

THOSE WHO SERVE

The Mantle of Authority in Willow Creek Stake

June 1973 to June 1983

by

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1983

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Preface

On the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the organization of Willow Creek Stake, President David J. Sperry suggested that a history be written. Consequently James Wilson, a member of the High Council, called Loretta Derrick to write the early history of the area and Diane Stokoe to interview local leaders and write the recent history of the stake.

The experiences described in these pages were taken from taped interviews now housed with the stake historian. For the most part, the stories are written in the words of those interviewed. Part one focuses on the three stake presidents who presided over the Sandy Utah Willow Creek Stake from its inception on June 17, 1973 through June 18, 1983.

Richard F. North, was the last president of the old Jordan East Stake. He served from April 2, 1967 through June 17, 1973. President North presided over a geographic area that included Midvale on the west and Willow Creek on the east and from 6600 South to 8500 South. Previously, Elder North had served as bishop of the Union 5th Ward with boundaries in 1966 that encompassed the entire Willow Creek Stake, Cottonwood Creek Stake, and part of the Fort Union Stake. President North was released when the Jordan East Stake was divided in 1973 to form the Fort Union and Willow Creek Stakes.

1. Wayne E. Saunders, was called as the first president of the Willow Creek Stake on June 17, 1973. He was released on October 24, 1976 to fill an assignment on a general board. President Saunders was assisted by John R. Ruppel, First Counselor and R. Lamar Bradshaw, Second Counselor.

2. John R. Ruppel, was first counselor to President Saunders. He became the stake president when Saunders was released. John served from October 24, 1976 until the stake was divided on October 15, 1978. He was then called to preside over the newly formed Cottonwood Creek Stake. President Ruppel was assisted by R. Lamar Bradshaw, first Counselor and Lowell M. Snow, Second Counselor.

3. David J. Sperry, was called to preside over the Willow Creek Stake on October 15, 1978. He continued in that position until March 25, 1984. President Sperry was assisted by the following four counselors in this order:

First Counselor

Lowell M. Snow

Lowell M. Snow

Kelvyn H. Cullimore

Richard E. Johnson

Second Counselor

Robert A. Tucker

Kelvyn H. Cullimore

Richard E. Johnson

Robert A. Tucker

Part II

THOSE WHO SERVE

The Mantle of Authority in Willow Creek Stake 1973 to 1983

Many believe that those called to ward and stake leadership positions are, at the time of their calling, endowed with special gifts that enable them to fulfill their responsibilities. One woman, with the ability to see beyond the veil, witnessed deceased relatives and a former church president, literally wrap her husband in a robe of gold as he was set apart as a new bishop. For those who serve, the mantle of authority is almost a tangible thing. President David Sperry recalled:

Unlike any other Church calling I've had, there has never been a day go by since the time I was called to be the stake president that I have not sensed and felt that I was the stake president. The mantle of authority was clearly there--even when I took an occasional vacation. It's something I've never been able to forget. It's as if it were constantly before me. It has helped me to remember, on an around-the-clock basis, who I am.

Who calls these leaders to serve? How are they called? Who trains these men for the roles they will perform? What kind of spiritual help do they receive as they strive to meet the needs of the people they serve? What experiences prepared them for leadership in the kingdom? These are the questions that will be discussed in the pages that follow.

The prophet Joseph Smith wrote, "We believe that a man must be called of God, by prophecy, and by the laying on of hand, by those who are in authority to preach the Gospel and administer the ordinances thereof." The experiences that follow testify to the fact that our leaders are "called of God."

Richard F. North

In early June of 1973, President North was contemplating the coming division of the old Jordan East Stake. As his mind wandered back over the years he recalled the changes that had occurred in the stake. Six years earlier there had been only six wards- -many of them in debt with past-due welfare and budget assessments and the 4,500 members of the stake lived in scattered rural conditions. There were vast differences in wealth. Personal incomes ranged from those who earned only minimum wages (almost at the poverty level) to some very affluent members who enjoyed large incomes.

Brother North, by nature, was a very organized man. He owned a business and had twice served as a bishop. He was called to serve as bishop of Evergreen Ward in East Millcreek Stake when he was just thirty-one years old. "I don't know how I can handle that," he told President Lamont Gunderson who issued the call. "I'm starting a new business in just two weeks."

President Gunderson promised that if he put the Lord's work first, he would be blessed and his business would prosper. He accepted the call and his business did flourish. Over the next eighteen years Richard North was to serve almost continually either as a bishop or a stake president. He presided over the Jordan East Stake at a unique time in its history. His administration brought financial stability as the entire area entered a period of rapid growth.

The events of his own call to serve as president of Jordan East came to mind as he contemplated the coming division. At a high council meeting in March 1967, just two weeks prior to stake conference, President Donald Brady Milne announced the reorganization of the Jordan East Stake. At that moment, Dick North had a sinking sensation in the pit of his stomach. Somehow he knew he was about to be called to be the new stake president. The next two weeks were the most trying of his life. He had an oppressive, unsettled feeling and he could not sleep.

Dick joined other stake leaders on the Saturday afternoon prior to stake conference. The meeting was held at the stake house on 600 East 7100 South. He still felt uneasy. He was the first man to be interviewed. The five minute interview with Elder Mark E. Peterson and John Longden, two visiting General Authorities, went rather routinely and he returned to his seat in the chapel.

I had taken a book to read as I knew we would be required to stay there for some time. I brought The Articles of Faith by James E. Talmage. As soon as I went back to my seat, I opened the book and it just fell open. The heading at the top of the page read, "Men called of God." That heading just jumped out at me and I knew then with absolute certainty that I was about to be called as the stake president. That call came later in the afternoon."



“From Dugouts to Spires” © 2000 by Utah artist, Kenneth C. Madsen, blends past and present in its depiction of South Jordan’s pioneer residents of 1859 and contemporary.

Six years had passed since President North was sustained and the process of selecting new leadership was about to begin again. The Jordan East Stake, that historic old pioneer stake, was about to be divided one last time. Fort Union and Willow Creek Stakes would be created and the name “Jordan East,” would fade into the annals of Church history.

