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The buildings at the center: Latter-Day Saint tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region

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THE BUILDINGS AT THE CENTER: LATTER-
DAY SAINT TABERNACLES IN THE
MORMON CULTURE REGION

by

Aaron James McArthur

Associate of Science
North Idaho College
1997

Bachelor of Arts
Idaho State University
2003

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree in History
Department of History
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Thesis Approval

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Master of Arts

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ABSTRACT

The Buildings at the Center: Latter-day Saint Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region

by

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Tabernacles are a largely overlooked feature of communities in the Mormon Culture Region. Though the tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City has world-wide recognition, very little has been written about the other 78 that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints built between 1847 and 1953. This thesis discusses the religious, cultural, and social motivations behind the planning and construction of tabernacles, as evidenced by developments such as the Plat of the City of Zion and the Priesthood Reorganization of 1877, as well as the numerous uses of these buildings. The significance of the buildings in the development of communities is investigated using an interdisciplinary approach, utilizing the work of historians, geographers, and sociologists.. The study also addresses why tabernacles are no longer built and the significance that they have in the communities where they still stand.

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...to gather mine elect from the four quarters
of the earth, unto a place which I shall
prepare, an Holy City, that my people may
gird up their loins, and be looking forth for
the time of my coming; for there shall be my
tabernacle, and it shall be called Zion, a
New Jerusalem.

- Pearl of Great Price of the Church
of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

PREFACE

I first became aware of the existence of tabernacles other than the one on Temple Square in Salt Lake City as a senior at Idaho State University in Pocatello, Idaho in 2001. Having an interest in the Teton Dam disaster and needing a topic for my senior seminar paper, I went to the Teton Flood Museum in Rexburg, Idaho to conduct some research. The museum is in the basement of the Fremont Stake (Rexburg) Tabernacle, and while there, I quickly lost interest in the flood, whose story had been told, and my attention turned to the building that housed the museum, whose story was more fragmentary. Through the course of my research, I discovered that though I was born and raised in Polson, Montana, 380 miles from Rexburg, I had a connection to the building. One of my relatives on my mother's side was Hans Fredrick Christiansen Piper, the man who spent three months landscaping the tabernacle grounds. I also discovered that my wife's great grandfather was the superintendent of construction for the building while another relative was the contractor responsible for installing the balcony in the 1930's. Both my father-in-law and my mother-in-law graduated from high school in the tabernacle. My wife recalls attending concerts in the tabernacle including a rock concert in 1996 (the City of Rexburg owned the building by that point).

Speaking to people in other towns with other tabernacles, I learned that they had similar experiences; that their grandparents helped build their tabernacle; they remember an important guest speaking to them from its pulpit; or they were baptized in its font. For

a great number of Latter-day Saints, tabernacles are a part of who they are and where they come from, whether they are aware of it or not. My grandfather was born in St. Anthony, Idaho. He no doubt went to meetings in the Yellowstone Stake Tabernacle. Who knows what effect that had on my family.

Studying diaries for clues to tabernacle uses and meanings is frustrating for a historian because of the lack of detail most diarists provided. Nevertheless, there are countless entries and references in the diaries and oral histories collected by the Utah Historical Society that read something like “went to meeting in the tabernacle today,” or “while passing by the tabernacle I saw...” These entries might be sparse on details, but they speak volumes as to how commonplace tabernacles were to the people who wrote. The buildings were just part of everyday life, taken for granted because of their pervasiveness, but exerting, nonetheless, an influence on town residents. This thesis only scratches the surface of the stories about how tabernacles influenced both the Saints and their neighbors of other faiths in their respective communities. Not all the stories have been told that explain why various communities undertook tabernacle construction, and certainly the significance to communities has scarcely been addressed, though as the case with all worthwhile topics, it is almost impossible to do them justice. Nevertheless, this thesis will attempt to address some of the key issues surrounding tabernacles in their construction, their utilization, and what they mean today.

INTRODUCTION

Every Sunday morning at 10:30, Mountain Standard Time, the longest running radio program in the history of broadcast radio is sent out on KSL 1160 from Salt Lake City, Utah to over 2,000 radio stations, TV channels, and cable stations.¹ Lloyd D. Newell's soothing voice welcomes listeners to "Music and the Spoken Word," a live broadcast featuring the Mormon Tabernacle Choir and the world renowned Mormon Tabernacle organ from "The Crossroads of the West." As the choir begins to sing, listeners are favored with spiritual, patriotic, and classical numbers performed by one of the most powerful and certainly one of the most recognized choirs in the United States, if not the world. For many, the existence of the choir is the only thing that they know about The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, more commonly referred to as the "Mormon Church."² The building that serves as the studio and home of the choir, the iconic, oval-shaped domed hall, is not only famous for the musical talent that resides there, but for the unique roof that was built without bolts, nails, or internal supports. Millions walk through the building annually, and are treated to demonstrations of the amazing acoustical properties of the building as well as the playing of the highest and lowest notes on the organ, which are so high they are only audible to dogs or so low that they are more felt than heard. Until the completion of the Conference Center across the street, the

¹ The first broadcast was July 15, 1929. More than 3,600 performances have followed.

² The term Mormon comes from Latter-day Saints' adherence to *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ*, which was translated by their founder, Joseph Smith, Jr.

tabernacle served at the venue for the semi-annual general conferences of the Church for roughly 140 years, where members gathered to hear doctrinal sermons and sustain the leadership of the Church.³ The tabernacle has been the object of study by the Historic American Building Survey, the Historic American Engineering Record, and is on the National Register of Historic Places. This amazing building sits in the direct center of the city, on the block that is the baseline for all streets in Salt Lake City, and as such, is at the physical and spiritual center of Salt Lake City, if not the Mormon world.⁴ It is a truly magnificent building.

What is less well known about the built environment of Mormondom is that if one were to travel north to Bountiful, Ogden, Brigham City, Garland, Logan, or south to American Fork, Provo, Manti, St. George, east to Heber City, or west to Ely, Nevada, one would find a tabernacle similarly situated in the direct center of town, usually on the equivalent of Main and Center. These tabernacles seat far fewer than the 12,000 that the one on Temple Square in Salt Lake can accommodate, and may not be as well kept. They certainly are not as famous as their much larger cousin in the capital of Utah, but each is easily one of the finest and largest buildings in its community. Although a great deal has been written about the Salt Lake Tabernacle, scholars have paid scant attention to the other seventy-eight tabernacles that the Church constructed between 1847 and 1953. This omission is surprising, and the basis for this thesis.

³ Taking its cue from literature produced by members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, I will refer to the church as the "Church," as both the LDS church and the Catholic church claim to be the only true church in its fullness on the earth.

⁴ Steven L. Olsen, "Celebrating Cultural Identity: Pioneer Day in Nineteenth-Century Mormonism," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (Spring 1996): 159.

