacob, Susan, Daniel, Courtney, and Isaiah Scholle with family file cards.

Charles began their efforts."

Brother Charles, who was an assistant in the high priests group leadership at the time, felt inspired to help the branch create a family history center. The nearest center was in Elizabethtown, about 20 miles away. "Our situation is unusual. Many of our people are of limited means. Many are new members with no family history experience. There are a number of them who don't have their own transportation. Most of them don't own or know how to use a computer." He believed



Shortly after her baptism, Cheryl Bakley—seated above left with Helen Nalley (standing) and Dawn Hubbard—attended the temple for the first time to do baptisms for her deceased ancestors. “I was in awe at the Spirit I felt,” Cheryl says. “The place was just beautiful. It’s humbling. The work that I had done was the first step in drawing the families together so that, when the time comes, we will be connected.”

that having the resources and personal assistance of a family history center would make a difference.

With the support of President Hubbard and Walter Liebegott, the high priests group leader, Brother Charles sought and received approval from Church headquarters for a family history center in Bardstown—but branch members would have to find a way to fund the center locally. And they did. Over time, Brother Charles was instrumental in obtaining several computers for the center and arranged for a free Internet connection from the city of Bardstown as long as the center would be available for public use. Branch members then converted a large storage room in the church building into a family history center.

To get the center up and running, branch members needed to learn how to do family history work. That’s where Dale and Norma Hettinger enter the story. Now serving as the temple president and matron of the Louisville Kentucky Temple, the Hettingers were the third set of local Church service missionaries called by stake leaders to serve in Bardstown. Lyle Stucki, president of the Louisville Kentucky Stake, remembers calling them “without knowing why the Lord had inspired their calling.”

The Hettingers brought great talents to the

branch. Sister Hettinger had served for 13 years as the stake family history consultant. She not only knew how to use the computer programs, she had years of experience helping people prepare their own family history information for temple work. At the same time, Brother Hettinger was serving in the temple twice a week. “Norma would help people get their records ready, and I would take them to the temple to have the cards prepared,” he says.

Initially the Hettingers went to members’ homes and taught them. After the center opened, they met members there. They trained them, helped them do their research, and made sure the work was ready.

As President Stucki explains, “We asked bishops and branch presidents to have new members focus on their family history and going to the temple. It strengthens them and ties them to their families.”

Still, getting records ready was only the first step. As the Hettingers helped members prepare names for the temple, Brother Liebegott arranged temple trips with ward members. The branch now sponsors baptismal trips every other month, and the entire branch is invited. Branch member David Ahern says, “These temple trips have been an absolute blessing for the branch because members of all ages, as well as new and long-standing members, are excited to attend the temple and do the work for their ancestors.”

Tapping the Treasure Trove

Branch members witnessed the hand of the Lord helping them gather large numbers of family names even before the Hettingers were available to help them prepare those names for temple work.

For example, although Susan Scholle has been a member her whole life, Susan’s husband, Daniel, was an adult convert. Brother Scholle says, “Before I joined the Church,

my mom and aunt had been looking up the Scholle family tree. My aunt would find a branch and take it as far as she could. Then she'd find another branch and go on. Then she'd share with us what she found. Between my aunt and my mom, they gathered about 4,000 names."

A few years ago, Brother Scholle began to earnestly prepare his family names for temple ordinances. "I didn't know how to submit them, so I went to the family history center. The Hettingers helped me put it together." With their help, Daniel was able to extend his family tree to almost 7,000 names. "Most of the work hadn't been done yet," he says.

Other converts—like Helen Nalley and her sister Maryann Hahn—brought records with them when they joined the Church a couple of years ago. The sisters had a cousin who worked at the main library in Bardstown. For 12 years Sister Hahn regularly went to the library to do family history work. "It's habit forming," she says. The deeper she dug, the more she learned about her family. Although poor health has since made her research difficult, by the end of 2008 she had filled 29 notebooks, each 3 inches thick, with family history records from her family line. She completed much of this before she joined the Church.

President Hubbard's wife, Dawn, joined the Church when she was 13

For Alexandra Ahern (seated at computer, with mother, Heidi, and grandmother, Abbey Schluter), discovering the compelling stories of her ancestors motivates her to do family history work.