Elder Delbert L. Stapley had been assigned to handle the division in 1973. The week before conference, he contacted President North and asked him to arrange interviews with the bishops, members of the stake presidency and high council. Then, rather casually he added, *“If you feel that there are any others in the stake who should be interviewed, please invite them.”*

In the process of making the calls, President North felt impressed to invite three people who were outside the usual categories – Stanley Burgon, Rulon Bradshaw and John Ruppel. Consequently Stanley Burgon was called to be president of the new Fort Union Stake, John Ruppel was called to be first counselor to President Wayne Saunders, and Rulon Bradshaw accepted a call to serve as stake patriarch in the Willow Creek Stake--all on the same weekend.

President North was not among those called to serve. After eighteen years in a leadership positions, he was finally released. How did he feel?

It was almost devastating. I had enjoyed the spiritual experiences that came with these assignments; and, had it been my choice, I would not have been released. I felt a spiritual loss. It was a hard adjustment. It was literally years before I felt comfortable with the loss.

Wayne E. Saunders

The interviews began around 6:00 p.m. on Friday evening, June 15, 1973. Elder Delbert L. Stapley wanted to call both new stake presidents that very night. The last interview concluded four hours later, at 10:00 p.m. He interviewed Stanley Burgon and was impressed to call him as the first president of Fort Union Stake. Elder Stapley made the call before Brother Burgon had returned to his home. However, Wayne Saunders (whom he felt should be called to lead the new Willow Creek Stake) had gone home, so he asked President North to contact him there. Brother Saunders was having dinner with his wife when the telephone rang.

“What are you doing?” Elder Stapley inquired.

“I’m eating a steak with my wife,” Wayne replied.

“How would you like to preside over one?” Elder Stapley asked.

I told him I'd never done anything like that. In fact, I hadn't even served in a stake position. He said that didn't matter. "The Lord will show you what to do." He instructed me to have recommendations for counselors ready early the next morning. I was quite concerned because of the weight of that assignment and the responsibility of getting everything organized. So when I went to bed that night, I asked the Lord for help in choosing my counselors. I told him Elder Stapley wanted me to hurry, so he would have to hurry. I wanted only two names on my mind when I awoke in the morning.

Actually the call to serve as stake president did not come as a complete surprise to Wayne Saunders. June is the season of flooding in Utah. Often, in years of heavy moisture, the rivers and streams overflow their banks and extensive damage results. Little Cottonwood Creek overflowed its banks in the spring of 1973 and the Saunders property located at 2163 Lorita Way sustained heavy damage.

The week before my call we were being bombarded with the waters of the creek. I was out in my yard looking at all the damage to my property. The banks were eroding and a lot of my yard had been washed away and the waters were getting close to my house. I felt grave concern and counseled with the Lord about the flooding. In that moment he manifested to me that he was going to ask me to serve as the new stake president, and that things would calm down.



Flood relief for the Willow Creek area. Wayne Saunders stands on the far right.

Elder Saunders awoke the morning of June 16, 1973, with the name of his second counselor, Lamar Bradshaw, in mind and he clearly saw the man who was to serve as his first counselor. The man who had occupied a seat at the corner of the table last night. He wore a dark suit. However, as the two had not been introduced, he did not know the man's name.

So Saunders telephoned Elder Stapley and gave him the information just as it had come to him. Lamar Bradshaw was to serve as his second counselor. The first counselor would be the man in the dark suit seated at the corner of the table when the interviews began. He explained to Elder Stapley he would have to identify the man as he did not know his name. Consequently Lamar Bradshaw was called in later that day. Lamar recalled the simplicity of the interview.

I thought there would be a searching in-depth study of everything I had done since the day I was born but there was none of that. In fact, Elder Stapley didn't even ask about my worthiness. He simply asked if I was willing to serve. In a state of shock, I responded "Yes."

"Fine! That's the way it ought to be. Now go and meet with President Saunders!"

The Man in the Dark Suit

John Ruppel had just moved to Utah from California where he had been serving as bishop. He had accepted a position in a retail corporation in Salt Lake City and had resided in Sandy only about five months.

He and his wife were entertaining several regional managers at their home the night he received the telephone call from President North. As John left his business associates to answer the phone, he had a strong impression that the stake president was on the other end of the line. His intuition served him well and he was invited to attend the Friday night interviews. This seemed rather extraordinary. Normally only stake leaders were interviewed; yet, somehow he felt it was right that he was included. Dressed in his dark suit, he sat at the corner of the table next to the door.

John Ruppel was the first to be interviewed. He recalled,

Elder Stapley asked who I thought ought to be the Stake President. I replied that I didn't know the men in the room well. Frankly, I knew very few of them. So I looked around and it was as if the countenances of everyone had been tuned down and this one face shone out—the face of Wayne Saunders. I gave Elder Stapley my impression. He wanted three names. I looked around the room and found there was not another, except for Lamar Bradshaw, whom I felt would not be the stake president but would serve as a counselor. Beyond that I had no special feelings, so I gave him only two names.

John Ruppel was scheduled to fly to California the next day on business. He made the trip because it seemed illogical that he would be called to serve. However, the feeling persisted that he would be involved.

About noon, after completing his negotiations, John was seated in a restaurant when he felt a strong impression to telephone his wife. Normally, he would never call her on a one-day

business trip. But he dialed the number. She answered and informed him that Elder Stapley wanted to speak with him. He called Elder Stapley who invited him to serve as first counselor to the new stake president. John flew back to Utah where he and President Saunders were finally introduced a few hours before the conference began the next morning.

“That was the man,” president Saunders remarked. “It has always been a great spiritual testimony to me to know the exactness of the Lord in choosing his servants.”



John Ruppel with President Wayne Saunders, Robert L. Simpson, Lamar Bradshaw

President Saunders' Administration

As Wayne Saunders began to serve, he discovered that the average age of the brethren in stake leadership positions was forty-two. Few of those called into the first Willow Creek Stake High Council had any previous experience in that position. President Saunders, an excellent scriptionist, began to instruct them.

Lamar Bradshaw recalled: *President Saunders spent more time teaching and instructing those men than anyone I have ever served with. He taught with great compassion and love, and with deep emotion. Many times he was brought to tears as he taught and trained members of the high council and the bishops on a one-on-one basis. His instruction, testimony and firm conviction has been a great help to me personally. I draw on those experiences and his teaching even today, as I serve as bishop of the 14th Ward in the Cottonwood Creek Stake.*

President Ruppel remembered President Saunders as a strong, spiritual man, and a very powerful leader.

President Saunders' Release

President Saunders presided over the stake for almost three and one half years. In the fall of 1976, Elder Bruce R. McConkie called to asked him if he'd received his letter yet. He replied, "No, I haven't received it."