Purpose of This Study

It is the purpose of this work to show that Latter-day Saint tabernacles were essential buildings in the development of communities and a sense of community throughout the entire region settled by the Saints. They sat at the geographic and spiritual centers of the towns they were built in, furthering the purposes intended by the use of the Mormon Village system which will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3. Using a wide variety of primary sources such as diaries, newspapers, photographs, interviews, and ward and stake histories, and secondary sources such as books and articles by historians, sociologists, geographers, and theologians, this thesis attempts to synthesize scholarship on Latter-day Saint culture and history to unlock some of the secrets tabernacles hold.

A study of the significance of tabernacles is justified not just because of the paucity of coverage in the traditional literature, but because an understanding of them is vital to our comprehension of the development of Mormon communities, themselves an important part of the Anglo settling of the West. Prior to 1847, there were settlers traveling to the Willamette Valley in the Oregon Territory, and there were Spanish Paisanos who had settled in Texas, New Mexico, and California, but the interior West was largely free of European settlement. Because the members of the Church were the first settlers of European descent on the scene, and they arrived in large numbers in organized companies, they have had a definite impact on the settlement of the West. These tabernacles are integral parts of the built environment of nearly every LDS community of significance that these settlers established and they played a similar role in each of these communities' development. In addition, they continue to play an active part in the communities in which they remain. An exploration of tabernacles not only

sheds light on a fascinating part of history, but fills a significant gap in the written history of the Church, providing a foundation for future scholars to build on. Despite the significance of tabernacles, their construction and use has been largely forgotten. This thesis attempts to identify and explain the reasons behind that historical amnesia.

Historiography

The depth and breadth of scholarship on the Church is impressive, excepting the study of tabernacles. One of the foremost scholars in the field is undoubtedly Leonard J. Arrington. Arrington was the first person to serve as the official Church Historian who was not a “General Authority”, meaning one high in the church hierarchy.⁵ Several of his works are landmarks in the Mormon bibliography. The best recognized is probably *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints*. Written with Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience* is a history of the Church for the general reader. Arrington’s primary research, however, focused on the economic history of Mormons. His books *The Changing Economic Structure of the Mountain West, Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900*, and *A Dependent Commonwealth: Utah’s Economy from Statehood to the Great Depression* with Thomas G. Alexander, both provide an overview of the financial conditions facing Latter-day Saints throughout their time in the Great Basin. His works *Orderville, Utah: A Mormon Pioneer Experiment in Economic Organization* and *Building the City of God: Community and*

⁵ The Church has a hierarchical structure. At the top is the prophet, who serves as the president of the church as a whole. The president is assisted by two councilors, and the three comprise the First Presidency. Below the First Presidency is the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, who wield the same authority as a quorum as the prophet does individually. Subordinate to the Twelve is the Quorum of the Seventy, headed by seven presidents. These three groups along with the Presiding Bishopric, which is responsible for the temporal welfare of the church as the others are with the spiritual welfare, along with a few other high officials, comprise a group known as “general authorities.” Consequently, the term general authority does not refer to an authority as in one who is extremely knowledgeable about a certain subject.

Cooperation among the Mormons with Feramorz Y. Fox and Dean L. May, focus on the utopian organization within the Church known as the United Order. The United Order was a series of agreements in individual communities where people would give everything they owned to the church, and the church would give back a stewardship, keeping the excess to meet the needs of others in the community. Arrington also tried his hand at biography with *Brigham Young: American Moses*, a book that gives greater insight into the colonization program pursued by the Church under Young.⁶

Among the more recognized Mormon scholars, Arrington has addressed the larger subject of the significance of tabernacles, but he did so only obliquely in an article recounting the history of the temple and tabernacle in Logan, Utah. He observed that the settlement and building up of Mormon communities followed a distinct pattern. First, the Saints diverted some water for crops, built log houses, and a bowery (see figure 1) or chapel.⁷ In the second phase, they enlarged the canal; put together adobe homes, and inevitably, a tabernacle. The third phase saw further expansion of the canals, building frame or rock houses, and most important, the construction of a temple.⁸ Though the

⁶ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Vintage, 1979); Leonard Arrington, *The Changing Economic Structure of the Mountain West* (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1963); Leonard Arrington, *Great Basin Kingdom: An Economic History of the Latter-day Saints, 1830-1900* (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 1958); Leonard Arrington and Thomas G. Alexander, *A Dependent Commonwealth: Utah's Economy from Statehood to the Great Depression* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1974); Leonard Arrington, *Orderville, Utah: A Mormon Pioneer Experiment in Economic Organization* (Logan, UT: Utah State Agricultural College, 1954); Leonard Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community and Cooperation among the Mormons* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1991); Leonard Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

⁷ A bowery was truly a vernacular structure, somewhat similar to a picnic pavilion, albeit larger. A frame of logs is erected over which brush is laid for a roof to shield worshipers from the elements. If a more permanent structure was desired, dirt would be placed on top of the brush and the sides enclosed with rough planks.

⁸ Leonard Arrington and Melvin A. Larkin "The Logan Tabernacle and Temple," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, 41, no. 3 (1973): 302-303. This process continues to this day.

progression that Arrington lays out is not a hard and fast rule of Mormon community development (especially since most communities did not end up with a temple), it generally delineates the growth of the average Mormon community.



Figure 1: Bowery in Clawson, Idaho, Summer 1899.

Another historian who has been very influential in determining the parameters of the discussion of Mormon History is Juanita Brooks. Brooks wrote *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* in which she explored the role that John D. Lee and Brigham Young had in one of the worst massacres in the history of the American West. Numerous books and articles have investigated every possible aspect of the events leading up to the massacre, the massacre, and the fallout from it. Even in Mormon history, nothing sells books like a scandal. The Mountain Meadows Massacre has been written about more recently by

Will Bagley in his award winning *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows*.⁹

Mormonism in Transition by Thomas Alexander is an analysis of the changes in the Church between 1890 and 1930 that resulted from the church's cultural, social, and political integration into American society. It is one of the few in depth investigations of the Church at the turn of the last century (a majority of the period-specific studies in LDS history focus on 1830 to 1851). The book's decade by decade analysis is useful for determining broad shifts in Mormon thought and culture.¹⁰

Several authors have tackled a general history of the Latter-day Saints. For a perspective from within the Church, Apostle B.H. Roberts' seven volume *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* is one of the most exhaustive, especially for the early period of Church History. Non-Mormon treatments include *Desert Saints: The Mormon Frontier in Utah* by Nels Anderson, and *Mormon Country* by Wallace Stegner. Though all three are well researched and written, they include little coverage of tabernacles, possibly because the time they were written in was not far enough removed from the era of tabernacle building to provide prospective.¹¹

Relationships with those of different faiths and the differences that Mormonism has with other form of Christianity are a common theme in the literature. *Religious Outsiders*

⁹ Juanita Brooks, *The Mountain Meadows Massacre* (Reprint Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), and Will Bagley, *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows*, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2004). Brooks also produced an autobiography and a history of Utah's Dixie, centered in St. George. Juanita Brooks, *Quicksand and Cactus: a Memoir of the Southern Mormon Frontier* (Salt Lake: Howe Brothers, 1982).