LOVING THE TEMPLE

Jamie Fulkerson (above, center) loves his Heavenly Father's house. He attends up to twice a month—or as often as time allows him to make the one-hour journey. It's not easy for Jamie. He was hit by a car as a boy, an accident that severely damaged his physical capabilities. Now 36, Jamie may not talk, but he understands. The look in his eyes shines with the love he feels for his Heavenly Father.

His parents, Shirley and Philip Fulkerson, help him through the temple. His dad helps him dress for endowment sessions and sealings, and Jamie sometimes acts as a witness for baptisms. The workers congratulate him—they know he is doing the Lord's work and they know Jamie's infectious smile encourages others to attend.

years old. "When we moved here, I felt the urge to do family history," she says. "I discovered that I have many ancestors from here in Nelson county and the surrounding counties. I went to the public library, and without a lot of effort I was able to find 80 names. So many of my ancestors grew up here, stayed here, and had their children here—it was kind of easy.

"I felt like having that strength from the other side [of the veil] was going to be a great help building up this area. And I think that that does happen as these people work on their local family names."

A Personal Work

Temple work becomes personal very quickly for those who engage in it. Philip Fulkerson, a member of 30 years who comes from a family of 20 siblings, says, “I’ve done the work for my mother, and my dad, grandfather and grandmother, a couple of my brothers, and even my son. When you go through for a family member, it’s just special.”

For Cheryl Bakley, a recent convert who serves as the family history center director, much of the excitement has come through helping branch members. “Other people have family lines we are really able to dig into,” she says. “The Aherns have traced their line back to about 1300! And the Hettingers helped a friend of mine who has traced her line back to the Salem witchcraft trials. We also found a report that described how a relative drowned when the Titanic sank. That history is just so interesting.”

Finding out about their family history has inspired Alexandra Ahern. She discovered a printed interview about “Old” Henry Francisco, her sixth great-grandfather, who it is believed lived to be 134 years old. As she shared it, her whole family became engaged.

“He was a drummer boy at Queen Anne’s coronation [1702],” Sister Ahern shares. “He fought in the French and Indian War [1754–1763], then for the Americans in the American Revolutionary War [1775–1783] at age 91. It’s really inspiring to have someone that was



BINDING HEARTS

Many of your deceased ancestors will have received a testimony that the message of the missionaries is true. . . . Someone in this world must go to a holy temple and accept the covenants on behalf of the person in the spirit world. That is why we are under obligation to find the names of our ancestors and ensure that they are offered by us what they cannot receive there without our help.”

President Henry B. Eyring, “Hearts Bound Together,” *Liahona* and *Ensign*, May 2005, 78.

Though few in number, the youth in Bardstown find strength in each other, especially as they prepare for temple trips. Shown here: Justin Hubbard, Ashley Wainscott, and Jessica Wimsatt.



such a patriot in our family.”

The interview also describes “Old” Henry’s characteristics, including what he looked like and his personality traits. As Sister Ahern read that part of the interview, her grandmother Abbey Schluter began to cry because “Old” Henry was so much like her. “He even liked bread and butter instead of toast and butter, just like she does,” Sister Ahern adds.

Personal Blessings

The coming of the Louisville temple in 2001 has energized Saints in the area. As David Ahern explains, “The greatest thing about having a temple close by is that when you go to the temple, you feel peace. It’s like you get to charge your batteries up again.”

For Shirley Fulkerson, having the temple nearby means the family can attend frequently and renew their covenants. “It’s wonderful. We were sealed in the Washington D.C. Temple. But we could only go back once a year. Then we had Atlanta—just an eight-hour drive. Then St. Louis was built and we only had to drive five hours. But when we heard a temple was coming to Louisville, I was really excited. It’s something special. It’s just an hour away.”

“We go at least once a month, sometimes twice a month,” her husband, Philip, adds.

President Hubbard says that having the temple nearby has had a domino effect on members preparing family names for temple work.

“The temple is here. They can see it. They can go visit it. They can take their picture in front of it. They realize they can go into it and do work for their kindred dead,” he says.

“It’s always special when we go to the temple as a family to do baptisms together,” says Brother Ahern. “It’s touching when you see your children get so excited about being baptized for people who are related to us. It draws us closer together as a family and it draws us closer to our extended family, many of whom we’ve never met before. Someday we will.” ■