"Well," Elder McConkie continued, "the Prophet is calling you to serve on a general Church committee and that will be your full-time assignment. He's asked me to come out and make the change."

Elder McConkie emphasized that there would not be any other assignment, only the committee work. President Saunders was not surprised. He knew through the Spirit that he was about to be released but he had kept that information quietly to himself. However, three weeks prior to stake conference he told his first counselor there was about to be a change. John Ruppel recalls having a lot of anxiety about that,

As first counselor, you search your soul to discover all the inadequacies and you think about ways you might have done a better job. Also, I feared that because President Saunders had been so strong, it would be very difficult for the people of the stake to accept anyone else. I prayed about that a lot—never particularly feeling whether or not I would succeed him. I did not have feelings one way or another. My wife did, but I did not. . .

The Thursday, October 21, 1976, before the Saturday afternoon interviews, I was driving home from work. In my mind I was really praying. All of a sudden while driving along (I'd like to say that I was on my knees somewhere and had a vision, but that just isn't what happened,) I got the most remarkable calm feeling. I heard no voice, nor did I have any mental impressions. It was just a calm—almost as if the Lord was letting me know all would be well, and things would happen the way he wanted them to happen.

That night we had high council meeting, and President Saunders asked us to bear our testimonies. I was the last to do so. A couple of high counselors came up to me afterward and said they could feel a calm. It was not anything that indicated I was about to become the new president, but they could tell there was something different. From Thursday afternoon on, I never felt any more anxiety. I did not worry about who would lead the stake. I just knew that things would happen the Lord's way and that the people would accept it.

The process of calling a new stake president began when Elder Bruce McConkie came to release President Saunders. In a meeting with the stake leaders, Elder McConkie said he felt his

job was “to find the man the Lord had already selected to be the stake president.” The purpose of his interviews was simply to be in a position for the Lord to say: “There is the man.” With these remarks, he began interviewing.

President Saunders recalls the day of his release,
I went into the chapel and quietly pondered the affairs of the stake. I thanked the Lord for the opportunity to serve and told him I was grateful to do whatever he wanted done, including being released for a committee assignment. While I was in the chapel, a great manifestation came to me; and I broke out in a cold sweat.

The Lord said to me, “I’m also going to ask you to be a patriarch.”

I responded, “Please don’t ask me to do that. That assignment has always been a bit frightening to me.” But the feeling did not go away, so I just got up and started toward my office.

When I got almost to the door, Brother McConkie opened the door and said: “President, the Lord has manifested some additional things here. There are other things we want to talk to you about.”

I said, “I know. He has called me to be a patriarch.”

Elder McConkie ordained President Saunders bestowing upon him the keys of his calling. Then he said: “The Lord bless you.” That is all the instruction a new patriarch receives.

I have found, even though I feared the assignment, that revelation comes in the same way—whether one is serving as Patriarch or leading the stake. You learn to understand all the Lord’s signals.

John Ruppel

Elder McConkie called John Ruppel to be stake president later in the afternoon of October 23, 1976. He sent him into another room saying, “Now go and find out who the Lord wants for your counselors. You have fifteen minutes.”

President Ruppel felt strongly that Lamar Bradshaw should continue as his first counselor, “he was very decisive, sure, and a swift thinker.” John recalls. “Lamar is a very personable and positive man. He was an unqualified sustainer of things that needed to be done. Though Lamar and I did not always agree. He has always supported me.”

Before going into the room to ponder and pray, Lowell Snow’s name had not been on his mind. After a few moments however, it was very clear that Lowell Snow should serve as his second counselor. There were many others with more experience. Elder Snow was a new bishop

and a very young man at the time, just thirty-two-years old. But John felt strongly that the Lord wanted Lowell to serve in that capacity. Consequently, David Sperry was called to replace Lowell Snow as bishop of Union 15th Ward and the new stake presidency was sustained in stake conference on Sunday, October 24, 1976.

President Snow described the reaction of the members of the stake: I was so impressed when President Ruppel was called. The mantle of authority fell upon him quite naturally. He really became president in the eyes of the people. He assumed the role and charted his own course, which was the right course. The Lord knew so well, perhaps much better than I or anyone else, the needs of the people at that time. John Ruppel was the right man at the right time in the right place. He was in a position to do a job that nobody else could do. I saw that with John and I think I saw that ever more forcefully when President Sperry was called.

During the next few years, U.S. News and World Report identified Sandy, Utah as one of the fastest growing areas in the nation. Consequently President Ruppel and his counselors had to deal with problems of that unprecedented growth. According to President Snow:

We were involved in a very heavy building program. We were literally raising hundreds of thousands of dollars each year. We were building constantly, and creating and dividing wards on a regular basis every few months. The real challenge was trying to see into the future. We could meet the immediate day to day needs of the people, but to try and project the growth in Willow Creek seemed very elusive. It was difficult to try and determine how much growth there would finally be between the mountains and 13th East. A lot of inspiration came during that time which was outside our realm of experience as we struggled to understand the growth and anticipate the calling of new church leaders.

In the late 1970's, the stakes were holding morning and afternoon sessions of quarterly conference. The Willow Creek Stake was growing so fast during this period that on one occasion, the stake presidency presided at two sessions of stake conference, conducted two sacrament meetings, divided two wards into four, and set apart four bishops, all on the same day

As I look back on that experience, all I can say is that it was a miracle we covered everything. It is hard to imagine how we were able to deal with those two or three years of explosive growth. I feel that John Ruppel's genius in seeing things through and Lamar Bradshaw's experience in the area were keys. It was a unique time—one that I have never experienced before or since.

Elder Bradshaw remembered President Ruppel as being a popular leader. He had a positive way with people and he was a good listener. In addition, he was very supportive of those called to serve with him. He made people feel that he had great confidence in their judgment. While describing his role as first counselor, Rulen Bradshaw remarked,

I have always felt my responsibility as a counselor (and I have served in that capacity many times over) was to counsel. This means that often I had to repeat myself so that those I worked with clearly understood where I was coming from. Once my recommendations were readily understood, it has been easy for me to change my mind. As a counselor, I've changed my position many times.

In less than a year after President Ruppel was called, it became evident there was a need for another division. President Ruppel explained:

As the stake grew from five wards and 2,000 members to twelve wards and 6,000 members, it became clear that a division was imminent. We felt we were losing a little control—not administratively so much, but we were losing touch with the people. As a presidency, we prayed about a division. One night as I went to bed, I had a really distinct impression of where the lines should be drawn. . . I prayed and asked the Lord to ratify that feeling and he did. . .