¹⁰ Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986).

¹¹ B. H. Roberts, *A Comprehensive History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1970-1971); Nels Anderson, *Desert Saints: The Mormon Frontier in Utah* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1942); Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1942).

and the Making of Americans by Laurence Moore, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* by Jan Shipps, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York* by Whitney Cross, and the unflattering *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History* all survey the tensions and social reordering that was occasioned by the founding of the new religion. Polygamy has been a particularly contentious topic, and the focus of various works including *The Antipolygamy Controversy in U.S. Women's Movements, 1880-1925: A Debate on the American Home* by Joan Smyth Iverson, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* by Brigham Young's grandson Kimball Young, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* by Jessie L. Embry, and Richard Van Wagoner's *Mormon Polygamy: A History*.¹²

A fair amount has been written, primarily by sociologists and geographers, regarding life in the Mormon village, which makes it even more surprising that so little has been written about tabernacles. Though dated, the landmark work in this field is Lowry Nelson's *The Mormon Village*, which drew on results of surveys the author conducted in three Mormon villages over a period of twenty years. Nelson discusses the economic and social structures that attend life in a village and how they differed from other "typical" forms of western settlement. The contribution of Dean L. May's *Three Frontiers: Family, Land, and Society in the American West, 1850-1900* (1994) is

¹² Laurence Moore, *Religious Outsiders and the Making of Americans* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Jan Shipps, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986); Whitney Cross, *The Burned Over District: The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1965); Peter S. Williams, *Freedom's Ferment: Phases of American Social History* (Reprint Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2002); Joan Smyth Iverson, *The Antipolygamy Controversy in U.S. Women's Movements, 1880-1925: A Debate on the American Home* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997); Kimball Young, *Isn't One Wife Enough?* (New York: Holt, 1954); Jessie L. Embry, *Mormon Polygamous Families: Life in the Principle* (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 1987); Richard Van Wagoner, *Mormon Polygamy: A History* (Salt Lake: Signature Books, 1989).

significant to our understanding of motivations behind community development.

Tabernacles did receive coverage in Richard Francaviglia's *The Mormon Landscape:*

Existence, Creation, and Perception of a Unique Image in the American West (1978). He

pointed to ten features that are distinct about Mormon towns: 1. Wide streets. 2.

Roadside irrigation ditches. 3. Barns and granaries right in town. 4. Unpainted farm

buildings. 5. Open field landscape around the town. 6. The hay derrick. 7. The

"Mormon Fence."¹³ 8. Domestic architectural style. 9. Dominant use of brick. 10.

Mormon ward chapels.¹⁴ I include tabernacles in Francaviglia's tenth category because

he indicates that the ward chapels are often at the center of the town. If a town has five

or more of these characteristics, Francaviglia considers the town to be a Mormon town.¹⁵

However, Francaviglia does not provide much analysis on what the buildings mean to the communities other than to name them as defining characteristic.¹⁶

Finally, Donald W. Meinig's "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, defined the "Mormon Culture Region," (see figure 2) comprised of a core, domain, and sphere. The core is comprised of Salt Lake City and the

¹³ The Mormon Fence is an unpainted fence created out of every material imaginable, and possibly some unimaginable as well.

¹⁴ Richard V. Francaviglia, "The Mormon Landscape: Definition of an Image in the American West," *Association of American Geographers: Proceedings of the Association of American Geographers* 2 (1970): 59-60.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 60. Wallace Stegner would include the prevalence of Lombardy Poplars, which he calls Mormon Trees. He says "They [poplars] give a quality to the land so definite that it is almost possible to mark the limits of Mormon Country by the trees." Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 22.

¹⁶ Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village* (Salt Lake: University of Utah Press, 1952); Dean L. May, *Three Frontiers: Family, Land, and Society in the American West, 1850-1900* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994); Richard Francaviglia, *The Mormon Landscape: Existence, Creation, and Perception of a Unique Image in the American West* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).

immediately surrounding settlements. Ironically, it is the area with the greatest concentration of Non-Mormons, or “Gentiles.”¹⁷ The domain is the area where there is less social complexity. It is the “most thoroughly Mormon area.”¹⁸ The sphere is defined as “those areas where Mormons live in nucleated groups enclaved within Gentile country or where they are of long-standing major local numerical significance.”¹⁹ Tabernacles did not play heavily into Meinig’s analysis, but they are, it is worth noting, prevalent throughout all three areas of the Mormon Culture Region.

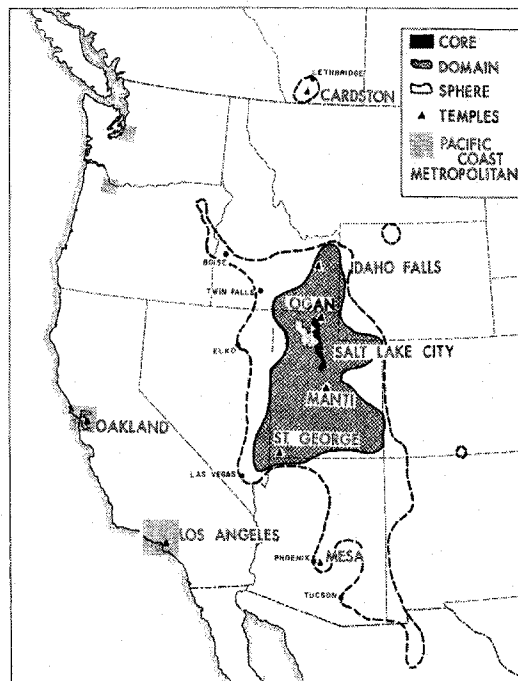


Figure 2: The Mormon Culture Region

¹⁷ D.W. Meinig, “The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55, no. 2 (June 1965): 215.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid., 216. The sole exception to the existence of tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Sphere is that in the Mormon Colonies in Mexico there are no tabernacles. There was, however, an academy building that was used in much the same way as tabernacles in other Mormon towns. One possible explanation is that in Mexico, all church buildings were the property of the state, and so the expense a tabernacle would incur was not justifiable.

The field of Mormon History also contains many works of biography, family histories, works addressing various ethnic groups that converted, and extensive treatments of the pioneering process, both before and after the Saints reached the Salt Lake Valley. There are only three significant works devoted solely to tabernacles. One, *A Tabernacle in the Desert* (1958) by Stewart L. Grow is a brief history of the Salt Lake Tabernacle, more of an expanded pamphlet than a full-fledged history. The second, *From Tabernacle to Temple: The Story of the Vernal, Utah Temple* (1998), by Kathleen M. Irving and John D. Barton, is the story of the building of the Unitah Stake tabernacle and its conversion into the only temple in the world constructed inside an existing building. The third is an unpublished master's thesis entitled "The Geographical Landscape of Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region," (1992) by Crystal Wride Jensen. Jensen's real contribution is to argue persuasively that tabernacles are a significant part of the landscape in the Mormon Culture Region, but she spends very little time explaining why.²⁰

Various journals have featured the story of individual tabernacles and their significance in the history of the towns they inhabit. *Utah Historical Quarterly*, *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*, *Brigham Young University Studies*, *Snake River Echoes*, and *Idaho Yesterdays* have all published works on these significant buildings. Searches of archives, self published stake histories, and the collections of individuals yield even more information. Local sources provide further evidence that ties

²⁰ Stewart L. Grow, *A Tabernacle in the Desert* (Salt Lake, Deseret Book, 1958); Kathleen M. Irving and John D. Barton, *From Tabernacle to Temple: The Story of the Vernal, Utah Temple* (Vernal, UT: S.T. Tabernacle Enterprises, 1998); Crystal Wride Jensen, "The Geographical Landscape of Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region," (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1992).

tabernacles strongly into the lives of community members and show that those ties have often existed for over a century.

