



1-1-2000

A Gathering Place: Russian Week at the Stockholm Sweden Temple

John C. Thomas

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Thomas, John C. (2000) "A Gathering Place: Russian Week at the Stockholm Sweden Temple," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 39 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol39/iss1/5>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

A Gathering Place: Russian Week at the Stockholm Sweden Temple

John C. Thomas

Temples are the great gathering places of Mormonism. As such, they cater in varying degrees to the diversity of an increasingly global Church membership. From its inception, the Stockholm Sweden Temple was designed to transcend the linguistic, cultural, and socio-economic differences that might otherwise undermine the temple's higher purposes.¹ Dedicated in 1985, that temple was therefore well suited to play a vital role in the early development of the Church in Russia and the Baltic states. During the 1990s, many Saints from the post-Soviet states traveled together for a week's stay at the Stockholm temple to be "endowed with power from on high" (D&C 38:32), then returned to build up the Church in their homelands. "Russian week," as it came to be called, was held several times each year. Participation in the event exemplified a distinctive blend of faith and concerted effort, triumph and travail, reminiscent of Mormonism's nineteenth-century gathering.

The first temple "pilgrimage" from a Soviet successor state took place in November 1992 as Ukrainian Saints traveled from Kiev to Freiberg, Germany. Howard Biddulph, a former mission president in Ukraine, has ably told of the planning and political negotiations to bring that excursion about.² Other excursions from the East soon followed. Where President Biddulph's account emphasized the perspective from the mission field, this study gives more attention to the vantage point of those at the temple itself.³

Planning "Russian Week"

All temples operate according to daily, weekly, and annual rhythms of work. What distinguished the temple in Sweden was that the language of temple work and worship varied from week to week according to the "invited stake or mission."⁴ Thus in 1996, only eleven of forty-eight work weeks were scheduled for Swedish-speaking patrons; twelve weeks were planned for Finnish-speaking members (four of which combined Finns and Baltic Saints); nine for Danes; six for Norwegians; and seven for Russians.⁵

A long-term calendar allowed leaders, missionaries, and staff at the temple (as well as in each mission) to take the necessary steps to prepare for what temple missionaries came to regard as their most tiring but inspiring weeks—those when excursion groups arrived from missions in Russia and the Baltic states. The main tasks were, first, to secure the travelers' transit and

entry into Sweden; second, to provide room and board for the guests; and third, to assemble a corps of volunteers with the language skills needed to guide new members through the temple experience.

A List of Invited Guests

The large gaps in wealth and living standards between Western Europe and the post-Soviet states fed perceptions that visitors from the East might be illegal immigration risks, especially in the case of Russians. (Travelers from Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania benefited from their governments' efforts to foster closer political and economic ties with Sweden and other member states of the European Union.) To guard against unlawful entry or settlement, the Swedish and Finnish governments required that Church leaders at the temple issue written invitations for each potential temple attendee before the government would issue a visa or a transit visa for the period of the person's stay on foreign soil.

In 1992, Sister Inga Kann-Siirak, an Estonian native and long-time temple worker who had settled in Sweden after fleeing her homeland decades before, surmounted the customs barrier by personally inviting a group of Estonian Saints to visit her and the temple. At her own initiative, she typed invitations for each of the fifteen people, making herself legally responsible for their timely return to Estonia. Then she and other temple workers pooled money to subsidize the costs of the excursion. When the temple presidency learned of her effort, they provided some funds to help defray the expenses of the excursionists.⁶

Subsequently, an arrangement was made in which mission presidents were asked to identify candidates for a temple excursion about two months in advance, then mail or fax a list of their names, birth dates, and passport numbers to the temple office. At that point, a member of the temple office staff would issue the list of invited guests. The list would be taken to the appropriate embassy or consulate, which in turn issued visas for the specific length of their stay.

The first Russian group to try this arrangement numbered only seven people, all from Vyborg and St. Petersburg, and was scheduled for March 1993. The group was unable to obtain visas until the last minute, when a Swedish Latter-day Saint with government experience and influence called public officials to persuade them that this was a religious excursion whose participants could be trusted to return home. Over time the legal process became less burdensome, resting on good communication between the missions, the temple, and the governments. It could easily be disrupted, however, by official worries about events in Russia or about the reliability of the travelers. In December 1993, an excursion from Moscow was abruptly canceled and all visas were revoked just as the group was preparing to leave the country: a member of the Church had asked for asylum at the Swedish Embassy in Moscow.⁷



Courtesy Thomas F. Rogers

The Stockholm Sweden Temple

The Swedish government required a member of the temple staff to meet each group at the dock or airport and escort them to the guesthouse on the temple grounds, then return them at the end of the week and guarantee their departure. In 1996, a Russian woman “jumped ship” at the end of the week. She was apprehended and jailed, and temple president Bo Wennerlund was obliged to persuade her to leave the country. After he explained that her actions might jeopardize all future excursions from Russia, the woman relented. Because the ferry carrying her group had already departed, the Church had to buy a plane ticket and fly her out of the country that day.⁸

Early in 1997, a Russian family traveling to Sweden to be sealed were forced to change their plans when a son was denied transit through Finland. Torn, the parents decided to continue the voyage, left the boy with an LDS family in St. Petersburg, and then stayed in touch with their son using a phone in the temple. Though no one in the party received an official explanation for the boy’s detention, some speculated that a suspicious customs official held back the child to prevent any attempt at permanent migration.⁹

In April 1996, a Nigerian Latter-day Saint living in St. Petersburg joined a temple excursion from that city. He was detained in Finland because officials considered him too high a risk for illegal settlement in the West. Apparently the prospect of an entrepreneurial African on a religious pilgrimage was too much for the customs official to comprehend. Somehow, after a couple of days of negotiation, transit was authorized and the man flew to Stockholm on Wednesday to rejoin his companions. Even then, some members of the temple staff, misled by incorrect information about the incident and the man’s visa, were nervous:

[They] had been told he had a visa for only two days [but] was planning to stay until the group went home. . . . [In fact] he had a visa until next Tuesday and wanted to stay in Stockholm to see if he could find a place to buy computer parts cheaper than in Russia. He told us in his testimony [in a fireside on Saturday night] that he had been trying to come to the temple for two years but had always been turned down, then he made it to Finland and was stopped there but that the Lord, the worker of miracles, found a way for him and he was able to fly here, after he was stopped at the boat.¹⁰

Despite these occasional misadventures, the approval process generally worked smoothly, if rather slowly, as both Swedish and foreign Saints gained the bureaucrats’ trust.¹¹

Arranging and Financing Travel to the Temple

At the same time as they compiled a list of likely travelers, mission leaders worked out arrangements for travel. The process became more involved as the number and reach of LDS missions in Russia expanded; by

1996, Latter-day Saints had come to the Stockholm temple from as far away as Siberia.¹² Some Saints might spend as much time in transit—five or six days—as they would at the temple, and as they crossed into the West, costs rose. The first temple excursion from Kiev, Ukraine, to Freiberg, Germany, cost each traveler about one-tenth of his or her annual income, despite economizing by chartering a Ukrainian bus, carrying their week's food, and sleeping in a meetinghouse in Freiberg.¹³ In the case of the Russian Saints, the economic hardships were similar if not worse, and often the distances were longer. Over time, travel was organized to ameliorate some of the difficulties.

Some mission presidents assigned an employee or a local volunteer to supervise travel arrangements. In the weeks before departing for Sweden, these agents negotiated group fares on trains, buses, ferries, and airplanes.¹⁴ All groups entered Sweden by ferry or air. In one unusual week in late May 1996, Russian Latter-day Saints assembled in Sweden in the following ways: five women and four men from Samara and Saratov arrived by air on Sunday evening, twelve members from Moscow arrived at a Stockholm ferry dock on Monday morning, and another eleven women and five men from Moscow arrived in Stockholm by ferry on Tuesday morning.¹⁵

Overnight ferries to Sweden departed from Finnish ports at Helsinki or Turku, as well as from St. Petersburg in Russia or Tallinn in Estonia.¹⁶



Saints from the Russia St. Petersburg Mission. On their way to the Stockholm Sweden Temple in May 1994, these members took time for a photograph at the Stockholm harbor. Meeting them was Reid Johnson, center front, who served as temple president from 1991 to 1994.

Russian missions arranged itineraries with an eye to distance, expense, and access to transit visas for Finland. In the mid-1990s, the St. Petersburg mission managed to contract bus and ferry transportation for less than \$100 a person—probably the lowest price any group would pay.¹⁷ Groups from other missions faced the daunting choice of spending several days of travel by rail or road and ship or paying the higher prices of airfares. Several groups did fly to Stockholm. In August 1993, Moscow mission president Richard Chapple and local priesthood leaders knelt in prayer and then “went to Aeroflot in faith” to secure an excursion rate on tickets after being told that a change in travel dates made the lower price impossible. Their efforts succeeded, but President Chapple believed that “it is clear that there must be a temple within the boundaries of the country eventually,” given the demands and uncertainties of cross-border travel.¹⁸

With the post-Soviet economies in crisis, few could afford all the expenses associated with a temple excursion; costs were incurred not only for transportation, but also for passports, visas, food and lodging while at the temple, rental of temple clothing, and purchase of several sets of the temple garment. Resolving the challenge required a balance of individual sacrifices and Church subsidies. When excursions began in 1992, Reid Johnson recalled, supervising authorities were unsure how best to proceed with any subsidy of the excursions. Although Church funds had been made available



Courtesy J. C. Steel

Guesthouse adjacent to the Stockholm Sweden Temple, 1998

in the past to help members travel to the temple, they had been used mainly in the Pacific, not in Europe. The word to President Johnson was, “Until we figure out a plan, keep doing what you’re doing” (meaning, arrange private assistance to the Estonian Saints). By 1993, however, some general Church funds had been made available to assist poor members.¹⁹

As a general rule, financial assistance was made available to members only for their first trip to the temple and only after they paid for the costs of their own passports and visas (and any other travel expenses they could afford). In the St. Petersburg mission (from which travel costs were lowest), some members took out loans from the mission office to pay for their round-trip bus and ferry tickets. Some loans became *de facto* subsidies as repayment lagged or failed (much like what happened with some efforts to finance the nineteenth-century gathering). Only Saints set apart as ordinance workers were eligible to receive any subsidy for return trips to the temple. Often these excursion ordinance workers also served as interpreters at the temple.²⁰

When the travelers arrived at the temple grounds, located in the Stockholm suburb of Västerhaninge, they found several Church-owned buildings adjacent to the temple, including a meetinghouse, a family history and distribution center, and a guesthouse.²¹ The guesthouse was built to provide sleeping and eating quarters for the patrons of the temple’s far-flung district, and in 1994 a wing was added with apartments for full-time temple missionaries. The temple staff allocated and arranged rooms to sleep up to one hundred and twenty visitors. They also purchased breakfast foods and contracted with caterers for lunches and dinners.²²

In 1997 the room rate in the guesthouse was 250 Swedish kronor per night (roughly \$40). To make the best possible use of money and living quarters, Russian visitors were usually housed six to a room, on twin beds, though families with children sometimes occupied a room by themselves. Groups from western European nations rarely shared rooms across family lines. Temple president Reid Johnson suggested that the Russian Saints “stuff something in their ears” to help them sleep in the crowded conditions. Despite the cramped quarters, the visitors felt like they were staying in “a plush hotel.” The costs of housing and feeding the visitors were billed to the missions, who in turn drew from a temple patron assistance fund administered by the Area Presidency.²³

