

PROXIES

Salvation beyond grave for Mormons

By Keith Graham
Staff Writer

Donald Conkey's grandparents were hot Mormons when they died. They might be today. And so, it seems, might your late grandparents.

At least, that's the view of Conkey and other members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as the Mormons are officially known. The church believes that its members can serve as proxies for the dead in several religious rites carried out in temples, like the new one officially opening in Atlanta June 1.

Non-Mormons have a rare opportunity to learn about "temple work" first-hand by visiting the new Atlanta Temple, in north Fulton County, before it is dedicated and closed to the general public. Through May 21, church volunteers are offering tours of the structure, where visitors will also learn about the extensive genealogy program the church has developed in conjunction with its aim of serving the deceased.

Through temple work, explained Conkey, a church spokesman, Mormons try to reach out to the dead, who are believed to be in a spirit world, and give them a chance to hear "the gospel of Jesus Christ in its fullness."

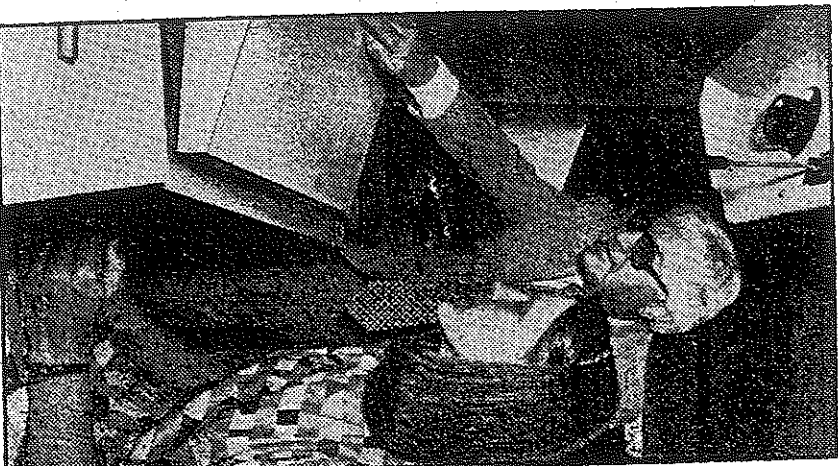
For Mormons, the fullness of the gospel includes not only the Bible accepted by most Christians, but the 19th century revelations of the Book of Mormon and the "Doctrine and Covenants" compiled by early leaders Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

In Conkey's case, his Presbyterian grandparents were given the opportunity — by proxy — to accept the church's creed, be baptized into it and eternally "sealed" to each other and their children after their deaths. The rites performed for the dead are exactly like those for living Mormons, but the dead, like the living, have the right to accept or reject them.

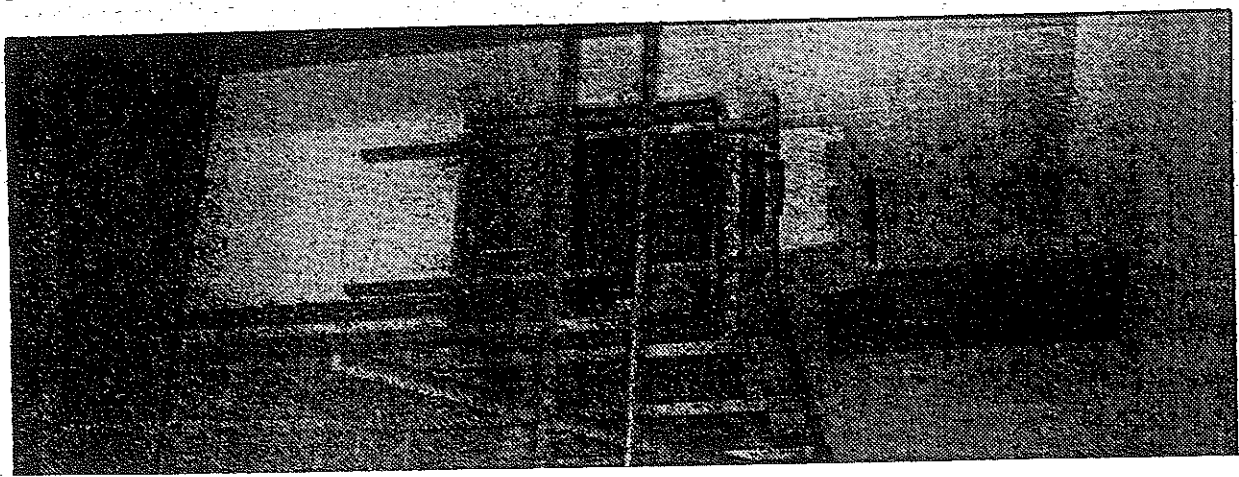
"The love that I have for those ancestors," Conkey explained, "is so great that I wanted to give them that opportunity. I've done all I can for them. It's up to them now."