If there are so many people at the community level that are so attached to tabernacles, scholars are left to wonder why more systematic and substantial work has not been done. Why the lack of emphasis on the buildings that sit at the geographical and social centers of so many communities? There are two possible explanations for why Mormon scholars have overlooked the buildings. One is that they were too obvious to be objects of study. They were taken for granted because not only were they everywhere, but they were not temples, and temples are the main focus of the religion, at least as far as the built environment is concerned.²¹ The second reason is that as the church shifted from a Utah Church to a world-wide church the tabernacles, which were significant to Utah, were superfluous to Mormon populations outside the Mormon Culture Region, and scholarship about the church reflected as much.

As for scholars who are not members of the LDS Church and may have been able to see the buildings from a different perspective and yet have not done so, the author has just a few general observations. One is that regionalists, who may recognize significant buildings in various regions of the country often do not know how to categorize Mormons. They are not sure if members of the Church should be studied as if they are members of a church or of an ethnic group, as members of the Church exhibit elements of both. That decision of how to classify the Saints is made even more complex as the Church appears to become more mainstream. For historians of the U.S. West, the topic of religion has not received much attention, excepting Native American religion. Most

²¹ A Worldcat search for "Mormon" and "temples" yields over 200 book-length studies.

non-Mormon scholars have left the study of the Mormons to the Church members, antagonists, or Jan Shipp.

Thesis Structure

Chapter one discusses the various types of buildings that constitute the built environment of Mormondom, including the characteristics that define a building as a tabernacle. Chapter two discusses the historical context of tabernacle building. It describes the basis for the Mormon Village system, Joseph Smith's Plat for the City of Zion, and the role of the Great Basin environment in LDS community development. Chapter three recounts the social, cultural, and religious motivations behind constructing tabernacles, such as the Priesthood Reorganization of 1877. It describes in detail the planning, financing, and finishing of the buildings, as well as the multiplicity of purposes they were utilized for. Chapter four proposes a theoretical framework for understanding the significance of tabernacles by examining the various ways historians, geographers, and sociologists explain the meaning of place and community with and extended treatment of the utility of the sociological theory of symbolic interaction. Chapter five attempts to explain why the era of tabernacle building came to an end and the ways the buildings remain significant in their various communities, though not to the Church as a whole.

CHAPTER 1

A SHADOW, A REFUGE, A COVERT FROM STORM AND FROM RAIN

Defining the Tabernacle

Tabernacle is a term that has a long history. To the ancient Hebrews, a tabernacle was a tent, a temporary house of worship. In the Old Testament, Isaiah refers to a tabernacle as “A shadow in the daytime from the heat, and for a place of refuge, and for a covert from storm and from rain.”¹ The *tabernacle of the congregation*, however, was a temple.² The tabernacle served as the social center for the Israelites while they sojourned in the wilderness, as well as the religious center. Much like Leonard Arrington avers that in modern times tabernacles are precursors to temples, the tabernacle of the congregation served as the interim home for the Ark of the Covenant before the temple of King Solomon was constructed.³ In our day, the parallel of a building that prepares people for a temple has been an appealing one for members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; especially since they spent their own period of time “traveling in the wilderness” before the Promised Land was reached.

¹ Isaiah 4.6, King James Version of the Bible.

² Bruce R. McConkie. *Mormon Doctrine* (Salt Lake: Bookcraft, 1979), 774.

³ John Widtsoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young: Second President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book, 1954), 413.

Historically, the Church had three main types of religious architecture, the temple, the tabernacle, and the chapel.⁴ The temple is a place where sacred rites and ordinances pertaining to salvation and exaltation in the Kingdom of God are performed. They are the most sacred buildings on earth for members of the Church, a place where one's salvation can be worked out more fully, and where the ordinances of salvation could also be performed vicariously for the deceased. The temple is literally the House of the Lord, the place where His Spirit may dwell, to which He may come and give revelations to His people. No expense or sacrifice is spared in the construction of these buildings, and they are often where the Church's finest architecture is represented. They are not used for regular Sunday worship services, but are operated Monday through Saturday, for endowed members to attend to what they feel is the most important work they can be engaged in.⁵

Chapels are the Mormon equivalent to the standard Christian church house, serving neighborhoods by providing a meeting place for a ward to take the sacrament (communion), listen to sermons, and fellowship with one another.⁶ In the early Church, they were generally the most vernacular of the three structures, and they remain the smallest. LDS congregations are established with distinct geographic boundaries, and so two or three wards are often able to share a building on a schedule that rotates annually. Modern chapels are equipped with a gymnasium that can be used as overflow seating space, a kitchen, and classroom space.

⁴ There are several other types of structures associated with the built environment of Mormons: the "I" house, the polygamy house with two front doors, Relief Society halls, Seventies halls, bishop's storehouses, and academy buildings to name a few.

⁵ To be endowed is to have been initiated into the rites of the temple, which various Church leaders have taught endows the person with power from heaven as long as they keep the covenants they make there.

⁶ A ward is a local congregation that has from 200 to 1200 people, roughly comparable to a parish.

A great deal of confusion has arisen over what a tabernacle is. This is not surprising as the Latter-day Saints have a distinct sub-culture with their own ritual life, social life, and dictionary. Some wards have even developed distinctive dialects and pronunciations.⁷ There is little agreement outside the Church as to the meaning of the word. For some, tabernacle only refers to the portable temple of the ancient Hebrews. For Catholics, it is the cupboard where the instruments for the administration of communion are kept. For many non-denominational churches, tabernacles are regular churches, albeit large ones. The confusion generated is perhaps described best with a photograph:



Figure 3: Pocatello, Idaho First Ward Building

⁷ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 217.

Many use the terms temple, tabernacle, and chapel interchangeably when referring to LDS meetinghouses, making researching individual buildings challenging, especially when the building lies in the Mormon Culture Sphere where the Saints often lacked numerical superiority.⁸ Figure 3 shows a postcard of the First Ward building in Pocatello, Idaho. In the upper left hand corner, the caption indicates that the building is a Mormon temple. The building was not even a tabernacle, but a ward chapel.

