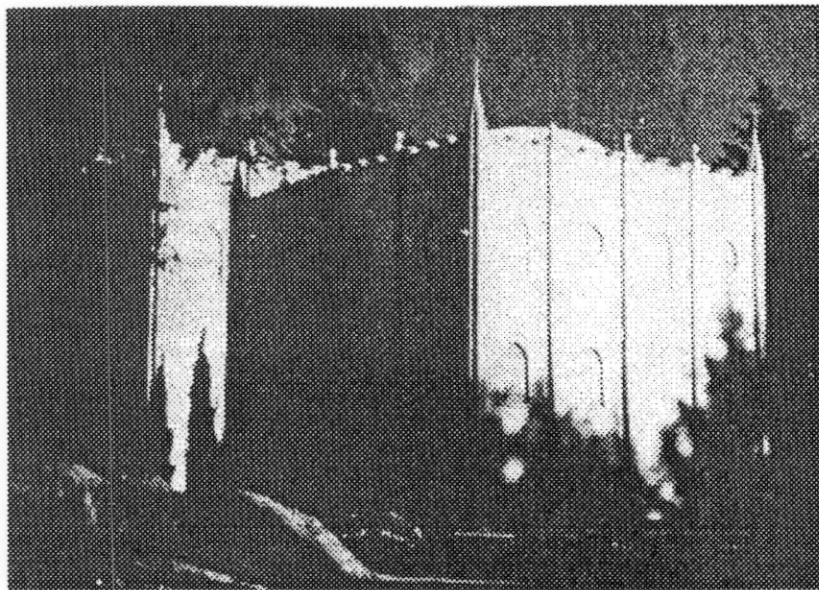


FIFTY YEARS OF UNITED ORDER IN MEXICO



In the center of Colonia Industrial, on the street named for Joseph Smith, stands an endowment house, a product of community efforts.

By Thomas Murphy

THE HISTORY of Mormonism in Mexico reached a new landmark early in 1997 when Colonia Industrial, a United Order community founded by Margarito Bautista Valencia, achieved its fiftieth successful year. Second, third, and fourth generations of Mexican Mormons in Colonia Industrial are celebrating through sermons and activities that remind them of their legacy. Colonia Industrial, a small, unimposing, exclusive colony of Mexican Mormons, lies in the municipio of Ozumba at the base of Popocatepetl, an active volcano in the central valley of Mexico.

With over a century of Mormon history in the area, Ozumba figured prominently in the early decades of Mormon proselyting in Mexico. In 1881, LDS apostle Moses Thatcher led missionaries and converts to the top of Popocatepetl and dedicated Mexico for the preaching of the gospel. These missionaries met some success in Ozumba where in that same year they founded the second LDS branch in Mexico.

By 1937, the LDS church in Mexico split in two after efforts by Mexican Mormons to obtain greater access to education, translated materials, and temple work, and after local leadership had failed to gain the desired response from LDS church leaders in Utah. The new Mormon group, known as the Third Convention, consisted of one-third of the Mexican Mormons and operated independently of the LDS church for nearly a decade. Eventually, the conventionists reconciled with Church leaders, and a majority of the members of the Third Convention returned to the LDS fold. Two smaller groups, however, remained independent. Lorenzo Cuautli led a congregation of *convencionistas* in San Gabriel Ometozila Puebla, which refused to reconcile with the LDS church. They took the name of La Iglesia de Jesucristo de los Santos de la Plenitud de los Tiempos (The Church of Jesus Christ of the Saints of the Fullness of Times). Margarito Bautista encouraged *convencionistas* to move to Ozumba, where he established Colonia

Industrial in 1947 as a place of gathering for Mexican Mormons who desired to live the fullness of the gospel, i.e., the United Order and plural marriage.

Bautista and his followers continued to call themselves Mormons, but for legal purposes, they established a church now known as El Reino de Dios en su Plenitud (The Kingdom of God in its Fullness). Sought out by other polygamists, Bautista associated

his small community with fundamentalist leader Joseph W. Musser. Musser's appointment of Bautista as an apostle of the Council and his promotion of Rulon Allred angered some fundamentalists and eventually led to a schism among Mormon fundamentalists in 1951. Bautista and his followers remained associated with the Allred faction but continued to maintain a substantial degree of autonomy until Bautista's death in 1961.

Despite predictions that the group would flounder after Bautista's death, community members continued to practice with considerable autonomy the fullness of the gospel as outlined by Bautista. Today, the Kingdom of God claims approximately nine hundred members, seven hundred of which live under the United Order in Colonia Industrial. In the early years, most members encountered prejudice outside their community and employment and security within. In recent years, their success in obtaining employment outside of the community has improved. Nonetheless, local committee members continue to

coordinate financial and labor contributions to the community.

The people of Colonia Industrial have faced considerable challenges, but their successes demonstrate that the communitarian spirit still lives and thrives in places far from the Great Basin. Beautifully decorated and well-built brick and wooden homes have replaced the small huts that pioneering peasants with minimal resources constructed amidst prejudice and discrimination from both Catholics and Latter-day Saints in Ozumba. Regular harvests of corn and wheat exemplify the success of communally managed agricultural lands. In the center of Colonia Industrial, on the street named for Joseph Smith, stands an ornate temple, or endowment house, a product of the community efforts. Next to the temple, members have begun constructing a large new chapel supported by donations of money and labor.

While the enormous growth of the LDS church in Mexico (720,000 members in 1995) dwarfs the small offshoot in Colonia Industrial, these Mexican Mormons' tenacious adherence to the principles of the United Order and plural marriage is a tribute to the testimony and fervor of their founder, Margarito Bautista Valencia.

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