Communication at the Temple

For the temple presidency, perhaps the most nerve-wracking part of the preparations for Russian week was assembling enough temple workers with the language abilities needed to instruct and minister in the temple. Ideally, most if not all workers would be able to communicate well enough

not only to perform the ordinances but also to help resolve concerns and mix-ups and to share in the travelers' religious experiences. That said, verbal acrobatics were the norm, not the exception. Instructions to the temple's full-time missionaries, who came from all of the Nordic countries and the United States, assured them that few workers would arrive able to speak "even a few" of the eight languages most commonly used during the year.²⁴ Although most missionaries acquired remarkable facility in the memorized ordinances, Keith Morgan, a counselor in the temple presidency, observed that "there isn't a day goes by that language isn't a problem," especially during Russian week.²⁵

One reason for the unusual scramble was the unfamiliarity of relatively new converts with the process of temple worship. Most Nordic groups brought several members with good knowledge of temple procedure who were set apart to officiate in the rites as excursion ordinance workers and who relieved the full-time temple missionaries of much of the work. For example, a Finnish group brought twenty female ordinance workers with them in December 1995 and a Norwegian group in May 1996 included twenty-three helpers.²⁶ Russian and Baltic groups never brought this much help—indeed, the missions could not afford to send them—and most participants were first-time templegoers.

The temple requested that missions send at least four men and four women with some previous experience as "recommended temple workers," but this support was not always provided. The other crucial need was interpreters. With English, not Swedish, serving as the "bridge" language, each group was asked to bring at least two members who could speak it. As might be expected, the number and quality of interpreters varied. On one occasion, the sole male interpreter failed to arrive because he had been called into service elsewhere in Europe, helping to translate for a General Authority.²⁷

Uncertain about what help would accompany groups from the Russian missions, temple leaders searched for members closer to Stockholm with the religious and linguistic preparation to assist. Some of these part-time workers received a standing assignment to help on the designated weeks; others were drafted into action as the need arose. The volunteers were old and young, natives of Sweden, Finland, Norway, Estonia and Cuba, who had learned Russian in various ways. Out of the mix, the various positions—sacred and mundane—were staffed.²⁸

Preparing to Be "Endowed with Power from on High"

The central purpose of all the preparation was to provide a setting where the Saints could deepen their covenant relationship with Christ in temple ordinances, instruction, and worship. In so doing, the Church in Russia and the Baltic states would be strengthened for the future. Thus, the



Courtesy Keith S. and Inga K. Morgan

Two Russian sisters and Keith S. Morgan, ca. 1995. Brother Morgan served as a counselor in the presidency of the Stockholm Sweden Temple.

temple presidency planned each day at the temple in detail. In 1996, a five-page schedule mapped the week's activities.²⁹

Because most members of the Russian and Baltic groups were new converts participating in temple worship for the first time, the pace was relatively slow. Gathering, instructing, and guiding patrons through the sequence of the temple ceremonies was slowed both by their inexperience and by the need to relay questions and instructions through an interpreter. As a result, the volume of ordinance work was lower than that of other weeks. Fifteen Russian-speaking groups visited the temple over the course of 1995 and 1996. These excursions, on average, performed 714 endowments per week. When Finnish and Estonian Saints attended the temple together, they averaged 861 endowments. Typical excursions from Nordic stakes performed closer to 1,000 endowments per week and might even double the number of ordinances performed by the Russian and Baltic Saints.³⁰

What the work lacked in volume, however, it more than made up in complexity and spiritual intensity.³¹ When groups arrived on Monday, missionaries and staff examined their records at the guesthouse or trained excursion ordinance workers in the temple. Among the documents to check were temple recommends, legal documentation for spouses and children, and genealogical records. As soon as possible, the temple personnel compiled a

list of names for vicarious ordinances. Those yet to be endowed received tags to wear in the temple so that workers would be sure to guide them through the process on Tuesday. Since spouses often had different surnames, they were paired by tags bearing the same color or single letter. In preparation for going to the temple the next day, first-time temple patrons also picked up one set of garments at the distribution center on site.

Temple leaders (the presidency, matrons, and designated trainers) used Monday afternoon to teach the groups' ordinance workers their roles. First, any "recommended temple workers" not yet authorized to officiate in the ordinances were interviewed by a member of the presidency (through an interpreter) and then set apart. Then they entered the temple, where leaders took two or three hours to recite, model, and discuss the words and actions of sacred ceremonies and to demonstrate such procedures as how to operate the automated audiovisual equipment. All the training was done through interpreters, from English to Russian, meaning that only English-speaking temple workers were able to instruct the visitors. If a group arrived after Monday, the training was necessarily abbreviated.

Each evening, one or more members of the temple presidency met with the travelers, while they ate a catered meal in the guesthouse dining room, to review the schedule and answer questions. Mission presidents encouraged temple leaders to use such occasions for teaching the doctrines and practices of the Church so as to prepare the Russian Saints to become better leaders in their congregations at home. More often than not, however, the discussions centered on more immediate concerns: When would an ancestor's proxy work be performed? How would parents meet their children to be sealed? How could the use of showers be staggered to conserve hot water? What etiquette should govern a visit to local shops?³²

After a breakfast of bread and butter and marmalade, cornflakes, and boiled eggs in the guesthouse kitchen,³³ the adults walked to the temple, a parent or two remaining behind to care for the children. Excursion ordinance workers entered the temple thirty minutes before their compatriots on the first day for a prayer meeting and last-minute training. Workers met the other patrons, helped them change into white clothes, and identified all newcomers with the appropriate tags. Because the ordinance rooms were modestly sized, the group was often split in half and guided through the course of the endowment about thirty minutes apart. Though the pace was purposely gentle, things often fell behind schedule.