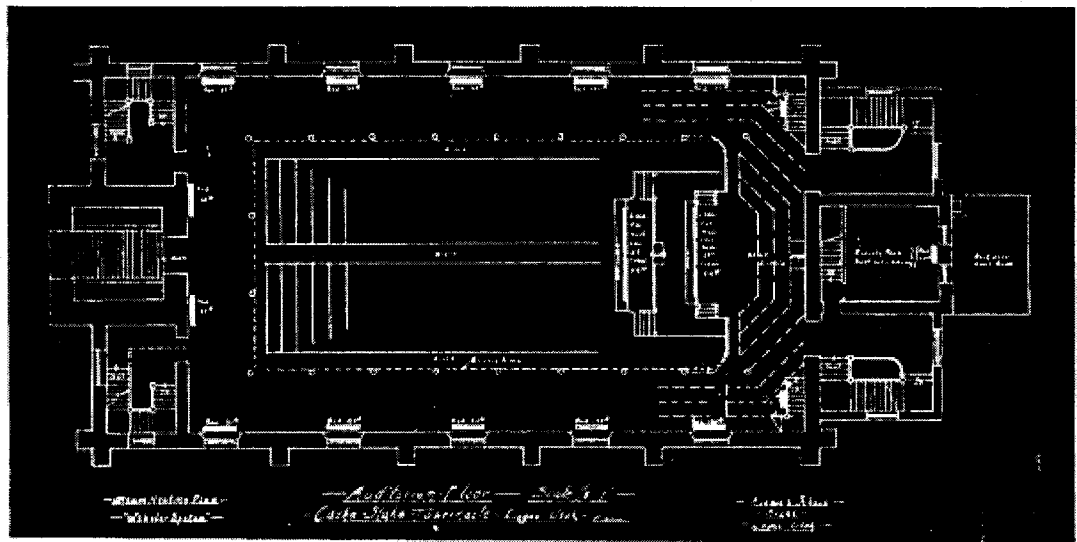


Figure 4: Floor Plan of Logan, Utah Tabernacle

Tabernacles, and later stake centers, are houses of worship built by stakes.⁹ Whereas chapels are designed for use by a neighborhood, tabernacles were for the use of the entire

⁸ D.W. Meinig, "The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (June 1965): 215.

⁹ A stake is an ecclesiastical unit roughly comparable to a diocese, containing from five to twelve wards. The name comes from Isaiah 54:2-3, which reads, "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." The stake was symbolic of the growth of the Church as being necessary to keep the Church strong and standing.

community. Though generally larger than ward buildings they are often architecturally indistinguishable from their counterparts. Tabernacles frequently had more attention and money lavished on them because of the larger pool of resources that a stake could command. Some are truly monumental works of architecture.

Tabernacles are buildings built by stakes, though any building that was especially large in size or seating capacity and was spectacular in form and detailing might be referred to as a tabernacle. The tabernacles in Parowan, Lehi, Springville, and Willard were also meetinghouses, albeit large and more ambitious than others and were called tabernacles by the “justly proud Saints who built them.”¹⁰ The inverse also applies as there are some buildings termed tabernacles by the Church, state historical societies, or the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers that are not called tabernacles by the locals.¹¹

Tabernacles are large, generally rectangular preacher-centered buildings, with a main floor and balcony facing a pulpit. Early ones often had seating capacities of up to 1,000, though some later ones seated up to 3,000 or more.¹² The meetings held there were not normally the regular Sunday meetings. Being designed primarily for receiving general instruction from the leaders of the stake and visiting general authorities, tabernacles were not designed for it. They also served as a place where settlers could meet and discuss the challenges that they faced in the process of settlement, such as the distribution of land,

¹⁰ Allen D. Roberts, “Religious Architecture of the LDS Church: Influences and Changes since 1847,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Fall 1975): 319.

¹¹ Crystal Wride Jenson, “The Geographical Landscape of Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region,” (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1992), 28.

¹² The Salt Lake Tabernacle is in a class by itself. Worshipers who weren’t into things like personal space or being able to breath were able to see 15,000 of their fellow Saints pack into the building.

irrigation, and agricultural procedures.¹³ Historian Joseph Heinerman explains the significance of ward buildings and tabernacles in the towns that had them:

[The] meetinghouse was not only a sacred place of worship as the synagogue to the Jews or the mosque to the Moslems, but it was also the primary center of cultural, social, educational, and religious activities. The lay members, both male and female, young and old, devoted more time to the meetinghouse and the multifarious interests revolving around it than did their religious counterparts in other Christian denominations. In the meetinghouses the camaraderie of Christendom was developed into an unparalleled cohesiveness between laity and leaders. The cultivation of talents and abilities in the different arts was encouraged or promoted at the meetinghouse, and certain individuals excelled and obtained eminence as musicians, public speakers, theologians, artists, etc. Finally, the religious significance attached to the ward meetinghouse can never be adequately explained. With all it embodied, then, the...meetinghouse became a unique and distinctive institution of early pioneer Utah.¹⁴

Tabernacles are known for their paucity of classrooms, though a few like the Granite Stake Tabernacle in Salt Lake City had quite a few classrooms. Occasionally they were provided with a font for performing baptisms. Several contained full basements that had a stage, a kitchen, and heating equipment. Some had attached gymnasiums whereas others had detached gymnasiums on the same property. Later buildings had rooms designated as stake offices, often with a safe for important papers. Because there was hardly any distinction between church and state in early Utah, tabernacles often served triple duty as a stake building, civic center, and courthouse, especially in communities where a bishop served as the mayor or sheriff of the town. Because they are larger and more ornate buildings, they were expensive to construct. The St. George Tabernacle, completed in 1876, cost \$110,000 to build, (In 2005 dollars, \$1.9 million) not counting

¹³ Jenson, 27.

¹⁴ Joseph Heinerman, "The Mormon Meetinghouse: Reflections of Pioneer Religious and Social Life in Salt Lake City," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50 (Winter 1982): 353.

labor and materials donated outright. Nobody knows the cost of the first Ogden Tabernacle (figure 5), as it was built entirely with donated materials and labor in 1855-6.

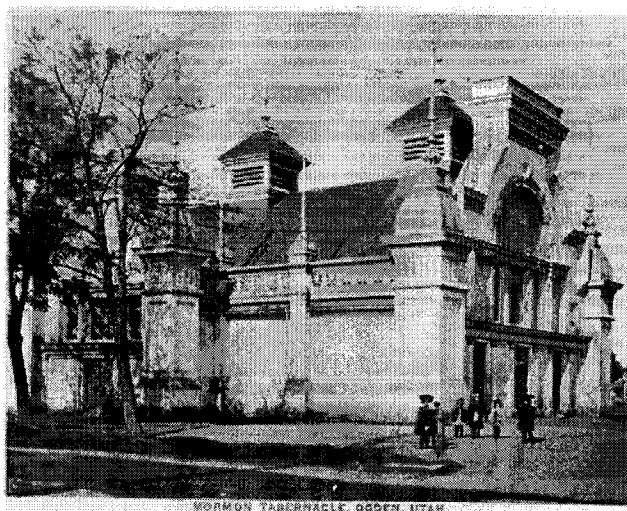


Figure 5: Ogden Pioneer Tabernacle, Ogden, Utah. Razed 1971.

