

## History of the Church in Japan - Part 14: 1968-1970: Mission divided; Expo '70

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By mid-1968 Japan had nearly twelve thousand Japanese Mormons in fifty-one branches and ten districts. Missionary numbers were well over two hundred, and there was obviously too much for one mission president to handle. The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve decided to divide the mission. Shortly before President Komatsu was to return home, the First Presidency changed the General Authority supervision of the area. Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Twelve and Elder Bruce R. McConkie of the First Council of the Seventy were assigned to lead the Asian Missions. On June 15, 1968, Elder Benson, in a letter to President Komatsu, asked him to begin preparing for a division of the mission by adding another set of assistants, another mission secretary and commissarian, and by moving the missionaries around so that both missions would have people of equal ability.

Walter R. Bills, a former missionary in the Central Pacific Mission, replaced President Komatsu in mid July, 1968. The next month Edward Y. Okazaki and his wife, Chieko, both converts of the Central Pacific Mission, who now lived in Denver, Colorado, arrived to take control of the new mission. On September 1, 1968, the Northern Far East Mission was divided to become the Japan Mission with headquarters in Tokyo, and the Japan-Okinawa Mission, with headquarters in Osaka. With the division of the mission Japan entered a new era of Church history, the contemporary period institutional development. Following 1968, the missions in Japan grew so rapidly and the stakes multiplied so quickly that it is not possible here to plot the course and development of all missions and stakes.

Although the Church announced its participation in Expo '70, the Japan World Exposition, in November 1968, by that time more than a year of planning and negotiations had taken place. On October 16, 1967, Elder Gordon B. Hinckley and President Komatsu went to the offices of the Osaka International World's Fair, where they discussed with officials the possibility of a Mormon exhibit. The officials told Elder Hinckley that they would sell space only on the outer perimeters, but he showed little interest in that idea.

Other meetings followed, with Komatsu and local leaders doing the legwork. Then, in April 1968, Elders Hinckley, Komatsu, Watanabe, Iami, and Marvin Harding, building supervisor, agreed upon a site, 1000 square meters, that was among the Japanese exhibits. Elder Hinckley was especially concerned that the Church would have a Japanese rather than an American image. (Hinckley, Journal, October 16, 1967 and April 26, 1968.)

On May 2, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve approved participation and allotted \$300,000 for the project. Before long, final architectural drawings and plans were under way.

Emil B. Fetzer, Church architect, designed the pavilion, a modern Oriental building having two stories. Its main feature was its spire, capped with an eight-foot fiberglass replica of the Angel Moroni statue that adorns the Salt Lake Temple and many other temples. The ground floor provided an assembly area, offices, and two displays, one on Japanese family life and the other a twelve-foot marble replica of Thorvaldsen's masterpiece, the Christ. On the second floor, visitors were conducted through a Creation room, a Plan of Salvation room, a Life of Christ room, and a Restoration of the Gospel room. They were then taken into one of two theaters which were showing the movie "Man's Search for Happiness." (Gerald Joseph Peterson, "History of Mormon Exhibits in World Expositions," (M.A. thesis, Brigham Young University, 1974), 144-45.)

The ground breaking for the pavilion took place in May 1969. Elder Ezra Taft Benson presided while important civic and Expo `70 officials as well as three hundred members and friends looked on. He told the assembled crowd that the Mormon pavilion would give the Church the opportunity to explain its history, doctrines, and programs and to make clear that the Mormon Church was a world Church with a world message. ("Expo `70 Ground breaking," Church News, May 17, 1969, 4.)

Nine months later the building, which was constructed largely of materials that could be re-used in other LDS buildings, was ready for use. All that remained to be done was to install the displays and movable facilities. Everything was in readiness by March 13, one day before the official opening of the exposition. On that day President Hugh B. Brown offered the dedicatory prayer on the building and the project workers. Other important Church leaders were also there: Elders Ezra Taft Benson and Gordon B. Hinckley of the Council of the Twelve and Elder Bernard P. Brockbank, Assistant to the Twelve. Elder Brockbank, who had directed previous exhibits in New York and Texas, was assigned to be commissioner for this pavilion. He was assisted by mission presidents Bills and Okazaki.

From a missionary point of view the setting for the pavilion could not have been better. It was next door to the Japanese national exhibit and close to the Russian and United States exhibits. People thronged to the Mormon Pavilion. During the six months of the exposition 6,658,532 people went through the building, and 780,000 left their names and addresses on the registers, expressing a willingness to have missionaries call at their homes. A total of 852,000 more people visited the Mormon exhibit in Japan in six months than visited the Mormon exhibit in New York in two years. (Peterson, "History of Mormon Exhibits," 143, 146.)

The message of the pavilion was different from those of all other exhibits. While national and business pavilions centered their messages on the material and technical progress of mankind, the Church centered on the divinity of Jesus Christ, the reality of a living God, the importance of the Book of Mormon, the plan of salvation, and the role of the family in that eternal scheme. The guides were missionaries, generally American, and Japanese members. The American missionaries surprised many with their fluent Japanese (as well

as Korean and Chinese) and impressed them with their cleanliness, courtesy, and obvious love for the Asian people.

Beyond the attractiveness of the missionaries, the Church had gone to extra efforts to provide appropriate literature for the visitors from the major nations of Asia. Copies of the Book of Mormon were available not only in Japanese (50,000 copies sold) but also in Korean and Chinese. Tracts and pamphlets too were available, as were several other books. Undoubtedly the most impressive part of the pavilion tour was the showing of "Man's Search for Happiness," a movie depicting man's journey through life and the meaning of that experience. W. O. Whitaker and the motion picture staff of Brigham Young University Studio traveled to Japan to produce the film in Japanese, with Japanese actors. After Expo `70 closed, the film became an important missionary tool in Japan. (For an extensive account of the production of the Japanese version of "Man's Search for Happiness," see Palmer, *The Church Encounters Asia*, 9-15.)