Conkey is not atypical. "It's part of the belief of the church members to research their ancestry," said Rolf Suter, another local Mormon.

And the ancestors of other persons, as well. Operating a genealogical program with a multimillion dollar yearly budget, the church has compiled a treasure-trove of records that it shares liberally with any-



HOW IT'S DONE: Rolf Suter and volunteer Barbara White research genee records; at right, font where computer records ancestors' baptism by proxy.



one interested in tracing his roots. Mormons have collected records in more than 60 countries, from Germany to Fiji, Brazil to China, and now has 100 microfilm cameras busily gathering genealogical information in 40 countries. Those cameras were put to use in Georgia from 1957-67 filming records in 120 of the state's 159 counties, said Suter, who came here from Salt Lake City, Utah, to participate in the project.

"The church kept the original roll but gave the state a copy free of charge," Suter said, adding that similar projects were conducted in most of the 13 original states.

For the church, the microfilming program is valuable because the records can be parceled out to workers who participate in proxy religious rites in the far-flung networks of temples — Atlanta is the 21st.

From the state's viewpoint, as well, the microfilming project was valuable. Many records, previously stored solely in scattered county courthouses, were put on

■ Atlanta Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints: Barbara White research genee records; at right, font where computer records ancestors' baptism by proxy.

microfilm for storage in the centralized state archives. When the church project ended, Suter stayed on as microfilm program coordinator for the state's archive and has been at work updating the record ever since. The Mormons filmed records dating after 1900, because their proxy temple rites serve only persons no longer living.

Visitors to the Atlanta Temple will see computer terminals scattered throughout. Once the temple is dedicated, Mormon volunteers in good standing, who must wear white clothes in the building, will use a specially encoded card to find the name

Mormon libraries aid genealogists

By Keith Graham

Staff Writer

Genealogy sounded dry to Floyd Stayner at first, but a visit to a branch library run by a local church changed all that.

"All of it started with my research with the Mormons," explained Stayner, a retired Army colonel who now believes genealogy is a fascinating subject.

The southwest Atlanta resident is not a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. But several years ago when his daughter asked him to help her prove her eligibility to join the Daughters of the American Revolution, he knew where to turn.

As far back as World War II, Stayner, 77, had heard about the Mormon church's genealogical library in Salt Lake City, Utah. The library is the largest of its kind in the world — containing 1.25 million rolls of microfilm and more than 150,000 books.

Stayner knew, too, that he did not have to go way out West to use those materials. All he had to do was drive to the church's local branch library in Dunwoody.

There he found a complete catalog of the Salt Lake library's holdings and was able to order the material he needed for use here.

Stayner's fascination with genealogy would not surprise most Mormons. They share his interest. And as pioneers in genealogical research — including some of the earliest efforts to microfilm records in the 1930s — they are willing to share their expertise.

They operate 420 branch libraries in the United States and 12 other countries — attracting an average of 500,000 patron-visits a year, many of them from non-Mormons.

Of the 126 visitors at the local branch in March, 75 to 80 percent were non-Mormon. Visitors there are assisted by librarian Deborah Kimball or one of 15 other volunteers, all with training in genealogical research.

Visitors can select materials they want and have them sent to the library for their use for a fee of \$2 plus 50 cents postage, Mrs. Kimball said. Normally the materials arrive about six weeks after an order is placed.