Architectural Styles

There are a wide variety of architectural styles used to design tabernacles, reflecting not only the changes of taste in buildings in the country, but also the wide range of backgrounds the designers came from and the available materials to build with. The range styles runs from vernacular to spectacular, most leaning towards the spectacular since they represented one of the largest investments in time and money that communities would make. Vernacular, Romanesque Revival, Early Modern, Prairie School, Early Christian, California Mission, Victorian Gothic, Middle English Tall, Renaissance Italianate, and Victorian Eclectic are some of the architectural styles used, just to name a few. Some examples follow. (See figures 6-17)



Figure 6: Vernacular with Greek Revival elements- Morgan, Utah Tabernacle - 1882

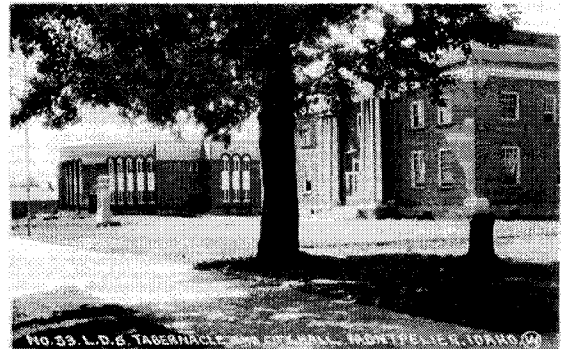


Figure 9: Early Modern -Montpelier, Idaho Stake Tabernacle (on left), 1919

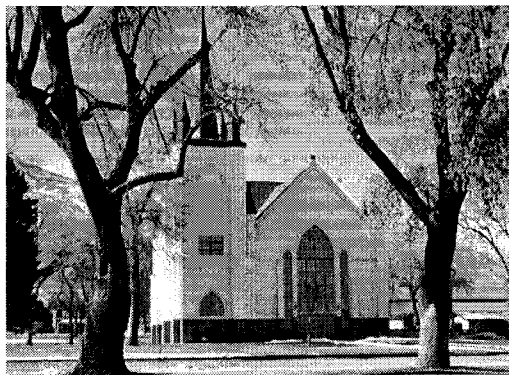


Figure 7: Victorian Gothic – Wellsville, Utah Tabernacle, 1908

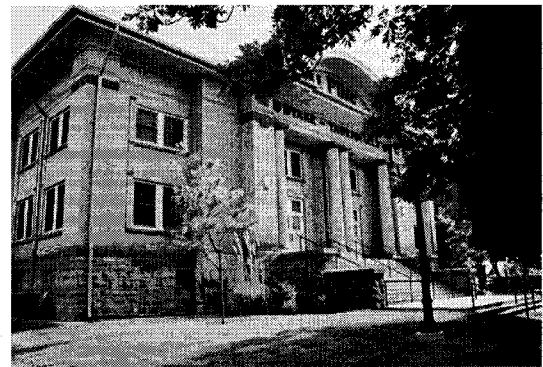


Figure 10: Prairie School –Alpine Stake Tabernacle, American Fork, Utah, 1914

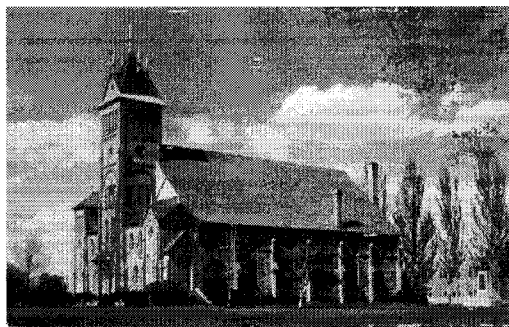


Figure 8: Romanesque Revival – Bear Lake Stake Tabernacle, Paris, Idaho, 1889

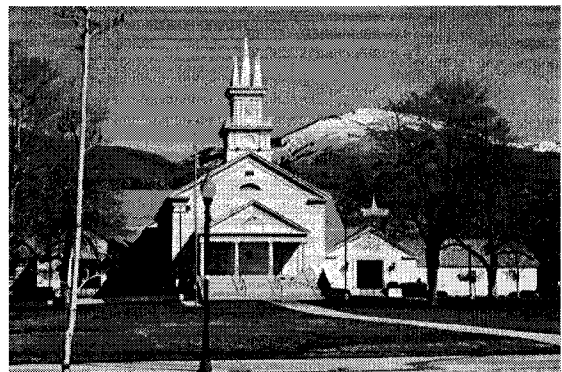


Figure 11: Greek Revival -Bountiful, Utah Tabernacle, 1863

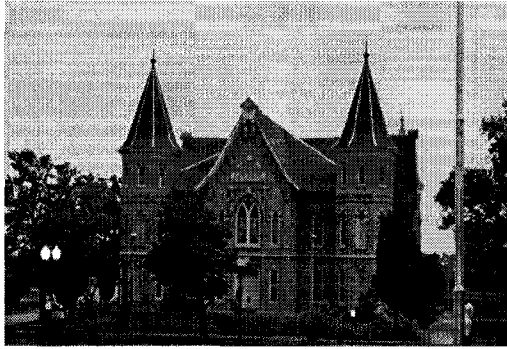


Figure 12: Gothic Revival -Utah Stake Tabernacle, Provo, Utah, 1896

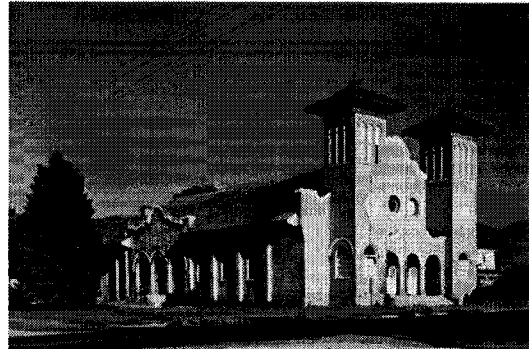


Figure 15: Renaissance Italianate -Nebo Stake Tabernacle, Payson, Utah, 1906



Figure 13: Early Christian -Granite Stake Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, Utah, 1929

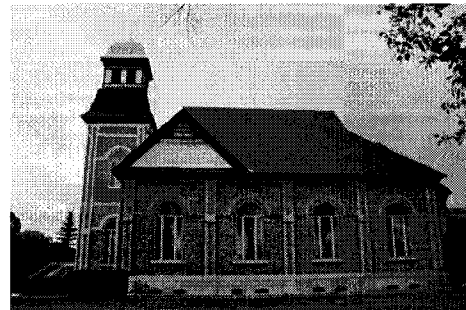


Figure 16: Victorian Eclectic - Randolph Stake Tabernacle, Randolph, Utah -1898.



