

HISTORY REVISITED

President Hinckley dedicated the first small temple 20 years ago this July — here's why it's been a game changer for the Church

By Marianne Holman Prescott

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It has been two decades since the first small temple — a concept developed by President Gordon B. Hinckley in 1997 — was dedicated in eight dedicatory sessions on July 26-27, 1998.

The 11,225-square-foot Monticello Utah Temple stands on 1.33 acres of land in the small namesake town in the state's southeastern corner.

One of the first three smaller temples announced by President Hinckley in general conference in October 1997 (the other two were Anchorage, Alaska, and Colonia Juarez, Mexico), the Monticello temple was the first of the “smaller temples” to be completed and served as a prototype for the new design.

“In recent months we have traveled far out among the membership of the Church,” President Hinckley said during the announcement in 1997. “I have been with many who have very little of this world’s goods. But they have in their hearts a great burning faith concerning this latter-day work. They love the Church. They love the gospel. They love the Lord and want to do His will. They are paying their tithing as modest as it is. They make tremendous sacrifices to visit the temples. They travel for days at a time in cheap buses and on old boats. They save their money and do without to make it all possible.

“They need nearby temples — small, beautiful, serviceable temples.”

He proceeded to explain that 30 “smaller temples” would be built in Europe, Asia, Australia, Fiji, Mexico, Central and South America, Africa, Canada and the United States.

“This will be a tremendous undertaking,” he said. “Nothing even approaching it has ever been tried before.”

Not only would the locales be scattered throughout the world, the temples were to be built immediately.

The direction to build smaller temples came to President Hinckley while he was traveling from Colonia Juarez, Mexico, to El Paso, Texas. In a Church News interview reported on Aug. 1, 1998, President Hinckley recounted the experience: “I reflected on what we could do to help these people in the Church colonies in Mexico. They’ve been so very faithful over the years. ... And yet, they’ve had to travel all the way to Mesa, Arizona, to go to a temple.”

The inspiration for the smaller temple concept came to the prophet’s mind.

“I concluded we didn’t need the laundry. We didn’t need to rent temple clothing. We didn’t need eating facilities. These have been added for the convenience of the people but are not necessary (for the temple ordinances).”

President Hinckley recognized that the necessary elements of a temple — those of eternal significance — could be housed in a smaller structure than what had been in the past. The smaller structure could be built in a shorter amount of time at a reduced cost.

The Monticello Utah Temple, completed just a few months after the announcement, became the first of the smaller temples to be dedicated.

Originally completed in 1998 to be only 7,000 square feet, the maiden small temple had less than half the floor space of a typical Church meetinghouse.

To put that in perspective, the meetinghouse adjacent to the temple site has 18,000 square feet.

Despite the smaller square footage, the smaller temple design has been effective in bringing essential ordinances to more members around the world — especially in locales where access to a temple has been limited. Today close to 50 temples are approximately 10,700 square feet — the typical small temple mold.

Although all the smaller temples have a similar footprint and size, each has unique details in the interior decorating, art glass, exterior stone and positioning of the spire.

In Monticello, the community quickly outgrew the temple’s capacity. Only five years later — to the day — after the groundbreaking, the temple was rededicated. Renovations took the temple from the original 7,000 square feet to 11,225 square feet.

“If temple ordinances are an essential part of the restored gospel, and I testify that they are, then we must provide the means by which they can be accomplished,” President Hinckley said in his announcement in 1997. “All of our vast family history endeavor is directed to temple work. There is no other purpose for it. The temple ordinances become the crowning blessings the Church has to offer.

“I can only add that when these 30 or 32 are built, there will be more yet to come.”

Today temples — large and small — dot the earth. There are 148 operating temples, 11 under construction, 11 being renovated and 19 announced.

MEMBERS

FamilySearch's 2.4 million rolls of microfilm are now digitized. Here's what this milestone means

By Sydney Walker 

Updated

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A global effort to digitize FamilySearch's collection of millions of rolls of microfilm is now complete — a milestone 83 years in the making, the [Church announced Tuesday, Sept. 21](#).

The archive containing information on more than 11.5 billion individuals is available to the public on [FamilySearch.org](#). Over 200 countries and principalities and more than 100 languages are represented in the digitized documents.