Consequently, John Ruppel was called to lead the newly organized Cottonwood Creek Stake. The choice of Bishop Sperry as stake president in Willow Creek did not surprise President Ruppel. For three months prior to the division, he had called Bishop Sperry into his office. He told him that it was time for him to look introspectively at his life and be certain that he was spiritually prepared for anything that might happen. President Ruppel did not tell David Sperry that he would be the next president of Willow Creek Stake, nor did he know that for sure, though he had some feelings about it. But he did tell Bishop Sperry that he wanted him prepared for whatever might come.

David J. Sperry

As one of the twelve bishops in the stake, David Sperry had known for six months that there would likely be a division at quarterly conference in October of 1978. As President Ruppel and President Bradshaw both lived west of Highland Drive, it was obvious that the eastern end of the stake would get a new president. Many thought Lowell Snow, who was serving as second counselor in the presidency, would be called as stake president. President Snow lived east of Highland Drive and had served in the presidency for just two years. To many, he seemed like the logical choice. Deep in his heart, David Sperry felt that he himself might be included in the presidency, but he had no sense as to which position he might occupy.

When Bishop Sperry was called by Elder Monson to serve as the stake president, he was initially very much at peace with the call, yet slightly surprised. He wondered why President Snow had not been called to that position and he asked Elder Monson.

“There is nothing wrong with President Snow,” he responded. He is a fine man, a great man and a spiritual man. It’s just that the Lord has decided that this is your time and season to serve.”

President Sperry had worked with Lowell Snow in the bishopric of the Union 15th Ward. It had been a rewarding experience, and so after prayerful consideration, he was grateful when President Snow accepted the call to serve as first counselor. Since he, David Sperry, had never served in a stake position, he felt the need for a counselor who was acquainted with the stake personnel and organization. President Snow represented that continuity.

The matter of whom to call as second counselor was much more difficult. President Sperry questioned Elder Monson about the men he had talked with. Elder Monson had interviewed virtually every leader in the stake in the process of calling two stake presidencies. He suggested some names but did not indicate any preference.

President Sperry recalled: *After President Snow was called, the two of us sat down and went over various names. The more we talked, the more the name "Bob Tucker" kept coming to mind. Brother Tucker was fairly new to our stake and was totally unknown to Elder Monson. Finally I said: "That name just keeps coming to my mind in a repeated sort of way. I guess the Lord really wants him."*

Robert A. Tucker

Two weeks prior to stake conference, Robert Tucker had the familiar unsettled feeling that came before he was called into a church position. Brother Sperry had been his bishop and there was no question in his mind, David Sperry would be the new stake president. He also felt strongly that President Snow would be called. Why he had an unsettled feeling was a mystery. He had lived in the stake less than six months. He had been released as bishop of the 10th Ward in Fort Union Stake just before his move into Willow Creek so Bob was enjoying a respite from his usual heavy involvement in church service.

By late Saturday afternoon, Bob Tucker felt totally relaxed. He knew the stake leadership interviews were held on Thursday evenings and since he had not been contacted, he completely discounted the feeling he had and began to get ready for choir practice. As a member of a special stake chorus, he would be singing at stake conference the next morning. The director had been emphatic--all choir member must attend the Saturday afternoon rehearsal.

The phone rang at the Tucker residence just as Bob was walking out of the front door. The stake executive secretary invited him to meet with Elder Monson. Having convinced himself that he would not be called, he assumed that Elder Monson was just inviting a few brethren in to gauge their support for the new stake presidency.

Elder Monson's line of questioning was just what Bob Tucker had anticipated:

"We have just called David Sperry to be the new stake president, Brother Tucker. How do you feel about that?"

I said I thought that was just great. We had been here for just a short time. David Sperry had served as our bishop. Few men had such an impact on our lives in such a short time. We would have no problem at all sustaining him.

“He has selected President Snow as his first counselor. Do you have any feelings about that?”

Brother Tucker had known Brother Snow when he had served as a bishop. *“We had belonged to the same region and met at several meetings. For the short time we have lived in the stake, I have been very impressed with President Snow,”* he responded.

“Would you have any difficulty sustaining him?” Elder Monson inquired.

“Absolutely none,” was his reply.

Elder Monson’s next question took Brother Tucker by surprise.

“And President Sperry has recommended that you become his second counselor.”

There was a very long period of silence.

“You seem to have more difficulty answering that question,” Elder Monson observed.

“That is because I had concluded that if this interview were going to take place it should have happened on Thursday. I am overwhelmed.” Humbly, Brother Tucker accepted the call.

When the stake was divided on October 15, 1978, John Ruppel and Lamar Bradshaw became members of Cottonwood Creek Stake. So the man in the best position to gage the situation in Willow Creek Stake was Rusty Snow:

Knowing where the people were spiritually and where the stake was headed, President Sperry could not have been called at a more opportune time. With his simple peaceful approach, he was exactly the right man. I found him to be a totally different administrator than President Ruppel. His style of dealing with matters was just what the people needed. I remember Elder Packer saying, “The duty of the stake presidency is to catch the vision of where to take the people.” David Sperry understood that.

Bob Tucker’s call to the presidency was an act of courage on President Sperry’s part. None of us could have known what the Lord had in store for Robert Tucker. We did not know him very well. Neither President Sperry nor I could understand why Bob Tucker had been called. The experience demonstrated that President Sperry truly was led by the Spirit.

President Sperry recounted the events of Saturday afternoon:

Elder Monson invited me over to the stake house about 3:00 p.m. He called me to serve as stake president, and said: “ Now I want to have the whole stake organized by Sunday morning.”

I had only lived in the stake three years, and I did not know people outside my own ward very well. I was relying heavily on President Snow for recommendations. The pace that afternoon was so hectic. In fact, Elder Monson kept me closeted in the stake president’s office; and as we would get names approved for high council or auxiliaries, he would have the previous stake presidency go out and make the calls. Then he wanted me to prepare a talk for service the next morning, and he wanted information forms completed.

There was a time that Saturday night when the evening session of conference was going on. I was all alone in the president’s office. I had the most uncomfortable feeling come over me. It was a feeling that I had never experienced before or since. I just wanted to walk out that door and run and never stop running—never to look back for my wife, my children, or anyone else. I think I came to realize how Jonah felt. I began to have a little more sympathy for that ancient prophet. I have always thought Jonah was a big coward because he ran and hid in the belly of a whale. Those few moments, when my faith and spiritual strength were being severely tested, gave me new insight and compassion into the life of that Biblical prophet.

