

A CONDENSED HISTORY OF THE CHURCH IN THAILAND

By Roy and Myrtle Ah Hook Sang
September 1973 Bangkok, Thailand

The ship arrived in Calcutta, India, April 26, 1853. On board were thirteen LDS missionaries. Nine were to labor in India and four were destined for Siam (Thailand). All were to experience much trials and hardships; however, on April 6, 1854, Elder Elam Luddington managed to reach Siam alone. Of his weekly Sabbath lectures, he once wrote, only eight or ten Europeans usually attended. Unfortunately, Elder Luddington had little success and on June 27, 1855, returned to San Francisco. That, more or less ended missionary activities until the end of World War II when LDS members came in numbers to Bangkok and the various military bases throughout Thailand.

Before the year 1961, informal church services were held intermittently whenever active LDS members have lived in Thailand. In March, 1961, Col. Joseph R. Meacham, his wife and two children arrived in Bangkok, followed in June by Max Berryessa, his wife and four children, Bro. Berryessa having been authorized to hold church services before leaving Utah. First services were held at the Meacham home. By the end of 1961, their ranks had increased to about fifteen members. Church services in Thailand, since then, have been functioning continuously.

In early 1962, a conference was held at the chapel of the mission hospital (7th Day Adventist).

In 1963, services were transferred to the Berryessa home and after a while to the Bob Campbell home; then in latter 1963, transferred again, this time to Bro. Earl Jones' home. About this time activities were expanded to include a monthly testimonial meeting and a weekly sacrament meeting. (Bro. Berryessa has the distinction of being set apart as Thailand's first Branch president by mission president Robert S. Taylor).

In July, 1964, the Sunday school was organized with Bro. Oral Preece as superintendent and Dick Nanto and Gary Wilcox as assistants.

The MIA, under the leadership of Neff H. Tippets was also organized in Sept., 1964.

The group outgrew the Jones' home and transferred to a private dining room at the Ban Keo Ruen Kwan Restaurant, corner of Soi 12 and Sukhumvit, in early 1965.

In the same year, three air force personnel, members of the church, stationed at Udorn, held their first services at the Udorn Hotel. Reminiscing, Bro. Clarence Pingel recalls taking the Sacrament bread with mustard on it, due to their having to buy a sandwich to acquire the bread. (Bro. Pingel

is back in Thailand, this time with his family who are very active in the Bangkok Branch.)

On January 21, 1966, Jim McElvee, a serviceman, was the first convert to be baptized in Thailand, so far as is known.

In January 23, 1966, the MIA was reorganized to conform to the stateside MIA program.

The first Relief Society was organized in February, 1966, with Sister Virginia Lewis as president, Charlotte Uierhdt and June Wilcox as counselors and Joyce Johnson as secretary and treasurer.

The Thailand District was organized on March 27, 1966, with Sterling Merrill as president, Earl Johnson, 1st counselor, John Dieterli, 2nd counselor, and Fred Banks, clerk. Bro. Merrill was also set apart as servicemen's coordinator for Thailand. On July 17, 1966, the Thailand District was reorganized under the direction of mission president, Keith E. Garner. Earl Johnson was sustained as president, Eugene P. Till, 1st counselor and Darrell E. Jones as 2nd counselor. Due to President Johnson's rotation to the U.S., the district Presidency was reorganized with Eugene P. Till sustained as president, Darrell Jones, 1st counselor, and Glen L. Wilcox, 2nd counselor. Also, Gordon H. Flammer was sustained as Bangkok branch president, with Darrel Gallup and James Fletcher as counselors. In Sept., 1966, Darwin H. Jepsen was sustained as branch clerk and Sister Lola Erma Jensen, YWMIA president.

The first Thai convert was Sister Ningnoi Thitapoora. She was baptized on Sept. 11, 1966. About this time the meeting place was transferred to the Grand Hotel.

At 6:30 AM, Nov. 2, 1966, the land of Thailand was dedicated for the preaching of the gospel by Elder Gordon B. Hinckley of the Council of the Twelve; also in attendance were President Keith E. Garner, Southern Far East Mission and President Marion D. Hanks, First Council of Seventy. A small group of Latter-day Saints from the Bangkok servicemen's branch attended this gathering in Lumpini Park.

In Dec. 1966, Articles of Corporation for the Church Foundation were signed by Earl Johnson, Gordon H. Flammer, Darrel Gallup, Darwin H. Jepsen, James Fletcher and Glen Wilcox. Bro. Flammer was appointed president of the Foundation.

On March 3rd, 1967, the first Green & Gold Ball was held at the Grand Hotel.

On July 16, 1967, the Bangkok Branch Presidency was reorganized with Hollis Hunt as president, Darrell Jones, 1st counselor, James Fletcher, 2nd counselor, and Darwin Jepsen, special assistant. Kim Smith and Gerald Springer were made clerks.

June 30, 1967--Initial arrangements were made for purchasing property on Soi 21.

The first group of six elders arrived on Feb. 2, 1968. These elders were totally unfamiliar with the language, had no church literature in Thai and did not even have the six investigators discussions translated. Their education in Thai began only after they moved into a house on Soi 49, Sukhumvit.

The first Thais to be baptized into the church through the efforts of the missionaries were Brother Boonpluke and Sister Rabiab Glaupin on May.18, 1968.

The Thai group was formally organized on June 9, 1968, with group leader Elder Hess, Elder Carl Hanson, 1st counselor, Elder Peter Basker as clerk and Elder Winegar, Sunday School Superintendent.

On June 17, 1968, mission President Keith Garner, in one of his last official acts in Thailand, made preparations to open the city of Nakhon Ratchasima (Korat).