Temple workers strove to assure that each newly endowed person was guided through the endowment by someone fluent in the language and the procedure. Finding enough help was, however, "always a problem."³⁴ Yet the newcomers seemed unfazed by the flurry of activity around them. Having observed the process from various vantage points in the temple, Keith

Morgan realized that “the Spirit had taught them what we had not been able to teach and made up for all of our shortcomings.” Sister Inga Morgan watched as the visitors entered the temple’s celestial room after concluding the endowment: “The Russians [came] in there, tears streaming down some cheeks from the gratitude they felt for being in that holy place. All of them stayed in for some time and meditated and you could tell they prayed silently. It was very moving.”³⁵

Sealing Families and Uniting Generations

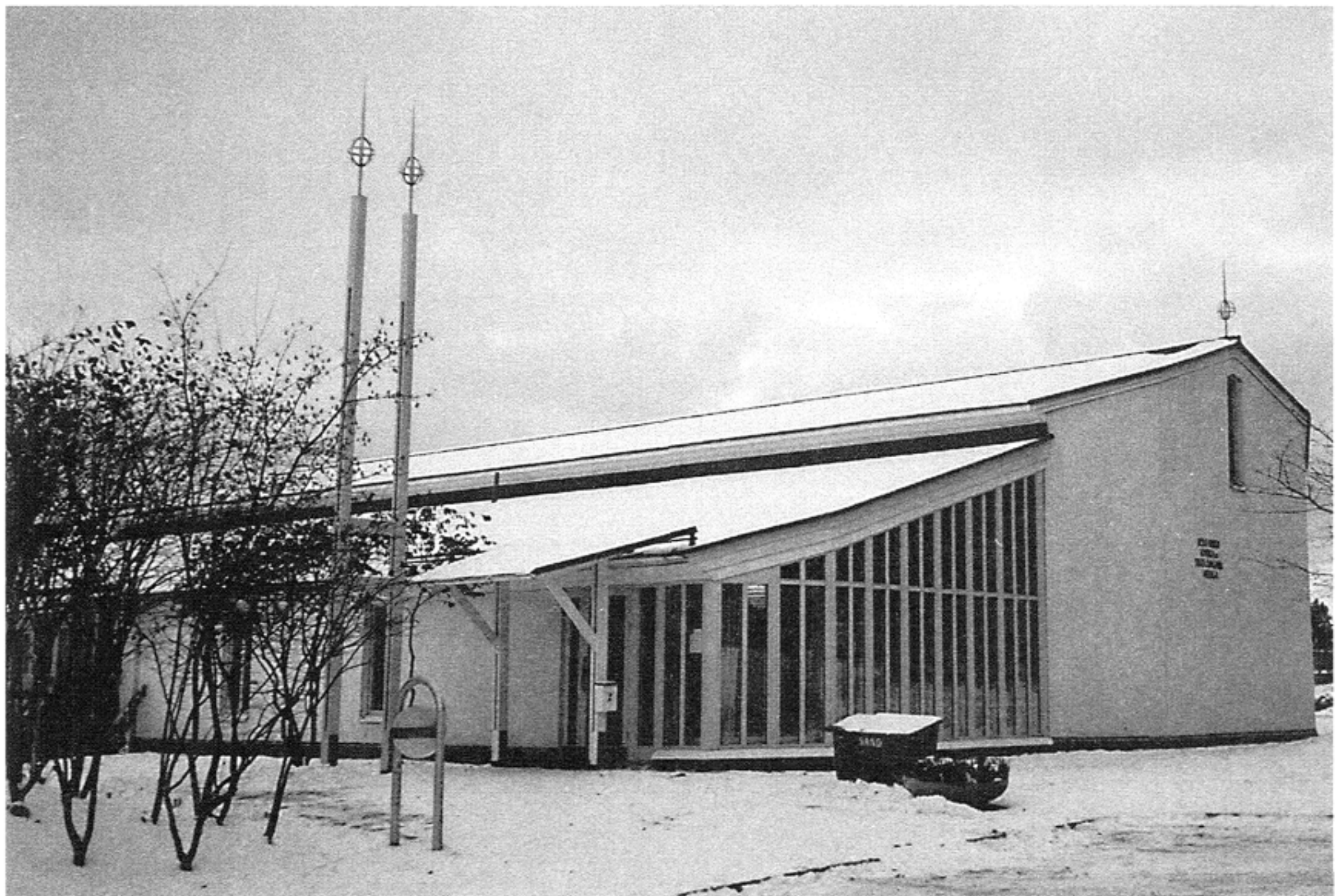
After lunch in the temple annex, many Saints turned their attention to vicarious ordinances in behalf of their ancestors. The sooner that baptisms, ordinations, and other preparatory ordinances could be performed in behalf of deceased relatives, the sooner patrons would be able to participate as proxies for their ancestors in the more time-consuming endowment in sessions on Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, supplemented as needed by other ordinances.³⁶



Oleg, Olga, Maria, and Tamara Frolov. A former ship’s captain, Brother Frolov has faithfully and effectively served as a branch president in St. Petersburg. When his family went to the Stockholm Sweden Temple, he was stricken with appendicitis and had to remain in Stockholm for an appendectomy after his group had returned home. On the day of his release from the hospital, he returned to the temple and, by chance, encountered President Thomas S. Monson, who was at the time touring the Scandinavian missions. With the help of missionary translators, a memorable conversation ensued.

Marriage or sealing ordinances for the living generally occurred on Wednesday soon after lunch, with friends in the group crowded into the temple's sealing rooms to witness the event. All early excursions from the East included at least some couples to be sealed, including parents with children to be united as families eternally. Children ranging in age from infancy to adulthood would accompany their parents, and occasionally three generations of a family traveled to the temple together. The sealing ordinances often linked the present and the past in poignant ways, as when a living son first knelt to be sealed to his parents, then repeated the rite in proxy for his deceased brother.³⁷

Since almost every patron was a first-generation member of the Church, work for the dead was often for close relatives, and the templegoers eagerly anticipated this vicarious service. They loved to watch each other work in the baptistery or sealing rooms. Some simply would not rest at ease until this work was completed—they consistently worried that something would be left undone. Asked how he had slept, one Russian replied that “the night was much too long,” so anxious was he to continue the work.³⁸ In response to this selfless anxiety, Keith Morgan and an indefatigable group of Russians spent four and a half hours performing vicarious sealings in one day in December 1995. Though the sealer had only recently arrived from the United States and spoke almost no Russian, he gradually



Courtesy J. C. Steel

Meetinghouse adjacent to the Stockholm Sweden Temple, 1998

became quite comfortable with the unfamiliar language. “I have never had a more spiritual experience,” he wrote his family that night. “Everyone in the room wept tears of joy. . . . I was just overcome by the beauty of it all.”³⁹