As the conference ended, I felt happy but very inadequate. Sunday night, when I was finally able to retire, I felt more spiritually and physically spent than at any other time in my life. Many questions were passing through my mind which made sleep difficult. I wondered—why me? Did I really have the capacity to lead the stake? Would the Saints accept and sustain me? Those were some of the feeling I had.

As I awoke early Monday morning, I began to experience a great calm. A peaceful feeling came over me and a strong spiritual impression gave me to know that all would be well and that I was acceptable to the Lord.

President Sperry’s Administration

President Sperry began his tenure with a desire to draw close to the people of the stake and administer with love, compassion and concern. His previous experience in the bishopric with President Snow had taught him a lot about administering with love. They had begun their work together with that kind of direction in mind. Gradually David Sperry came to realize that the job of stake president was more administrative than he had suspected. It also seemed to be a step removed from the people he presided over. In addition, he found he was handling really difficult matters--those problems passed on by bishops which often resulted in church courts and extensive counseling.



Elder Monson with President David Sperry, Lowell Snow, and Robert Tucker

Another realization was that the stake still needed a great deal of management because of the continued rapid growth. Traditions need to be established, a ball park developed, and new chapels constructed. There was a tremendous amount of work centered around the management of growth. Five months into President Sperry's administration, Robert Tucker was called to be president of the Spain Madrid Mission. Lowell Snow said of Bob Tucker:

President Tucker learned all the things he needed to learn in that short period to prepare for his new calling as a mission president. While doing so he served with love and had a great impact upon the people of the Willow Creek Stake.

While looking for a new counselor, President Sperry called Kelvyn Cullimore, son of James A. Cullimore of the First Council of Seventy, into his office and said to Brother Cullimore:

I want you to know that President Tucker will be leaving for his mission. I've taken the matter to the Lord and have asked him what I should do about calling another counselor. As yet, I have not had any strong feeling, but I am impressed that you may be the man that the Lord wants called. However, I want to find out some things about you before I ask the Lord to ratify your call.

Brother Cullimore did not know President Sperry well. At that moment, he felt the stake

president had just paid him the greatest compliment he had ever received. In putting the question to him as he did, Brother Cullimore understood that he was saying, *“If you are not called, I know you can handle it.”*

During the next month, while he heard nothing further, Brother Cullimore experienced a great calm, an assurance that everything would be as the Lord wanted it to be. Then, in April of 1979, President Tucker was released to leave for the mission field and President Cullimore was called to serve as second counselor.

Kelvyn Cullimore described himself as a very aggressive and opinionated person, but a man totally capable of submitting himself to his Church leaders. *“Though I willingly expressed my opinions, once a decision was made, I was always very supportive. I think it takes courage for a leader to call someone like that.”*

President Snow reflects on President Cullimore strengths:

President Cullimore had a great impact on the stake. He was a model of intensity, organization and motivation. He provided a balance within the presidency. I stood in awe of his ability to grasp problems and wrestle with them. President Sperry was moving at his own pace. I was somewhere in the middle. President Cullimore was the real driving force in seeing things done and completed on time. He insisted on quality.

By 1980, the high council began to take on an expanded role. As the stake grew larger, it became necessary for the high council to carry more of the workload. Eventually the high council evolved to become the link between the stake presidency and the ward priesthood leaders. The abilities of the men called and the weight of their assignments, increased dramatically during these years, until, according to Lowell Snow, the high council in the Willow Creek Stake became one of the best working high councils in the Church.

President Sperry was both happy and sad when he heard the news that President Snow had also been called to become a mission president. He recalled,

President Snow is a marvelous man. He is a man who was born of goodly parents. Instinctively he knows right from wrong. He does not struggle with many of the things that trouble the rest of us. Some of the truths I have had to learn through difficult experiences seem to be natural dimensions of his being. I think he has the capacity to emerge as one of the great leaders of the Church.

Consequently Kelvyn H. Cullimore became first counselor and Bishop Richard E. Johnson, pictured left, of the Union 23rd Ward was called as the new second counselor. Commenting on his leadership qualities, President Sperry said:

The thing I like about Elder Johnson is his steadiness and good common sense. I think

his life reflects the kind of simple and provident lifestyle that is so appealing to me. He is a hard worker. He is very loyal and has a good understanding of Church administration. He was an obvious and popular choice. (Richard Johnson, pictured left, later served as Willow Creek's fourth stake president.)

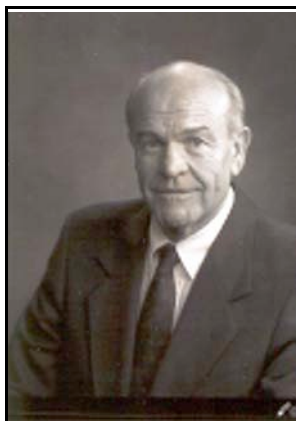
At stake quarterly conference in October, 1982, President Sperry released Kelvyn Cullimore from the presidency. He praised him with these words, “*President Cullimore's great strength and style comes in organizing and promoting, and in establishing programs and traditions.*” With President Cullimore's release, Richard Johnson became first counselor and Robert Tucker, who had returned from his mission assignment in Spain, was called back into the presidency.

Each of the three men who served as stake president of Sandy Utah Willow Creek Stake's first decade brought unique talents and strengths. President Saunders trained the high council and taught parents their duties under the patriarchal order. His teaching provided a foundation that sustained the membership during years of unprecedented growth. President Ruppel's management skills guided the stake through the years of growth and the stake's first division. President Sperry continued to manage growth while establishing new traditions and encouraging members to embrace a philosophy of simple and provident living. This philosophy prepared the people for a recession and the difficult economic conditions which beset the nation during 1981 and 1982.

Preparing Area Leaders

The three men who served as stake president during Willow Creek's first decade came from vastly different backgrounds. Contrasting experiences served to build their faith and lay a foundation for service. Common to each was a deep love for the Savior and a desire to become like him.