The digitization project has been directed by the Church historian and recorder and executed by preservation professionals in the Church History Department. Records have been released online as they were digitized, and FamilySearch employees and volunteers will continue to index and process the remaining images for online access.

[Elder LeGrand R. Curtis Jr.](#), a General Authority Seventy serving as the Church historian and recorder, said the project shows the Church's commitment to sharing and using its preserved records.

“The Church has been dedicated to the proper preservation of records from the beginning, and we learn from Alma that we preserve records so that God's children can see God's hand in the lives of His children and covenant to accept and follow the Savior,” said Elder Curtis, referencing [Alma 37:17-19, 46](#).

In addition to preservation professionals in the Church History Department, the effort also involved Church staff and senior missionaries who visited many religious and government archives worldwide over the past eight decades.

“We hope that all those who contributed to this milestone in the last 80 years feel a sense of humble accomplishment today,” Steve Rockwood, CEO of FamilySearch International, said in a [FamilySearch release](#).

“And we hope the millions of individuals who will discover, gather and connect generation upon generation of their family members for years to come because of these efforts will have a deep sense of gratitude for the many unheralded contributors who made those discoveries possible.”

What is microfilm?

For more than 100 years, FamilySearch and its predecessors have been collecting, preserving and providing access to genealogically significant historical records — such as birth, death, marriage, census, military service and immigration documents.

The [Genealogical Society of Utah](#) — known today as FamilySearch — began microfilming records in 1938. Microfilm is an exposure of a document, image or file that is reduced down to a smaller format on a reel of 16mm or 35mm film and can be viewed using a machine that magnifies the image on a screen.

FamilySearch’s microfilm collection eventually grew to more than 2.4 million rolls.

For several decades, duplicates of the original rolls could be ordered and viewed at one of FamilySearch’s more than 5,000 family history centers worldwide. FamilySearch [ended its microfilm distribution to family history centers in 2017](#) as it began its transition to an all-digital approach and information could be viewed and searched online.

The microfilm will continue to be stored and preserved in the Church’s physically secured and climate-controlled archives, according to the [news release](#).

Digitization process

FamilySearch purchased its first microfilm scanners in 1998 and began digitizing its microfilm collection.

Initially, the scanners would detect the front edge of an image frame by frame, explained David Rencher, FamilySearch’s chief genealogical officer. But if it failed to detect the front edge of that frame, it skipped that image and went to the next — resulting in many lost images.

Software was developed by FamilySearch in 2006 in conjunction with the Church History Department and the Church’s Information and Communication Services Department to improve and accelerate processes.

“Our guys went through and figured out a technology to capture the entire roll of film as a single image and then divide the entire frame into single images, which had not been done before,” Rencher said. “And that way, we ensured that we didn’t drop or lose any images. So that was unprecedented.”

The scanning began with about five employees. As the process was further developed, up to 30 employees using 26 scanners were working on the project, even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The last roll of film added to the collection was captured by FamilySearch's in-field cameras in 2018, and the last of the microfilm scanning was completed last month.

Why it matters

Elder Curtis said the microfilm digitization effort reflects “the turning of our hearts to our fathers” as part of the fulfillment of Malachi’s prophecy, which Moroni related to Joseph Smith in September 1823 (see [Joseph Smith—History 1:36-39](#)).

“This work has always been about more than just moving source documents from paper to microfilm to digital,” he said. “It is an effort to accelerate the work of salvation on the earth; an effort to save the earth and its inhabitants from being utterly wasted; an effort to turn children’s hearts to their fathers as they are touched by priesthood power and accept the Abrahamic covenant — the promise made to the fathers — in their hearts.”

FamilySearch is also in the process of digitizing its large microfiche collection, which should be completed in the next several years, according to the news release. Microfiche stores exposures of documents on flat sheets of images rather than reels.

To explore FamilySearch’s collections of indexed records and images, go to [FamilySearch.org](#) and search both “Records” and “Images”. The [Images feature](#) enables users to peruse digitized images from the microfilm collection and more.

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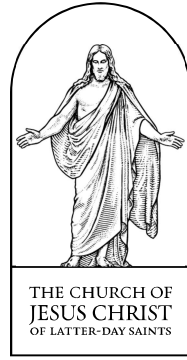
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