The system can be slow and cumbersome due to the delays between the time of ordering and the arrival in Atlanta. And the library's hours are not convenient for everyone, several local genealogists said.

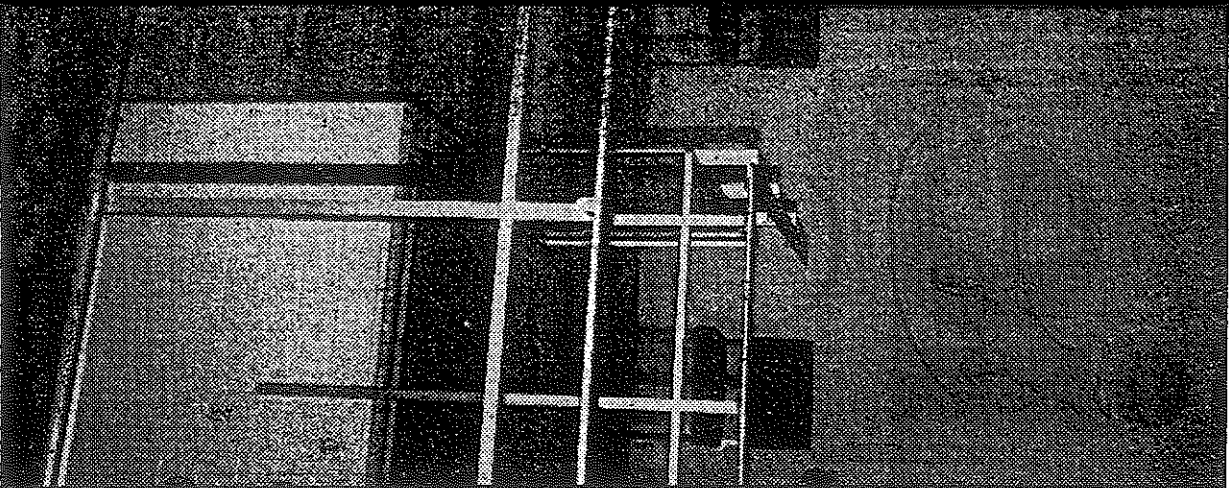
But the vast resources can save a researcher the expense of traveling to numerous other cities — or countries — to gather necessary materials.

The sheer bulk of the records, even on microfilm and the more compact microfiche, constantly requires new planning. A new five-story library is under construction to replace the three stories now used in the church's main headquarters building in Salt Lake.

And, two decades ago, the church began to store master negatives of all the film in its vaults hundreds of feet below the granite walls of Little Cottonwood Canyon (not far from the Alta ski resort) in the Rocky Mountains.

The church asks, but does not require, that anyone using its genealogical research facilities turn a copy of the results over to its library. ■

■ **L.D.S. Branch Genealogical Library:** 1155 Mount Vernon Road, Dunwoody. Hours: Mondays, 9 a.m.-1 p.m.; Tuesdays, 9 a.m.-3 p.m. and 7-10 p.m.; Wednesdays, 7-10 p.m.; Saturdays, 9 a.m.-5 p.m. Closed during the Temple tour period. Open to the general public. 393-4329. ■



of a person from the church's genealogy records on one of these terminals.

Then, while in the temple, the volunteer will serve as a proxy for this person, who may have been the member of another faith or of no faith at all.

Mormons believe that deceased persons undergo a partial judgment at the time of their death but that a final judgment, which determines how the soul spends eternally, will occur at some unknown future point, according to Bob Winston, president of the Atlanta Temple. A number of gradations of glory exist in the after-life, even for righteous people, but the highest levels are reserved for good Mormons. "The main reason for joining the Mormon church," Winston said, "is obtaining exaltation in the celestial."

He and other members of his church mean to see that the opportunity for that kind of exaltation goes to everyone — including the dead. ■

*Ask News Service
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Atlanta Mormon Community Renovates 'Mother' Chapel

The "mother chapel" of Atlanta's Mormon community is being renovated, at a cost of \$1.25 million, after nearly 40 years of service to thousands of Mormons, who have worshipped and served in the chapel located at 1450 Ponce de Leon Ave.