Patriarch Wayne Saunders is a tall, humble, intense man with penetrating blue eyes and a soft voice. In a quiet, sometimes halting manner, he told of his youth:



I have not always felt close to my Heavenly Father. I have had a lot of different stresses and difficulties in my life; but since I was little I have had a great love for the Savior. I had to learn by experience as I moved through the years, about obedience and loving him by my actions as well as with my heart. He has been close to me. I have felt his spirit many times. I love him very much. I know this is his church and all that happens here is under his direction. I do not know where I gained this testimony, except that it came to me a day at a time, a little here and a little there. I know that God lives and I am certain of the existence of the Master. I know the importance of his work and want to serve where he needs me.

I never did want to do very much in terms of leading out. I was always very shy and had

great difficulty presenting myself to people. As a youth, I would run a mile in the opposite direction if I suspected that someone was going to ask me to give a talk.

I have always been active in the out-of-doors. I have a lot of respect for the earth and all the beautiful things the Lord has given to us. I love every season. I love the mountains and lakes and rivers. I think it is a tremendous thing to live here—even if it is a bit messy sometimes with floods and such.

I love the youth and have had many great experiences with them through the Aaron Priesthood program—especially as an advisor to the Explorers on a trip into the High Uintas. One time we were coming out of the back country up there in a terrible storm. It was dark, pitch black, and we got lost. Lightning was so strong that we could see it snapping through the trees, and we were just plain lost.

I had parked the jeep flatbed on the mountainside before we took off up a little old jeep trail. We just could not find it. So we knelt down and asked the Lord to guide us to the jeep. We simply asked him to cause impressions if we moved too far to the left, or too far to the right. Then we got up and wandered. We went up the mountain trail and walked right to the door of the jeep all by the spirit of the Lord.

Those experiences with youth have taught me more about the gospel than anything else. They prepared me to understand parents through their children. Then the Lord asked me to be a bishop and I learned a lot more.

The Saunders family had moved to the Salt Lake area from Boise, Idaho. Brother and Sister Saunders had loaded their family and belongings into their van and drove to Salt Lake, not knowing where they were going to live. They prayed and asked the Lord where to settle. They were impressed to come to the Little Union Valley where they first rented a house in the Union 8th Ward. Later President Saunders was called as bishop of that ward. Three and one half years after moving into the stake, he was called to be the first stake president.

President John Ruppel, a youthful articulate, self-confident man searched his beginnings for clues that would identify him as a future stake president. He found few:



My inactive LDS mother married a Mason, who in Utah, have to avow they are not Mormon. I was not active in the church, although I was baptized when I was ten. I went away to Presbyterian High School and attended Baptist bible schools in the summer. My mother died when I was twelve, and my Catholic grandmother came to live with my father and help raise us. Dad remarried a Catholic. Literally, I had no involvement with the Church until I married my inactive wife when she was twenty and I twenty-two. We lost our second child. This hit

her much harder than it did me and she began going back to church. That led to my return.

We were transferred to another area soon after we were activated, where we remained active. We lived in Kansas City for almost two and a half years. I worked mainly in the mutual. Then we went to Wichita, to a quite impoverished ward with many problems. I was called to be bishop. It had only been a little over two and a half years from the time I had been activated and ordained an elder. I remember that call well. I had the distinct impression to run! Literally, that was the emotion I was feeling.

I wasn't particularly good when I was young. I told anti-Mormon jokes at college. I had every reason, like Paul, to be rejected, but the Lord had other things in mind for me.

I have always been devout in the sense that I believed in the Eternal Father and in his son, Jesus Christ. Whether or not they had a true church was of little significance for me until I was reactivated. One time I was sitting in a fast meeting. Not knowing that I really had a testimony, I stood up to bear one. I am strongly impressed by spiritual things. I do what I feel impressed to do, though often it does not feel logical at the time.

Judging from his beginning, it did not seem logical that John Ruppel would become the second president of Willow Creek Stake. But John Ruppel was a man willing to follow spiritual promptings, consequently, the man, and hundreds of people in two stakes have been blessed.

President David Sperry, his boyish good looks a little concealed by heavy glasses, was seated on the stand watching the congregation assembling for stake conference in October of 1982. The strains of the prelude music, "More Holiness Give me," drifted out over the congregation as they took their seats. His mind wandered back to his youth,

It was Christmas morning and David was thirteen years old. The proceeding months had been stressful in the Sperry home. That morning, even though it was Christmas, there had been a misunderstanding between his parents which spoiled the day for David. He loved his parents and felt great concern for them. He also felt very much alone.

I remember going off by myself into an area that we used to call "The Grove." It was a wooded area located along Little Cottonwood Creek in Murray. Concerned about the conditions within my home, I found myself pouring my heart out to a Heavenly Father. I really wasn't sure existed. I made some covenants and promises on that occasion. I heard them repeated from the lips of a patriarch at the time I received my patriarchal blessing years later.

I told the Lord that if he would help me find some success in life, I would try to serve him and do whatever he asked of me. I told him that the only thing I really wanted in life was to become a good husband and father. T



It seemed following that occasion, things began to change for me. I became a better-than-average student. I had all kinds of opportunities in high school. I was elected Junior Class President, then Student Body President and I became the state debate champion. Many honors came to me—it was almost uncanny the way they came. I was able to get my Doctor's degree by the time I was twenty-six. I do not say these things in a boastful way. It just seemed that the Lord took me at my word. It was as if he was saying, "Okay, I'm going to help you succeed, then from age twenty-six on, you are going to have to fulfill your covenant to serve. Since then it's been almost continuous, I have served as either a bishop or president of the stake.

At the tender age of thirteen, I came to realize I must put my Heavenly Father first in my life. It's often said that in times of loneliness, pain or suffering, we come to know our Heavenly Father the best. This was true in my life. Very early on Heavenly Father became my best friend. The song, "More Holiness Give Me," is an expression of the desire of my heart to try and be more like him.

I guess there is not a month or season that goes by but that I have not struggled with some difficult problem. You must confront someone or you have to make a decision that has a real impact on others or some other far-reaching effect.

You struggle for hours, weeks and sometimes months and just do not know what to do. But when it comes down to the final moment of decision, I have never felt abandoned by the Lord. Even though he has allowed me to struggle and fight to gain the answer for myself. When the problem was resolved I could see the hand of the Lord in the outcome. My Heavenly Father has never abandoned me.

Is there a price a leader pays personally for the service he renders? President Sperry responds:

In weaker moments I sometimes compare myself to a fellow by the name of Gordon Gee. He and I wrote a law book together. We are the same age and of similar educational background. Although we have different gifts and talents, I have always felt we have the same innate intelligence. He is now president of West Virginia University. I have always had some of those aspirations, not to be president of a university, but perhaps a small college. Somehow that has eluded me. I have turned down professional opportunities that could have enhanced my career because I have felt that my calling as bishop or as stake president came first.