Figure 14: California Mission – Hollywood Stake Tabernacle, Los Angeles, California, 1927

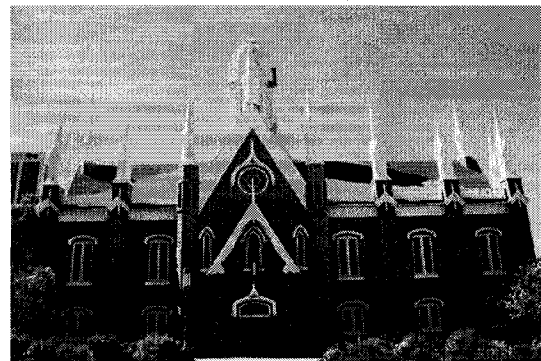


Figure 17: Victorian Gothic - Assembly Hall, Salt Lake City - 1877.

Early Tabernacle Construction

While the Church was headquartered in Kirtland, Ohio and Nauvoo, Illinois, there were very few chapels or other meetinghouses, partially due to the fact that most resources were dedicated to the construction of temples.¹³ Consequently, most large meetings were held outdoors as was common for many denominations in many areas. About one year before the Saints were driven out of Nauvoo, Joseph Smith instructed the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles to construct a tabernacle for the people to meet in. The tabernacle would not technically be a building, but closer to a large tent as the Twelve intended to use canvas, rope, and poles to build it. Having received his assignment from the Twelve, Apostle Orson Hyde purchased four thousand yards of canvas and \$125 worth of hemp to make rope.¹⁴ The tabernacle, which was to be constructed adjacent to the temple then under construction, was never built, and the four thousand yards of canvas was used for tents, tent ends, and wagon covers on the wagons of fleeing Saints when mobs drove them out of Nauvoo in 1846.¹⁵

The Saints constructed a tabernacle (See figure 18) in Winter Quarters, now Council Bluffs, Iowa, halfway to the Salt Lake Valley. This one was a little more substantial than the one planned for Nauvoo. It was built of horizontal green cottonwood logs in eighteen days. It was a far cry from the fine tabernacles that were to follow. The logs were rough

¹³ Several sources indicate that the Kirtland Temple was the most expensive building per capita that the Saints have built. It cost \$60,000 to build, which was an incredible sacrifice of money, goods, and labor for the Saints at the time given their financial condition. Elder Joe J. Christensen, emeritus member of the First Quorum of the Seventy avers that the Nauvoo temple was the second-most expensive building ever built by the church. Joe J. Christensen, "Latter-day Temples and Temple Worship," Brigham Young University-Idaho Devotional, 11 February 2003, accessed 5 July 2005; available from http://www.byui.edu/Presentations/Transcripts/Devotionals/2003_02_11_Christensen.htm; Internet.

¹⁴ Elden J. Watson, "The Nauvoo Tabernacle," *BYU Studies* 19 (Fall 1977): 417.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 421.

hewn with a broad axe and laid directly on each other. Cottonwood shrinks considerably when it dries, and so the walls shrunk by eighteen inches in height before the building was destroyed. The internal supports, which were vertical and thus did not shrink in the same direction as the walls, caused the walls to lean quite a bit. Because the building was constructed of green logs in the Midwest, the humidity in the building was quite high, causing mushrooms to grow on the walls in the dark, humid interior. Some said it reminded them of a flower garden and most certainly felt like a greenhouse.¹⁶

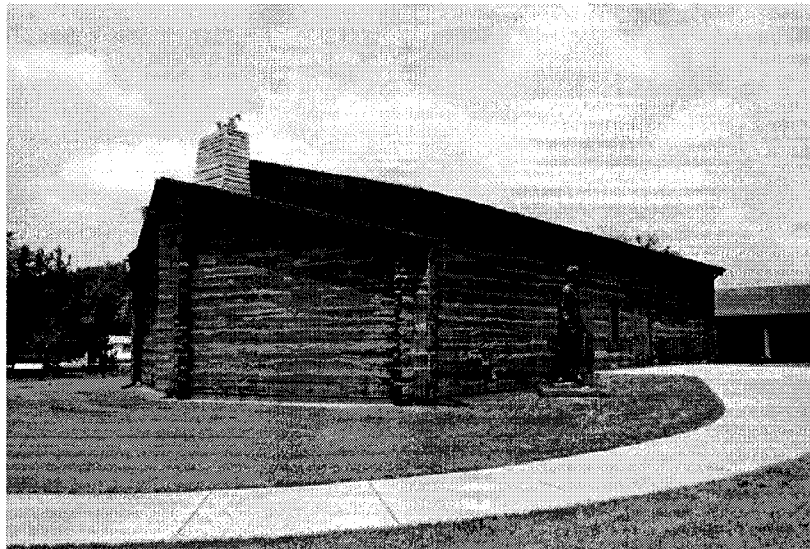


Figure 18: Replica of 1847 Kanesville Tabernacle, built in 1996

The Kanesville Tabernacle, as it was called, was the site of a very important event in Church history. From the time Joseph Smith was martyred on June 27, 1844, the Quorum of the Twelve led the Church. On December 27, 1847, over 1,000 people and nine of the twelve apostles met in the tabernacle and reorganized the First Presidency

¹⁶ This is according to the tour guide. August, 2002.

with Brigham Young as the President. The original building was dismantled around 1849. The replica was built by the State of Iowa in 1996 for use in the state's sesquicentennial celebration and donated to the Church after the festivities. The Church maintains a visitor's center there today.