On another occasion, a Russian woman was baptized and confirmed in behalf of her deceased mother, but then the record of her work was misplaced. Finally, as the endowment session was just about to begin, someone found the card. Workers hurriedly took her to the initiatory room and then to join the waiting company and receive the covenants as proxy for her departed mother. In spite of the rush, “tears ran down [the] faces” of the temple workers who readied the woman for the endowment, “because of the spirit they felt.”⁴⁰

As might be expected of inexperienced templegoers, enthusiasm for the principle of the redemption of the dead occasionally outpaced understanding of its practical requirements. For example, some members of a group, having watched as their friends were baptized in behalf of their forebears, decided that they should go and do likewise for their parents. “Did you send in the papers ahead of time?” a worker asked. “No, but I know when they were born and everything.” The missionary, dubious, probed further—“Are they dead?” “No,” came the reply.⁴¹

At other times, errors made in the mission field found their way to the temple. A widow, just minutes away from participating in a proxy sealing to solemnize her marriage to her deceased husband, was discovered to be several days shy of the first anniversary of her baptism, the normal waiting period before receiving temple blessings. While the temple presidency waited for word from Church headquarters, the widow sat and fretted in the lobby. Workers lacked the vocabulary to provide much reassurance or comfort. After several hours, approval came. Unable to express her joy in words, the woman simply clasped her hands repeatedly to thank the missionaries. When she returned to the dressing room, “she was hugged by everyone, Russians and temple workers alike,” in celebration of a reprieve that allowed her to proceed with the sealing.⁴²

Celebrations and Farewells

Temple work continued into the evenings. When it was finished, workers were usually exhausted and dragged themselves to bed. The visitors, however, routinely congregated around a piano in the guesthouse dining area to sing hymns and native folk songs “half the night.”⁴³ In addition, it became a tradition to meet one night late in the week for a fireside or testimony meeting. Although the guesthouse could host such a gathering, Russian and Baltic Saints who had seldom if ever seen a “real” Mormon meetinghouse sometimes asked permission to meet in the chapel next door to the guesthouse.

Travelers and missionaries alike attended this evening devotional, so interpreters mediated the spoken word. But when the group sang, language was irrelevant, as hymns rang out in three or more different tongues, knit together by the tune. On more than one occasion during his service at the temple, President Wennerlund rendered Louis Armstrong's "What a Wonderful World," to the delight of Americans and Russians alike. Not surprisingly, these meetings were emotional, imbued both with the wonder of the week's experiences and the sadness of leaving the temple with uncertain prospects of a return. Frequently the poor travelers gave gifts to their comparatively wealthy hosts; then the night ended in a blaze of flash photography.⁴⁴

Most groups left Västerhaninge on Friday or Saturday, after a last long shower, a few more hours of temple worship, a final instructional meeting with the temple presidency, group pictures, and some contemplative minutes while cleaning rooms and packing lunches. Finally came warm embraces and friendly good-byes across the language barrier, before temple workers waved farewell to the Saints departing in buses or vans.

Becoming "Fellowcitizens with the Saints"

Almost everyone leaves the temple with a deeper perspective on life. Mission presidents in Russia noted "a manifest spiritual change" upon the Saints' return home, "an unspoken bond . . . and an understanding of the ultimate purpose of their existence."⁴⁵ One expression of temple service's spiritual impact was the way that it subdued national enmity among the diverse peoples who came together at Västerhaninge. Temple attendees were "no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints" (Eph. 2:19).

When he dedicated the Stockholm Sweden Temple in 1985, President Gordon B. Hinckley prayed that God would "pour out [his] healing influence" on the Saints and help them "reach out in love one toward another."⁴⁶ The petition took on new meaning when Russian week began. As one American missionary couple told a *Church News* writer, the temple gathered people who had been "mortal enemies for generations." (Ironically, the Americans focused on European enmities, ignoring the Cold War rivalry of the superpowers.) At the temple, these people learned to "work with one another . . . [and] to love one another."⁴⁷

Though the peaceable interaction of Americans and Russians at the temple should not be overlooked, other cases may be even more meaningful. Particularly instructive is the relationship between Finnish and Russian Saints. Finnish Latter-day Saints were crucial to the introduction of Mormonism in contemporary Russia (as well as the Baltic states). The first missionaries to Russia came from the Finland Helsinki Mission, and many Russians and Estonians were befriended before, during, and after their

conversion by Finnish families when *glasnost* eased movement across borders in the late 1980s. Finns have provided important service in the Russian missions and at the temple. When Andrei and Marina Semionov became the first Russians to be sealed in the Stockholm temple in December 1991, they were escorted by Finnish friends. More recently, Finnish congregations have hosted Russian groups who stopped for services on Sunday on their way to the temple, and Finnish members have supplied buses that carry groups from St. Petersburg to Turku to Västerhaninge.⁴⁸

These acts of grace are all the more striking when we consider the ironies behind them. Both the Semionovs and the first group excursion came from Vyborg, which was the second city in Russia opened to missionaries and the first Russian site on which a Latter-day Saint meetinghouse was built. Yet Vyborg sits on what was once Finnish territory; indeed it used to be Finland's second largest city. It fell to the Soviets, first as a result of the Winter War of 1939–40, remembered as Finland's worst war, and again in 1944.

For Finns and other Nordic Saints, memories of past tragedies, the linguistic challenge of Russian, or the noticeable difference in economic self-sufficiency might have been expected to color their reading of the nascent Russian Mormon saga. Asked by a supervisor to conduct the sealing ordinances for a set of names, a Finnish temple worker “looked at the cards, saw they were Russians, threw up his hands and said, ‘No Russians.’” He gave no explanation—it might have been the language, it might have been a memory. Another worker reminisced with a colleague about his grandfather's old homestead. He missed the property, long since “stolen” by the Soviets.⁴⁹ But even difficult history did not stop the healing effects of temple work. In 1995, a group of Finnish youth researched seven-hundred teenage Finnish casualties of the Winter War and then traveled to the temple in December to be baptized as their proxies.⁵⁰ Having turned their hearts and minds to fallen countrymen, the young Saints apparently ignored the temptation to turn their hearts against their forebears' enemies.