President Sperry has no regrets about answering calls to serve in church positions. He was once counseled by his regional representative, "If we don't exercise courage and follow

spiritual directives when we receive mental impression, then we are not of much use to the Lord.” Elder Sperry honored his boyhood commitment and has since discovered that the blessings and spiritual experiences that come with the offices held have more than compensated for the weight of the mantle he carries.

Spiritual Experiences of Willow Creek Leaders

How has our Heavenly Father blessed, sustained, and uplifted our leaders over the past decade? These are some of their experiences:

Stephen D. Stutz and the Stake High Council

In July 1977, Brother Stutz took a business trip to Helena, Montana. Shortly after his arrival he began having severe stomach pain. Realizing he was trying to pass a kidney stone, he checked into a local hospital where he remained for five days without any improvement.

On Saturday, his sixth day of confinement, his doctor found infection and advised him that an operation would be needed the next day if the stone was not passed. The prospects of being operated on hundreds of miles from home, in a strange city where he had only a few business acquaintances was distressing to Brother Stutz. He had many family, business and church responsibilities as a member of the high council and he knew that such an operation would mean a six week stay in a Helena hospital. He hoped and prayed that the surgery would not be necessary.

On Sunday morning, Brother Stutz had a dream. He saw clearly the high council room with council members sitting in their respective chairs. His own chair stood empty. The councilmen, pictured, talked a little about his absence and then knelt in prayer in his behalf. Brother Stutz could actually feel the spirit and power of his quorum. Quietly a voice whispered to him that everything would be all right; he would not need the operation and would be home soon. A feeling of peace enveloped him.

About mid-morning I was prepared for surgery. I remember counting backwards as they put me to sleep. When I awoke, I felt for the cut but discovered I was still whole. The doctor was able to remove the stone in one last procedure before I was to go under the knife.

Upon returning home, Brother Stutz related his experience to members of the high council (pictured below) describing his dream. He was surprised to learn that through the high council normally met on Thursday evening, a special meeting had been called that Sunday. At the very hour of his dream in Helena, Montana, council members were meeting at the stake house in Sandy, Utah. They discussed his problem and prayed in his behalf, even as he witnessed in the dream that same morning.



Willow Creek Stake High Council

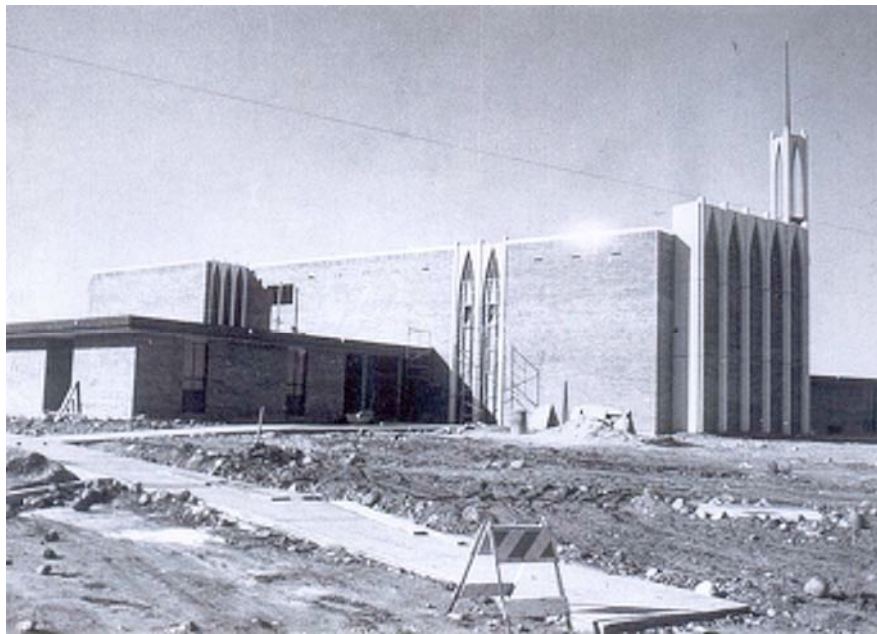
The Reactivation of President Robert R. Busch

Bob Busch was reactivated in 1965 in a project temple class while Richard North served as bishop of the old Union 5th Ward. In January, 1966, Bob and his wife went to the temple and had their children sealed to them. While getting ready that day, Barbara, Bob's wife, said to him reassuringly, "We will see to it that they leave you alone and let you sit on the back row. You can creep in and out of the chapel as soon as the meeting ends."

Within a year after going through the temple, Brother Busch was serving as second counselor in the Union 8th Ward bishopric. A little later he had the feeling that he was about to be called as bishop. It was a feeling which he rejected. Bob was new in the church. He felt there were hundreds of good brethren who were much better qualified for that position. The feeling persisted. Bob often went into the mountains and prayed but this feeling simply would not go away, *"I wanted to serve the Lord, he recalled, but felt the Lord was making a big mistake in choosing me. I wanted him to reconsider. But he did not change his mind. Consequently, I was called."*

On the Sunday Bob was to be sustained, Brother A. Theodore Tuttle, a general authority who made his home in the ward, had just returned from a church assignment in South America. He was invited to sit on the stand. Brother Busch, as second counselor to the bishop, was seated on the aisle. President Tuttle had to walk past Bob to take his seat. As he reached him, President Tuttle stopped and took his hand. Their eyes met. Tears welled up in the eyes of both. *“So you are going to be the new bishop,”* Elder Tuttle said with a smile and a twinkle in his eye. He knew spiritually what he could not have known in any other way as only the stake presidency and members of the Bush family had been advised of Bob’s new assignment.

Robert Busch became a leader and one of the great bishops in Willow Creek Stake. He served as bishop for over eight years and later became a counselor in the stake presidency. It was Bishop Busch who was instrumental in finding the site for the present stake house (at 2750 East Creek Road, pictured below.) He tried unsuccessfully to acquire two different pieces of property for the new building. However, it was not until construction began on the present site that everything finally fell into place. *“I really believe that is where the Lord wanted the Stake Center,”* he testified. Robert R. Busch served as agent bishop in charge of the stake center and had many spiritual experiences related to the construction of that building, pictured below.