Construction began on the chapel in 1947, at a time when the entire Atlanta area Mormon community numbered only a few hundred. The name then, as it is today, was the Atlanta First Ward of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, the church's official name. The name "Mormon" is a nickname derived from a major prophet from the Book of Mormon, a book of scripture accepted by church members as "another witness of Jesus Christ."

In 1990, this "mother chapel" is only one of many chapels, a temple, and church offices located in the metro area now which serve the rapidly growing membership of Latter-day Saints in north Georgia, and throughout the southeastern United States.

The building was built with many thousands of hours of member donated labor and occupied in 1954. Modern at the time of its construction, it soon became outdated by the new technology that will now replace the original equipment.

In 1957 the Ponce chapel became "stake" headquarters for the Latter-day Saints for most of the state of Georgia. At that time, the newly formed "stake" was only one of three stakes in the entire southeastern United States. Today there are nearly 70 stakes in the same geographic area, with each stake serving an average of 10 congregations.

Leadership for the fast growing

world wide church population is coming from the ever expanding Missionary Corps, now in excess of 40,000, who serve two years, at their own expense, anywhere in the world the church assigns them. James "Jimmy" Putnam, who until June 15 had served as bishop of the Atlanta Ward several years, is a product of the church's priesthood leadership development program. Bishop Putnam's parents, Loyd and Dorothy Putnam, lifelong residents of Avondale Estates, were involved in building the original chapel when their first son, "Jimmy" was born in 1951.

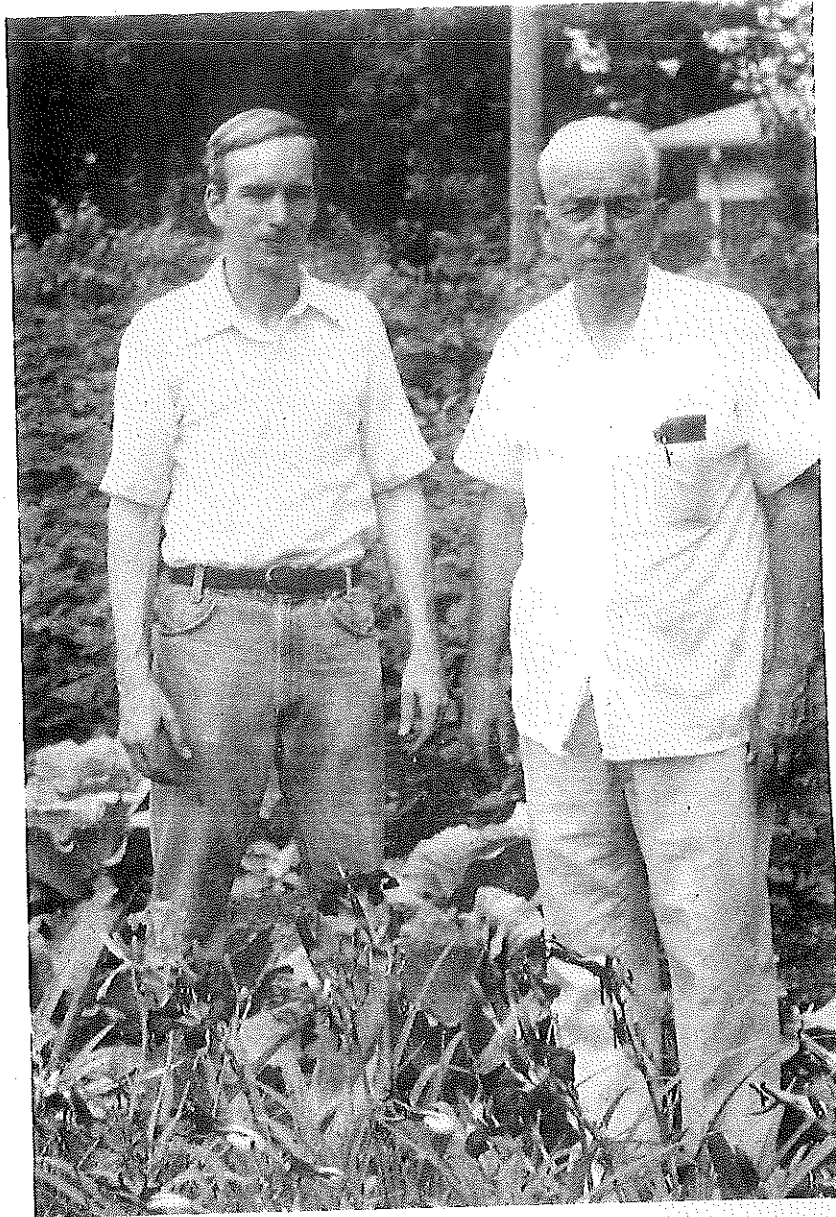
In 1970, at age 19, "Jimmy" was called to serve a two-year mission to England. With seven sons and a daughter, Bishop "Jimmy's" family is likely to provide a third generation of missionaries to be trained for church service and return to become bishops, like their father James, or their grandfather Loyd, who served as bishop of the Atlanta Third Ward several years in the early 1960s.

