

Teens in British Columbia experienced Church history by stepping back in time.

Walking into the Past

By Paul Christensen and Chris Leonard

When he arrived at stake youth conference, Jade Meynders got out of the car, picked up his things, including his sleeping bag, and started walking down a dirt road cut through a thick forest. Those around him were dressed as if from a day long past—the girls in long dresses and bonnets, the boys in shirts with full sleeves and some in long-tailed coats, styles from 150 years ago.

As they walked, they noticed markers set up several yards apart with years painted on them. Each step took Jade back in time. “It really helped prepare my mind to comprehend and feel what was going to happen,” said Jade.

At the end of the road, the groups walked into a full-size replica of a pioneer town, complete with the Whitney store and the Grandin press, although those two businesses, significant in the history of the Church, were not originally in the same town. The Abbotsford British





PHOTOGRAPHS BY DAVID ZUSKIND



Rings made out of horseshoe nails and bracelets made of leather served as souvenirs of the event.



Columbia Stake was taking the youth back in time so they could witness several events from a variety of locations in Church history.

The town, in a forest setting, was a remarkable replica made possible by the volunteer work of some 120 men in the stake. It was originally a partially built movie set of a typical town in the western United States or Canada during pioneer times. The leaders of the Abbotsford Stake made arrangements for volunteers to help the owners finish the buildings, including adding roofs, hanging doors, installing windows, and painting the buildings. The owners then agreed to let the stake use the movie set as the location of their youth conference.

So when Jade and his friends entered the town, it really felt like they had stepped back in time to the 1830s.

Holding a County Fair

The town was dressed with garlands and flowers. The teens, their leaders, and members of the stake who agreed to play the parts of prominent Church members in history gathered for a typical fair from pioneer times. The group played games, held competitions, and enjoyed entertainment. At the end of the day, the mayor gathered everyone together and organized them into families. Under the direction of their leaders, the “families” set up their camps in a nearby wood, which would be home for the next week.

“I finally understood what the early Saints lived through and how their testimonies were their only possessions that were certain,” said Alex Loewen. “It inspires me to keep a strong testimony and rely on the Lord like they did.”



Joining Zion's Camp

The next morning, the daily newspaper, the *Times and Seasons*, was delivered to each family before breakfast. It reported on the events of the previous day and announced the schedule for the upcoming day. The most anticipated event was a meeting called by the Prophet Joseph Smith for the entire village to meet in the square.

The person playing the part of Joseph Smith recounted the persecution the Saints had suffered in Jackson County, Missouri. Then he called for young men to volunteer to leave the village and march to redeem Zion. Later, the volunteers followed their leaders down main street as young women gave them bottles of water and supplies for the journey.

While the young men were gone, the young women reenacted the organization of the Relief Society, where Emma Smith and her counselors and secretary were sustained.

The young men marched a good distance with meager rations of beef jerky, crackers, and dried apples. A heavy rain fell, and the young men had only tarps to sleep under, but no one complained that wet, weary night. Instead, their heads were filled with thoughts of those who walked the 1,000 miles on the real Zion's Camp.

Building a Temple

The next morning, everyone gathered to listen to the person playing the Prophet Joseph Smith announce the building of the Kirtland Temple. A wooden frame replica had been erected by volunteers a few weeks earlier. Each family took turns helping to finish the outside of the structure,



Carving stool legs and setting them in place helped each participant create a sturdy seat for both daytime and evening programs.

Games such as checkers, stick pulling, and gunny sack races were just as enjoyable as they have been in pioneer times.



Each "family" took turns finishing the outside of the temple, cutting tiles and gluing them in place. Others painted the steeple that had to be lifted and mounted in place.



using cut tiles of Styrofoam and gluing them in place. Aleisha Anderson said that working on the temple was the highlight of the conference for her and that "it was spiritual and made me feel really good."

The temple dedication was then reenacted. Rebekah Leonard said it was her favorite part of the week. "The weather was perfect, and the Spirit was so strong."

Facing the Mob

On the final evening the teens put on their cleanest clothes and stepped out to the town's midsummer square dance. Then, just as the dance was winding down and the sun was setting, the town gathered to witness a moving reenactment of the Prophet Joseph Smith's being dragged from his home and tarred and feathered by a mob. Youth and leaders quietly and solemnly talked on the way back to their camps, where they gathered to discuss how opposition and faith still work together.

At about 10:30, the peace of the camp was shattered by the sound of shouts and gunshots. A mob of jeering men, some on horseback and some with lighted torches tore through the camp, driving the Saints out into the dark.

Although the teens knew that they were not in any real danger, still the feelings of facing what early Saints had to face became vivid for them. "In a weird way, I loved getting driven out of our camp by a mob," said Alyssa Bill. "It showed me a small portion of the faith the Saints had to have to go forward with the Church. I'm really grateful that they stayed strong."

The group gathered again by lamplight and heard their stake president talk about facing up to today's dangers.



Meeting Brother Joseph

For many participants, the best part of the conference was feeling what it must have been like to have the Prophet Joseph Smith in their midst talking to them, playing games, and enjoying their company. Clayton Jensen said, "The conference made me realize there was more to Church history than we read. Now I know that the Prophet Joseph was someone who actually had fun and had friends like any other person."

On the last day, the sheriff came to town and arrested Joseph and Hyrum Smith. The teens watched in dismay as the two were taken away. Later, the news spread that the Prophet and his brother had been martyred. Reactions were powerful and heartfelt. Jillian Collingridge said, "The reenactments definitely made things seem more real to me. The conference

strengthened my testimony so much. I want more than ever to be the best I can be."

Building Testimonies

On the final day, the group met together like the pioneers in Kirtland and Nauvoo did before leaving their towns. The gathering was used as an opportunity for teens to bear their testimonies.

Shoshana Okana loved the conference. She said, "It was amazing. It was a great way to learn more about our heritage and the strong Saints who helped keep the Church going through terrible persecution. My testimony is so much stronger, and not just my testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith and the sacrifices of the early Saints, but of the truthfulness of the gospel and the love our Church leaders have for us youth."

That love held the Saints together in the past, and it will continue into the future. **NE**



On the last day of the youth conference, the whole group gathered in front of the replica of the temple and listened to men portraying the Twelve Apostles as they described the succession of the First Presidency.