On another occasion, a female worker, perturbed to watch Russians eating catered meals while Finnish patrons provided for themselves, told the latter group to eat alone in the kitchen. After a few days' segregation, however, the two “nations” decided to dine together.⁵¹ And reconciliation has gone much further. One Finnish worker whose home was destroyed in the Winter War was called as a sealer and asked to learn the ceremony in Russian. He persisted in the face of the linguistic and emotional barriers, then found himself “filled with love” as he performed the ordinance with a group of Russians. Another Finn, a woman very apprehensive about working with Russians, entered an endowment session and “almost started



Russian Saints and temple missionaries, December 1995 or 1996. A group of visiting Saints gather for a social with resident temple missionaries in the guesthouse of the Stockholm Sweden Temple.

Courtesy Keith S. and Inga K. Morgan

shaking” as she looked at the people around her. But as the ceremony progressed, her feelings softened; when she looked around the celestial room, the fear was gone, replaced by love.⁵²

Another Finnish Saint experienced a similar change of heart at the temple. After working with a group of members from St. Petersburg in August 1996, she told co-workers how she had doubted that “she’d like to have anything to do with the Russians” when she began her service at the temple. “She remember[ed] too vividly the Russian-Finnish war when they lost [Karelia] to Russia . . . and how they hated the enemy.” But “those feelings soon disappeared,” she testified, “when she met the first Russian sisters who were so loving and so eager to come to the temple.”⁵³

The feelings of reconciliation and oneness fostered in the temple also changed the Church in Russia. A mission president in St. Petersburg saw greater unity among members who had been endowed. In the temple, he felt, they crossed a spiritual threshold, became “part of ‘Mormon culture’” (in the best sense of the word), and were “truly changed forever.” As a result of their experience, he concluded:

They looked at things differently, even though they were still Russians, or Georgians, or Armenians, or Poles, or Hungarians, or Siberians or whatever. They were members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in a way which transcended all boundaries of whatever type or description. . . . They were ambassadors for encouraging others to join with them in an inclusive society . . . open to all who are willing to make the commitment.⁵⁴

“Strangers and Pilgrims on the Earth”

As the temple experience drew Latter-day Saints together as a people, it also tended to heighten their differentiation from others. As a result of the teachings and covenants embraced in the temple, they became, more than before, “strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” distinguished by their vision of “a better country, that is, an heavenly [one]” (Heb. 11:13–16). Anyone who has left the temple with a touch of regret at the prospect of returning to “the world” would understand in part how Russian Saints felt upon leaving Västerhaninge’s haven of peace and rest. When they departed, few could be sure of seeing the temple again, and many faced hard roads upon returning to their homes.

To maintain ties to the temple, some Russians corresponded with temple workers. Marina Abramova was a Muscovite serving in the Russia St. Petersburg Mission when she accompanied an excursion to the temple in April 1996. Because of her skills as an interpreter and ordinance worker, she had unusually good prospects of returning to the temple after her mission. As expected, her name was submitted with a list of Saints invited to travel from Moscow late in August 1996. An illness, detected but unidentified

during her mission, prevented her from joining the August excursion group. She sent a letter instead:

Aug 12, 1996

Moscow

Dear Sister Morgan,

Thank you very much for the note you've sent with Sister Maslova.

In June I had an operation and I need one more later but before it I need a chemotherapy treatment. My doctor told me that it's not a cancer, but I have some weak bad cells in my stomach. Now I'm in the hospital and will stay there until Aug 27, that's why I can't come with this group of saints from Moscow.

You know, I'm so jealous for them.

I feel myself well after the first course and I don't know how it will be after the second one, and I'm a little bit scared.

But I want and need to be in the House of the Lord though I don't know when. And I want to ask you for a favour. Would you ask President Wennerlund for the personal invitation for me and for my friend that we may come by ourselves when I'll be able to do it between the days I need to be in the hospital. Please help me if it's possible.

My full name is Abramova Marina Ivanovna, birth date March 29, 1957. My friends name is Zalicheva Alexandra Nikolaevna, birth date Feb 23, 1948.

Sometimes I feel myself like a Job: I don't have a job, a money, a health. I just came from a mission. But I'm very grateful for all this trials, because I feel our Heavenly Father's love. And I know that Jesus Christ is our Savior and that he lives. And I love him with all my heart. And you know, I'm the happiest woman in the world! Thank you for your help and for your love. You'll always be in my heart.

Love,

Marina Abramova

When Sister Morgan replied, she expressed sorrow at Marina's hospitalization and puzzlement at the diagnosis. Then, with a view to helping grant Marina's unconventional request, Sister Morgan asked that she inform the temple office of the exact dates of travel so that the visa process could be set in motion. She also inquired, gently, how the unscheduled excursion would be paid for. "It would be so nice to see you again and I hope you will feel strong enough for the trip," her letter concluded.⁵⁵

Then at Christmas, Valentina Lebedeva, who had been part of the excursion in August, mailed a card and note to the sisters she had worked with in the temple.

Dear Sisters Morgan, Morrison, Sterri, Enlund, Wiren, Top, Lapalainen, Ramo, Saarikivi, Losten, Ousunian, Jarvinen, Ritva and all sisters.

I wish you a very Cristmas and Happy New Year. I remember you, your love, help and kindness very often.

I hope to come to the Temple and see you in June. I wish you our Heavenly Father's many blessings to you.

With love

Valentina Lebedeva

P.S. Excuse me for my bad English and mistakes in your names.

I must tell you a sorrowful news. Marina Abramova died at first December. We hope she will with our Heavenly Father.

Marina's health had deteriorated too quickly for anything to come of her request.

