

A Short History of the Church of Christ Congregation in Canon City, Colorado

Recorded by Santha Carmack, February 2026

In May 1937, a group of God fearing, God loving people began to meet in the living room of Brother and Sister Johnson (Grandparents of Joyce Watkins and Great Grandparents of Gary Watkins). They would meet Sunday morning, Sunday evening and Wednesday evening. The people meeting for worship were a group of dedicated, faithful, loving Christians. People of modest means, working six days a week, twelve or thirteen hours a day. One of the most important things to them was to strive to be Christ-like and to be of service for God.

Here are the names of the people instrumental in forming the Church of Christ in Canon City, Colorado;

Violet Day and her extended family
Joyce Watkins and her extended Johnson Aunts
Cleo Johnson, son of Brother and Sister Johnson
Dovine Dice
Charley and Hazel Dawes and their children
Charles, Ray, Raymond (twins), Wilbur and Virginia
Brother Hittle
Jake and Reta Wheeler and grandson Dick
Johnny and Oleta Carmack and their children
Chrystine, Gerald, Val Gene, Murrell
J.A. and Bobbie
Clarence and Alpha Shipler and their children
Maxine and Irma Lee (they would go back and forth from Sylvania, Kansas to Canon City).
Travis and Lillian Helm and Roberta, Carolyn

In 1940 Travis Helm and Clarence Shipler began to discuss the possibility of purchasing land and building a permanent church building. They were fully aware of the fact that a war was looming and financing would have to be found and arranged. Travis and Clarence both agreed that thru faith and unceasing prayer and hard work it come to pass.

Travis Helm was a true visionary. He moved to Canon City in the early 1930's. He was a registered pharmacist who went on to buy the shop at 5th and Main Street to open his own pharmacy. Travis was a workaholic and a shrewd and savvy investor. Travis is the one who got financing for the property at fifth and Harrison and financing for building supplies needed to build the red brick church building.

The building still stands after 86 years (in 2026). The men of the congregation would work on constructing the building in their limited spare time. Deep love, faith built the building.

In the early 1940's a gentleman and his wife moved to Canon City to help organize and stabilize the congregation. His name was Brother Ruble (he would say, I don't do first names). Under his guidance the first elders were placed: Travis Helm, Clarence Shipler and Johnny Austin Carmack (Brother Ruble had baptized Johnny Austin and Oleta Carmack). The 1940's and 1950's saw a large number of members move into the Canon City area.

Many of those people would play a major role in the congregation for years to come;

Bob and Mary Helm
Mary Logan
Sadie Cox
Sadie Nash
J.B. and Helen Nichols
Roger and Sharon Yetive
La Fawn Watkins
Marie, Stella, Nellie and Daisy Hiltbiddle
Brother and Sister Franklin
Jimmy and Melina Hayes and 3 daughters
Gladys Root and daughters Charleen and Eileen
Charlie and Winnie Parsley and Tom and Susan
Ruby Johnson
Clovis and Rosaline Smart and Cliff and Shirley
Brother and Sister Allington
Grace Rich
Sister Spence
Sister Callahan
Cecil and "Buss" Colvin and Gary, Danny, Billy
Jack and Norma Nichols and Gary and Danny
Bernie and Lois Vines and Mike, Phil, Molly
Walt Chapin
Charlie and Jeri McCasland and Tom, Molly
The Paynes and daughter Nina Mae
Lucile and Veda Havens

1949-1960 could be called the golden years of the congregation. Membership was growing. Members were of one accord with the same strong goal to reaching out to the community to share the good news. There was total harmony. Everyone was of one mind, strong faith, same goals and desire to serve. There was no dissension, no subversion. The congregation was full of children and young people. There were excellent, knowledgeable teachers to ensure that the children and young people were grounded in the faith. The yearly vacation bible schools were wildly popular. Members were good to check on shut ins and needy. Travis Helm and Clarence Shipler helped the very needy with food each week. Funds came out of their own pockets. It was never mentioned to the members that these two men helped.

From 1949-1960 saw two excellent ministers, strong in the bibles, faith and knowledge: Brothers John Thortob and F.L. Lemley. The congregation had an excellent service and body of work with the Colorado State Penitentiary as well as a music section on the local radio station.

For information from 1960-1999 consult Phyllis Ary, Gary and Pam Watkins, Cheryl Owens.