Lamar Bradshaw trains Bishop Charles Johnson

President Bradshaw enjoyed many spiritual experiences while serving as a counselor in two stake presidencies but what he relished most was the training of new bishops. He always approached these responsibilities with much prayer and fasting. Consequently the special assurances that came to him were always clear and unmistakable.

The saints in Willow Creek Stake, as well as the saints all over the church, were asked to do many things. They are called to serve on various committees and are frequently given the opportunity to share their means and in so doing are greatly blessed. They are usually very supportive of their leaders. During the decade of rapid growth in the Willow Creek area, the people were taxed heavily for new buildings. Bishop Charles Johnson of the Union 8th Ward was having a difficult time raising money for the new chapel on Alta Canyon Drive.

In discussing the problem with President Bradshaw, it seemed evident to Lamar that Bishop Johnson was somewhat hesitant to be assertive. So Brother Bradshaw suggested that Bishop Johnson schedule some appointments with a few of his more affluent ward members. He advised the bishop to prepare spiritually for these meetings. After petitioning the Lord for help, President Bradshaw and Bishop Johnson began these discussions with Bishop Johnson conducting and President Bradshaw observing.

“As we met with these people, we felt a great unity of purpose,” President Bradshaw remembers. “Our prayers were answered and without exception. Each member agreed to contribute to the building fund. It was amazing that in many cases we had actually noted the amount they would volunteer beside the name. They independently decided to contribute exactly what we had assessed them.

One situation was particularly amusing. The good brother came right out of his chair—just right out of his chair. He said, “I knew that’s what you were going to ask me for! I just knew it!” And it was a very considerable amount—five thousand dollars, as I recall. He gave willingly.

From that time forward, Bishop Johnson had no difficulty raising money. Through this experience he developed confidence and came to appreciate the mantle of a bishop. *“It is not the man that influences people, it is the mantle he wears. Ward members like and respect the man, but it’s the mantle that has the power to change lives,”* President Bradshaw explained.

Preparing Robert A. Tucker to be a Mission President

Bob Tucker spent the afternoon of February 8, 1979 out in his yard harvesting rocks. Many homes in Willow Creek were built on the rocky, sandy plateau surrounding the Willow Creek Country Club. Twenty years earlier, the area was nothing but sage brush, scrub oak and rocks, mainly rocks. Nobody wanted to buy property in that area because there was no water and too many rocks. In 1960, Taylor Burton and Owen Bunker came in and built the Willow Creek Country Club. Subsequently, two home shows were held in the area and it became a fashionable place to live. The plateau, once the home of cougars, jack rabbits, coyotes, badgers and rattle snakes had, by 1979, become a luxurious residential area.

February 8th was Bob’s birthday and his mother had arrived to help celebrate. Bob and Diana had sacrificed to acquire their new home. They loved it and the location, yet somehow

Bob had a feeling that things were about to change. He asked his mother how she would feel if they were called away. *“What are they going to do,” she asked. “call you to be a mission president?”* Bob explained that for the past few days he had such an impression. Just seven days later, President Nathan Eldon Tanner issued the call.

Bob and Diana were surprised to be assigned to the Madrid Spain Mission. There was an opening for a mission president in Mexico City at that time. Bob had spent eighteen months in Mexico City as a missionary. He was acquainted with many of the area leaders, but that was not the mission he was called to.

Later, when President Tucker was about to organize the first LDS stake in Spain, everything came together,

I badly needed the experience in the Willow Creek Stake Presidency to prepare me for my assignment in Madrid. . . The Lord has always helped me in all my callings and assignments. I am not sure how he does it, but I know he does. If it wasn't for this knowledge, I would not have the courage to accept these callings. I have never seen a pillar of light or a heavenly personage, but his presence and assistance in this work is unmistakable.

Bob recalled a meeting with one of the ministers of the Spanish government. His limited Spanish vocabulary did not include political or legal terms and he did not feel prepared to deal with these civic leaders. Yet he went into the meetings full of confidence because he had prayed and he knew the Lord was with him. When the meetings ended, Bob often shook with fright as he remembered what he had said and what was accomplished. Just imagine, a boy from Elmo, Utah in a European city of five million people, meeting with the ministers of government and organizing the first Mormon stake in Catholic Spain.

Preparing and Setting Apart Missionaries

Most of the stake leaders interviewed mentioned the experience of calling and setting apart new missionaries among their most spiritual experiences. President Saunders recalls an experience with Mike Miner.

When we set him apart, we gave him a blessing that stated he would be protected and his life would be spared in his travels. Mike and his companion were hit by a car one day while riding their bikes and his companion was killed but Mike's life was spared. He sustained only minor injuries. There have been countless experiences like that.

I remember one day walking down the hall to my office , when I received a very strong impression to call a young man over to the stake house. I had never met him before and I did not know why the Lord wanted that young man singled out. But I called him in and told him that the Lord was concerned about him. This youth got quite upset with me and

walked out of my office. The next day he called me and asked if he could meet with me again. I said, "You bet!"

I got over to the stake house in a hurry. The young man came in to my office and said, "I was so upset that you had discovered me. Last night I was going to do something very wrong but because of our visit, I didn't. I stayed home and pondered my situation. I became convinced that someone knew about me in a way that made me realize I have a Father in Heaven who really cares about me."

That young man became strong in the church and served a mission. I've always marveled at how the Lord knows each of us in such sacred and special ways.

Patriarch Saunders concluded his interview with this statement:

The Lord has a special feeling toward this area. It has a great history. There have been a lot of devoted people come to this Little Union Valley under difficult circumstances. The Spirit of the Lord is strong here. I believe the Lord has in mind for the people here to really perform in a patriarchal way. All that is done in the stake should be done in a way that strengthens fathers and mothers and prepares them to preside over families. The people who live here are very special. They are teachable. They will learn and accept these teachings. It is different here in Willow Creek than it is in the world and we should never lose sight of this.

President Snow concluded his interview by recalling Boyd K. Packer's dedicatory prayer which was pronounced upon the people living in the Little Union Valley. *"He blessed the people that they would be protected. The influences of Satan would not be felt here."*

"I feel it is a great privilege to live in an area where you are regularly blessed by the presence of apostles of the Lord." Both A. Theodore Tuttle and Elder Packer were members of Willow Creek Stake at the time. Our people have indeed been blessed with strong leaders that have guided us through our first decade. The events of our history testify that our leadership were indeed "Men Called of God."

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