

LDS Baptismal/Rebaptismal record, 1847-1863

Another invaluable but relatively unknown record source at the Church History Library is a compiled list of early pioneers to Utah who were either initially baptized and confirmed or rebaptized and reconfirmed during the years 1847-1854 (with a handful of entries dated 1858-1863). The approximately 3,600 entries in this record have been indexed by Ronald G. Watt, Church archivist and information specialist. The index is located at the reference desk in the Church History Library. You will need to ask one of the staff members to assist you.

The index lists the members' names in alphabetical order with the baptismal/rebaptismal date and page number where the corresponding entry appears in the original record which has been microfilmed and is available for use (Church History Library call number CR 375/8, reel 6109). The record is arranged in a rough alphabetical format with column headings for the member's name and his/her birth date and place, quorum affiliation, baptismal date and officiator's name, designation of first baptism or rebaptism, confirmation/reconfirmation date and officiators' names, and remarks. Unfortunately, many of the entries lack complete birth information. Located at the back of the volume are a few stray pieces of paper containing some birth and baptism/confirmation information for selected individuals and scattered reports from bishops regarding similar information about their respective ward members. A Church clerk's note on one report reproves the bishop for not submitting more complete information. It appears that this record was compiled and kept at Church headquarters. Many of the entries seem to have been recopied from reports and other sources.

This index and corresponding original record can help document an early pioneer's origins and his/her probable residence at the time of baptism/rebaptism. It can also be a very significant research aid to help determine the possible time period in which an early pioneer and family members arrived in Utah. As mentioned in a previous article, the Mormon Pioneer Overland Travel database lacks about 20,000 pioneers' names and arrival information out of an estimated 60,000 possible emigrants.

The practice of being rebaptized as a sign of renewing covenants and recommitting oneself to the Gospel apparently began during the Nauvoo era. Many members were rebaptized in May 1842 during a general reformation. In Utah the practice began on August 6, 1847, when President Brigham Young and the Apostles then residing in the Salt Lake Valley were rebaptized and reconfirmed. The following day Heber C. Kimball baptized fifty-five Saints; they were reconfirmed by Brigham Young and several members of the Council of the Twelve. The practice of rebaptisms and reconfirmations continued for many years in Utah. During the "Reformation" of the late 1850s it was introduced and implemented in the mission field. Membership record books printed by the Church in 1877 included a formal column heading to record those events. The practice was officially discontinued in 1922.

(Information contributed by Jay G. Burrup, archivist and information specialist, LDS Church History Library. If you have questions, please contact the Church History Library at 801-240-2272 or send an e-mail to churchhistorylibrary@ldschurch.org.)