On June 30, 1968, the first Thai services in Korat were held. Twelve people attended including Elders Craig C. Christensen and Scott E. Blinkenstaff.

In July, 1968, President Keith E. Garner was released and W. Brent Hardy set apart as the new president for the Southern Far East Mission.

In Sept., 1968, church services were moved from the Grand Hotel to the YWCA on Sathorn Road.

On Feb. 1, 1969, President Hollis Hunt, Darwin H. Jepsen and Harold Ward of the Branch Presidency were released. Sidney W. Ross was released from the District Presidency and sustained as Branch President with Ronald Cundick and Harold Ward as counselors.

Final approval for purchasing property on Soi 21 granted May 12, 1969.

Oct. 29, 1969 G. Carlos Smith was called to ^Preside over the South East Asia Mission. Newly formed Thailand is part of the new mission. In attendance were President and Sister Bruce McConkie and President and Sister W. Brent Hardy.

Sept. 4, 1970 - Groundbreaking ceremonies for Bangkok Chapel. Officiating were Elder Bruce M. McConkie and mission President G. Carlos Smith.

Oct. 1, 1970 - Fifteen students enrolled for the Bangkok Branch seminary at I.S.B. (International School, Bangkok).

April 8, 1971 -President Sidney Ross was released and Paul D. Morris sustained as branch president, with Norm Stahlie and Duane Eyre as counselors.

Nov. 2, 1971 - A special meeting was held at the Windsor Hotel with President

Marion G. Romney presiding. Craig McCune was released as district president and Paul D. Morris sustained.

Nov., 1971 - Paul D. Morris was released as branch president and Wm. Melvin Condie sustained,

Nay 7, 1972 - the church services were transferred to the present chapel site (Asoke).

- June 10, 1973--President Wm. M. Condie was released and Charles Clark sustained as branch president with Jerry Downard and Edward Law as counselors.

Thailand officially became "The Thailand Mission" on June 28, 1973, when President Paul D. Morris was ordained mission president by Elder Boyd K. Packer in Salt Lake City, Utah.

The Thailand Mission was formally turned over to President Paul D. Morris by President Miller F. Shurtleff of the South East Asia Mission on Aug. 8, 1973.

Church Growth 1968-1973

By the end of 1968 there were twelve missionaries in Bangkok and Korat and a total membership of seventeen. At the end of 1969, there were fifteen missionaries and sixty-one baptisms. In Jan. 17, 1970, two cities, Khon Kaen and Chiang Mai were opened to the gospel. Later, on April 24th, Thonburi was opened and on Sept. 28, elders were sent to Phitsanulok. By the end of 1970 there were thirty-two missionaries laboring in six cities, with a total of one hundred forty-one baptisms for 1970. The missionary force numbered forty-one with seventy-four baptisms so far. This brings the total Thai membership to two hundred ninety-three for 1970. Estimated Church Membership in 1973 Bangkok (English Speaking) 100 Servicemen 300 Thai 350-400.

Opposition to Church Growth

Note: Buddhism, especially Theravada Buddhism, is the state religion of Thailand, and the great majority of the Thai people are Buddhist; however, the Thai government of every period has bestowed upon the people, freedom to profess any faith they prefer and has welcomed any missionary of any faith to preach its tenets anywhere in Thailand. Christianity first came to Thailand about the year 1511, brought by the western missionaries of the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants followed in the early 19th century.

The opposition toward the church took form in many ways. When the missionaries first came to Thailand, they were plagued by evil spirits. Here is a portion of a letter written by Elder Alan Bess, July, 1968. "One of these has, been active resistance by evil spirits. One evening two such beings actually

attempted to pull George Eldridge from bed. (George is a Thai boy who had been staying with us to help with the language). After his terrifying experience, the following day the elders blessed George against such influence.

The next night, in the far bedroom, we felt very uncomfortable. As I woke perspiring heavily, I saw a figure standing over Elder Hanson's bed in the darkened room. I called to Elder Hanson; he too was awake and also feeling very uncomfortable. He asked to be blessed, and after doing so, he slept comfortably. Not too long after this time, Elder Christensen was frightened by a figure standing at the foot of his bed; it remained for several seconds and only disappeared as Elder Winegar was awakened. Many of the elders had had bad dreams and restless nights. Then the night before President Hardy visited us on the 3rd of July, 1968, I had had great difficulty going to sleep, I saw at the foot of my bed (which used to be Elder Christensen's) a figure which only disappeared after I sat up in bed. I mentioned all this to President Hardy and he understood at once. The following day, after District Conference, we held a meeting of all the elders, (Elder Egbert, Brothers Eugene Till, Phil Haymond, and Glen Wilcox included). We had a wonderful testimony meeting-and at the conclusion, President Hardy offered the prayer, "blessing the house to only be a habitation of that which was good."

Mission President Hardy, in his visits to Thailand, explained that each time he came to Thailand, he felt the spirit of the devil weakening more and more; and in the words of mission President G. Carlos Smith, "the devil has ruled unchallenged for many centuries in our mission and now we have disturbed his reign. He will use all of his power to thwart this work but it shall continue and shall not fail.

MISSION PRESIDENTS-1955-1973

Southern Far East Mission

H. Grant Heaton 1955-1959

Robert S. Taylor 1959-1962

Jay S. Quealy 1962-1965

Keith E. Garner 1965-1968

Hong Kong-Taiwan Mission

W. Brent Hardy 1968-1971_

Southeast Asia Mission

G. Carlos Smith 1969-72

Miller F. Shurtleff 1972-1973

Thailand Mission

Paul D. Morris 1973-1976