Marina Abramova's letter poignantly captures the significance of Russian week, both the difficulties involved in getting members to the temple and the temple's powerful impact on a member's faith and commitment. The correspondence between Sister Abramova and Sister Morgan typifies the drama of this twentieth-century "gathering": on one end, newly converted Saints, yearning to be at the temple but separated from it by geography as well as social, economic, and political distance; on the other end, devoted missionaries and leaders struggling to organize the best methods to bridge the gaps and get the members to the temple. Just as it had in the nineteenth century, gathering for temple blessings required an inventive blend of "faithfulness and concerted effort."⁵⁶ And just as experiences in the Nauvoo Temple helped sustain the nineteenth-century pioneers during the rigors and tragedies of the trail west, experiences in the Stockholm Sweden Temple helped prepare modern pioneers like Marina Abramova for the "unknown journey" ahead.⁵⁷

John C. Thomas [thomasj@ricks.edu] has been Professor of Religious Education at Ricks College since 1998. He received his B.A. in 1988 and M.A. in 1989 from Brigham Young University, and his Ph.D. in 1995 in political science from Indiana University. His related publications include "'A Mighty Linked Chain': The Temple Caravans of the Northwestern States Mission," in *Regional Studies in LDS Church History: Western Canada*, ed. Dennis A. Wright and others (Provo: Department of Church History and Doctrine, Brigham Young University, 2000), 251–75. An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Mormon History Association meeting at Omaha, Nebraska, May 1997.

1. The Stockholm Sweden Temple has the same architectural plan first used in the Swiss Temple, with rooms and equipment to allow for temple instruction in multiple languages; physical facilities, such as the guesthouse, were built to accommodate patrons.

2. Howard L. Biddulph, *The Morning Breaks: Stories of Conversion and Faith in the Former Soviet Union* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 180–91. Biddulph purposely chose the word *pilgrimage*, "although it is not part of the typical Latter-day Saint lexicon for temple-going," because it captured the "exalted spiritual purpose" of the Saints' "journey to a sacred place" (180–81); C. Frank Steele used the same imagery to

describe early excursions to the Cardston Alberta Temple in “Pilgrims of the Light,” *Improvement Era* 35 (October 1932): 709–11. Claus Meyer titled his photo essay of a Brazilian temple trip “Pilgrimage down the Amazon,” in *The Mission: Inside The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. Epicenter Communications (New York: Warner Books, 1995), 111. David J. Whittaker has also called travel to the temple “a type of a pilgrimage to a holy place” and has argued that the temple endowment actually reminds people of their pilgrim status and teaches them how to navigate their “mortal pilgrimage” successfully. David J. Whittaker, “Pioneering Journeys, Then and Now,” in *Brigham Young University 1996–97 Speeches* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1997), 319–20.

3. Such a study would not be possible without the cooperation of full-time missionaries who served at the Stockholm temple. I benefited greatly from access to the papers and correspondence of Keith S. and Inga K. Morgan, who served at the temple from November 1995 through April 1997. Indeed, their frequent notes to friends and family, containing rich descriptions of the travails and triumphs of “Russian week,” provided the initial impetus for this project. For most of their mission, Elder Morgan served as a counselor in the temple presidency and Sister Morgan served as either an acting or an assistant temple matron. During their mission, they dealt firsthand with ten temple excursions from missions in former Soviet lands. A few of these excursions included members from one or more Baltic republics, and another seven excursions brought together members from Finland and at least one of the Baltic states. All correspondence from Keith S. and Inga K. Morgan was sent via electronic mail to multiple recipients, including the author’s family; copies are in the author’s possession.

Valuable information came as well from interviews with the Morgans and correspondence and interviews with several other people, including Reid Johnson (president of the Stockholm temple from 1991 to 1994) and Gary Browning, Thomas Rogers, Richard Chapple, and Gary Anderson, all of whom presided over Russian missions in the 1990s. The resulting account portrays events and practices as they stood up to the late 1990s; even though many practices continue as described, the past tense is employed throughout. The story is compelling, but somewhat incomplete; readers would benefit from a more systematic collection and study of the impressions of Russian Saints who participated in the temple excursions.

A few firsthand accounts have been published in Gary Browning, *Russia and the Restored Gospel* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1997). In addition, some oral histories have been collected and housed in the Historical Department, Archives Division, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, though access to them is usually restricted in the case of living members.

4. See *All Temple Schedule* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997). The outline of the schedule was due at Church headquarters by June of the preceding year.

5. “Temple Calendar 1996 Stockholm Sweden Temple,” in possession of the author. Three weeks are labeled either “International” or “Nordic.”

6. The Estonian Saints stayed at the temple from November 30 to December 5, 1992, participating in ordinances in Finnish and Russian. Reid Johnson, interview by author, Holladay, Utah, October 23, 1997.

7. The asylum seeker was probably not a member of the traveling group. Russia Moscow Mission president Richard Chapple called the temple on the day the group was scheduled to arrive and apologized for the cancellation. The first excursion from Moscow went to Stockholm on August 30, 1993, after efforts to go to Freiberg in June were scuttled by visa problems with Germany. Johnson, interview; Gary Browning, letter to author, May 28, 1997.