When Bishop Putnam was released June 15 another ward member was called to serve the ward as its bishop. The new bishop, Peter N. Richards, is a graduate of Emory's School of Dentistry. Bishop Richards and his wife, the former Cindy Rounds, are both products of the church's priesthood leadership training program. Bishop Richards served his two year mission in Utah; Mrs. Richards, her 18 months in the New England Mission, headquartered in Boston.

The local congregation has continued to grow, and divide, throughout the years. Ten stakes, with 95 congregations, have been organized in Georgia since the original Atlanta branch was

formed. And growth continues, with three new congregations being created recently from the Atlanta Ward membership; The East Lake Branch, which has the church's first black branch president in the metro area; and the Spanish Branch, which serves the fast growing Hispanic population of the metro area.

The renovation work will be completed in mid-August with the first Sacrament Service scheduled for Aug. 26. An open house has been scheduled for Sept. 22 to which the entire neighborhood community is invited. Dr. James O. Mason, a former Atlanta Stake president, and former head of CDC, will be the main speaker at the open house evening service. Dr. Lawrence Harker and Donald Conkey, both of Druid Hills, co-chair the open house.



Bishops Loyd, right, and James "Jimmy" Putnam shown in the Putnam family garden in Avondale Estates. The Putnam family, life long members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormans) are both examples of the priesthood leadership program the church uses to develop and provide leadership for its fast world wide growth.

Moormons announce change in local ward boundaries

President Tom Hammond and Bishop Ronald Simons, of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, announced a changing of boundaries in the Chamblee Ward this past Sunday.

The ward boundaries have been expanded to include a larger portion of the Dunwoody area. This change was made to alleviate the overcrowding in the Roswell II ward. Approximately 85 members will be added to the congregation.

Consequently, the ward has been renamed the Chamblee-Dunwoody Ward to better signify the membership.

— Compiled Jason Smoot

Debbie Neighbor

3/10/89

Latter-day Saints Church Creates New South DeKalb Branch

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has divided its downtown Atlanta congregation, forming a new East Lake Branch. It will be headed by Walker Atrice, president, the first black leader of an LDS congregation in the Atlanta area. His counselors are William Thomas and Frederick Arnett.

The East Lake Branch has a beginning membership of 32. It includes an area from Memorial Drive south to I-285, and from Moreland Avenue east to Columbia Drive. Because the LDS Church forms its congregations by geographical area, creating this new branch has reduced the transportation problems of some of its members in downtown Atlanta. The members are holding Sacrament Meeting and Primary in their homes, rotating from week to week, until a suitable building is found.

According to President Atrice, the branch already has some specific goals. It plans to promote the importance of education and to encourage its members to be active in the community. It also plans to work on the problems of teenage pregnancy.

For information call 373-2663.

Secretary - Schell - New - Nov. 3, 1988