8. Keith S. Morgan, email, November 5, 1996.
9. Keith S. Morgan, email, March 30, 1997.
10. Keith S. Morgan, email, April 28, 1996; see also Inga K. Morgan, email, June 1, 1996.
11. Lest it be thought that immigration concerns are unique to European governments, consider the experience of Anastasia Maslova. Called from Russia to serve a mission in Canada, she was denied entry into the United States to attend the Missionary Training Center in Provo, Utah. It took six weeks of “pleading” by Church officials to secure her temporary entry into the country. Sister Maslova then received the endowment in the Provo Temple while at the Missionary Training Center. Browning, *Russia and the Restored Gospel*, 328.
12. Keith S. Morgan, email, January 20, 1997; Keith S. Morgan, email, October 10, 1995.
13. Biddulph, *Morning Breaks*, 182–83.
14. Thomas Rogers, letter to author, July 25, 1997; Gary Anderson, email, April 26, 1998 (typescript of an electronic mail sent to multiple recipients, sent to author in June 1999).
15. “Preliminary schedule for week 22, Moscow and Samara-Saratov,” 1996, mimeograph, in possession of Inga K. Morgan.
16. When the first group left Estonia in November 1992, they rode the ship *Estonia*, which later sank in one of recent history’s worst maritime disasters.
17. Rogers, letter to author. Rogers served from 1993 to 1996; a more recent report estimated the round-trip journey from Moscow at \$240 per person. Anna Sterligova, “Russian Temple Trip,” ldsworld-gems@lists.ldsworld.com, February 9, 1999.
18. Richard Chapple, *Journal*, August 16, 1993, quoted in a letter from Suzanne Chapple to the author, September 29, 1997.
19. Johnson, interview.
20. Rogers, letter to author; Anderson, email.
21. There is also a house available for the use of a nonlocal temple president. The layout of the temple grounds is illustrated in a pamphlet published by the Church titled *Herrens Hus: Templet i Stockholm Västerhaninge* [n.d.].
22. Gerry Avant, “Temple in Sweden Is as Spiritual Magnet to Grateful Members,” *Church News*, November 11, 1995, 5.
23. Keith S. Morgan, email, April 12, 1997; Johnson, interview; Gary Anderson, letter to author, November 14, 1999.
24. The languages are English, Swedish, Norwegian, Danish, Finnish, Russian, Estonian, and Spanish. “Instructions for Stockholm Temple Missionaries,” typescript, 1995, 1, in possession of the author.
25. Keith S. Morgan, email, September 23, 1996.
26. These figures are based on a review of papers in the possession of Inga K. Morgan.
27. Keith S. Morgan, email, April 28, 1996; Keith S. Morgan, email, January 20, 1997.
28. Keith S. Morgan, email, November 8, 1996; Keith S. Morgan, email, January 20, 1997; Keith S. Morgan, email, March 30, 1997; Inga K. Morgan, email, November 8, 1996.
29. “This schedule never works out but we have one anyway.” Keith S. Morgan, email, April 12, 1997.
30. These calculations are derived from an unofficial record of ordinances compiled by Inga K. Morgan during her service in Stockholm and in her possession.
31. The account in the succeeding paragraphs draws most heavily on email from Keith S. Morgan, April 28, 1996; November 13, 1996; January 20, 1997; March 30, 1997;

and from Inga K. Morgan, April 28, 1996; November 24, 1996; and “Preliminary schedule for week 22, Moscow and Samara-Saratov”; other sources cited as necessary.

32. Keith S. Morgan, interview.
33. Inga K. Morgan, email, August 14, 1996.
34. Keith S. Morgan, letter to author, December 9, 1995.
35. Keith S. Morgan, email, November 21, 1996; Inga K. Morgan, email, November 28, 1995.
36. Keith S. and Inga K. Morgan, interviews by author, April 17 and 26, 1997.
37. Keith S. Morgan, email, November 13, 1996.
38. Johnson, interview.
39. Keith S. Morgan, email, December 1, 1995.
40. Inga K. Morgan, email, November 30, 1995.
41. Keith S. Morgan, email, January 20, 1997.
42. Inga K. Morgan, email, November 16, 1996; Keith S. Morgan, email, November 16, 1996.
43. Keith S. Morgan, email, January 20, 1997.
44. See Keith S. Morgan, email, December 1, 1995; Keith S. Morgan, email, January 20, 1997; Inga K. Morgan, email, April 28, 1996.
45. Rogers, letter to author; Gary N. Anderson, “Russia at the Crossroads: Mormon Cultural Connections in Eastern Europe,” paper presented at the Mormon History Association meeting, May 1999, in possession of the author.
46. The Stockholm Sweden Temple dedicatory prayer, given July 2, 1985, is transcribed in “‘Waited Long, Hoped, Prayed’ for Temple,” *Church News*, published by *Deseret News*, July 7, 1985, 11.
47. Avant, “Temple in Sweden,” 6.
48. Gary Browning, letter to author; Reid Johnson, telephone conversation with author, October 26, 1997; Gary Anderson, letter to author, April 26, 1998; Sterligkova, “Russian Temple Trip.”
49. Keith S. Morgan, email, March 30, 1997.
50. Inga K. Morgan, email, December 9, 1995; Inga K. Morgan, email, December 11, 1995.
51. Johnson, interview.
52. Johnson, interview.
53. Inga K. Morgan, email, August 17, 1996. The message continues:
As this Sister Rämö was talking a flood of memories came to me. I remember when Finland lost Karelen [*sic*]. I remember the war and the terrible cold winter that year. . . . Many Finns had fled to Sweden and many had sent their children to Sweden so they could be taken care of and fed. We heard about the miserable conditions of the Finnish soldiers whose marching boots had no soles left, and who froze to death. We had learned to knit in school so we helped the way we could by knitting knee and wrist warmers that were sent to Finland to the soldiers. I can remember the smell of the gray wool yarn. All these things came back to me as [she] spoke. And I too felt so grateful that we now could all be together for a whole week with only loving words spoken and admiration shown. That is what the gospel of Jesus Christ can do for us, changing from hating our enemies to loving them. In retrospect, it has been an incredible week.
54. Anderson, “Russia at the Crossroads.”
55. This information comes from a draft copy of the letter prepared by Sister Morgan. Her letter was sent back to Moscow with Anastasia Maslova at the end of the week

(August 31, 1996). All three letters quoted—exactly as written—are in the possession of Inga K. Morgan and the author.

56. In their letter of January 1841, the First Presidency told the scattered Saints that it would take “faithfulness and concerted effort” and not just “individual exertion” to build up Nauvoo and its temple. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2d ed., rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1971), 4:272.

57. Sarah Pea Rich wrote that the Nauvoo Temple endowment helped assure her that God would “guide us and sustain us in the unknown journey that lay before us” on the trail west—a statement David Whittaker cited and employed as a metaphor for life’s journey in “Pioneering Journeys, Then and Now,” 320–21.