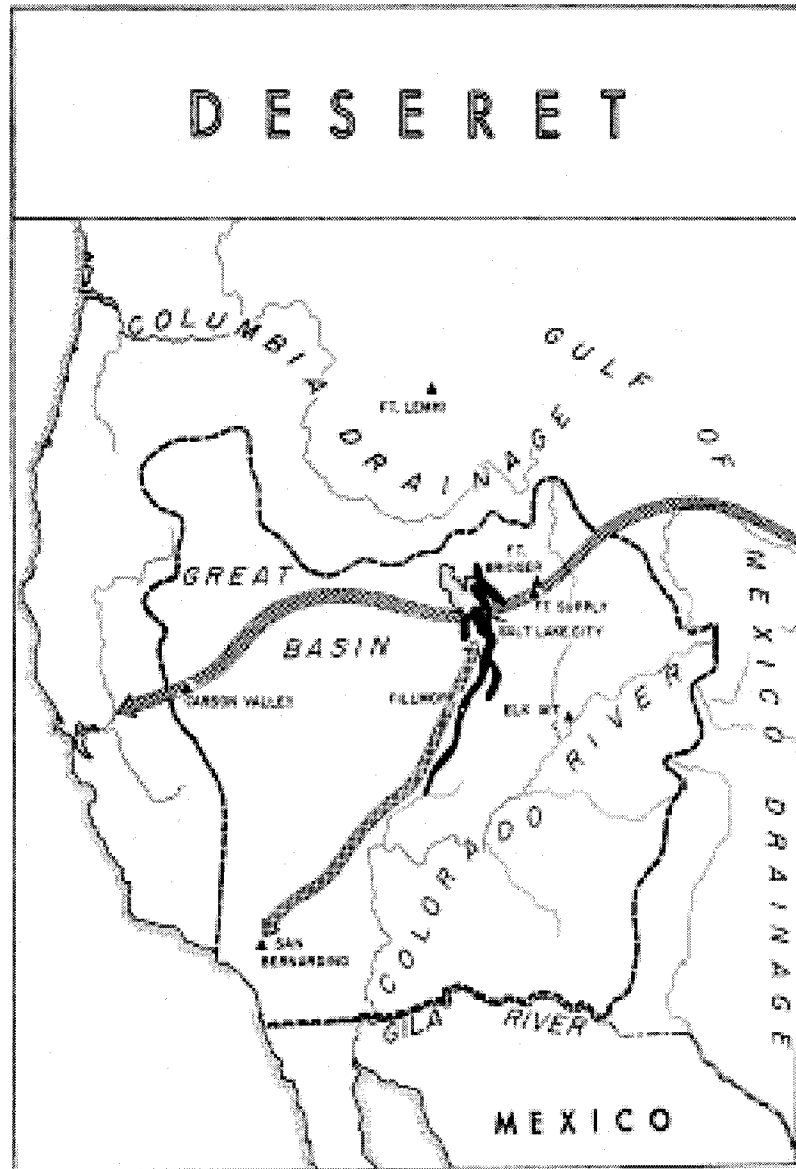


Figure 19: The Proposed State of Deseret

When the saints reached the Valley of the Great Salt Lake the Latter-day story of tabernacles began to take on a greater significance. Arriving in the valley on July 24, 1847, a day that many LDS communities still celebrate at Pioneer Day,¹⁷ the saints, after building a bowery, quickly began constructing homes and planting crops, preparing for the coming winter. Many, however, were not to remain in Salt Lake for long. The Church initiated a policy of “calling” groups of people to settle in various places throughout the Great Basin, Snake River Plain, and Colorado Plateau. The Church tried for the next fifty years to have the area claimed by the Church admitted to the United States as a state called “Deseret.”¹⁸

The concept of a tabernacle has been around for five thousand years, during which time the term has come to mean many different things to many different people. It is therefore not surprising that there has been such confusion over the Latter-day Saint usage of the term. Nevertheless, the tabernacle is a clearly defined building in the Mormon built environment, one that represents some of the finest architectural traditions of the Church.

¹⁷ Steven L. Olsen further explains the significance of the celebrations in pioneer and modern times in “Celebrating Cultural Identity: Pioneer Day in Nineteenth-Century Mormonism,” *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996-1997): 159-218.

¹⁸ Deseret was the Saint’s word for the honeybee, which, along with the hive, they used to symbolize industry and hard work.

CHAPTER 2

IN THE GREAT BASIN

This chapter focuses on the historical context of tabernacle construction. First, I will examine Joseph Smith's 1833 Plat of the City of Zion and how the Saints translated that plan into a western idiom with the Mormon Village system. I also analyze the role that the isolation and harsh environment of the Great Basin played in the village system and the construction of tabernacles.

The Plat of the City of Zion

"Behold, mine house is a house of order, saith the Lord God, and not a house of confusion,"¹ and Church members took that phrase to heart. Distinct from the somewhat haphazard settlement patterns of much of the West, most of the Mormon communities were settled and built up in an orderly manner. The institution that geographers so readily recognize as a Mormon village has its roots in the plan that Joseph Smith proposed for the City of Zion. Historian Richard H. Jackson noted that in the early and mid 1800's "there was a 'city mania' among Americans, [with] contemporary observers noting that nearly every person in the Ohio-Mississippi valley had in his pocket a

¹ *Doctrine and Covenants* 132:8. The Doctrine and Covenants is a series of revelations received by Joseph Smith and his successors as President of the Church

grandiose plan for a city that he wanted to sell in whole or in part,"² so Smith was not unique in having a plan for a utopian community. He introduced the plan to fellow members on June 25, 1833, but it was not presented as a formal revelation for the church.

It reads:

The plat contains one mile square; all the squares in the plat contain ten acres each, being forty rods square. You will observe that the lots are laid off alternately in the squares; in one square running from the south and north to the line through the center of the square; and in the next, the lots run from the east and west to the center line. Each lot is four perches in front and twenty back, making one half of an acre in each lot, so that no one street will be built on entirely through the street; but on one square the houses will stand on one street, and on the next one, another, except the middle range of squares, which runs north and south, in which range are the painted squares. The lots are laid off in these squares, north and south, all of them; because these squares are forty perches by sixty, being twenty perches longer than the others, their greatest length being east and west, and by running all these squares, north and south, it makes all the lots in the city of one size.

The painted squares in the middle are for public buildings. The one without any figures is for store-houses for the Bishop, and to be devoted to his use. Figure first is for temples for the use of the presidency; the circles inside of the squares, are the places for the temples. You will see it contains twelve figures, two are for the temples of the lesser Priesthood. It is also to contain twelve temples.

The whole plot is supposed to contain from fifteen to twenty thousand people: you will therefore see that it will require twenty-four buildings to supply them with houses of worship, schools, etc.; and none of these temples are to be smaller than the one of which we send you a draft. This temple is to be built in the square marked figure 1; and to be built where the circle is which has a cross on it on the north end. South of the plot where the line is drawn, is to be laid off for barns, stables, etc., for the use of the city; so that no barns or stables will be in the city among the houses; the ground to be occupied for these must be laid off according to wisdom. On the north and south are to be laid off the farms for the agriculturist, and sufficient quantity of land to supply the whole plot; and if it cannot be laid off without going too great a distance from the city, there must also be some laid off on the east and west.

² Richard H. Jackson, "The Mormon Village: Genesis and Antecedents of the City of Zion Plan," *BYU Studies* 17 (Summer 1975): 223.

When this square is thus laid off and supplied, lay off another in the same way, and so fill up the world in these last days; and let every man live in the city, for this is the city of Zion. All the streets are of one width, being eight perches wide. Also, the space round the outer edge of the painted squares, is to be eight perches between the temple and the street on every side. No one lot, in this city, is to contain more than one house, and that to be built twenty-five feet back from the street, leaving a small yard in front, to be planted in a grove, according to the taste of the builder; the rest of the lot for gardens; all the houses are to be built of brick and stone. The scale of the plot is forty perches to the inch.³

Geographer Donald Meinig portrays the City of Zion as a rigid gridiron of roomy blocks and streets in which one is able to discern the influence of the plans of New England towns, but formalized by the biblical foursquare and expressing a firm belief in the virtues of social concentration and of a rationally ordered society, which was a worthy setting for the kingdom of God on earth.⁴ Distinct from New England towns though, Smith added space at the center for monumental architecture, for the construction of twenty-four temples. These temples were more like civic structures than traditional meetinghouses.⁵ According to Wallace Stegner, the result was “a right-angled and rather stiff-elbowed version of the garden city, created well ahead of its time and demonstrating the advantages of an orderly town-building over the hit-and-miss squatting that characterized the usual western settlement.”⁶ The reasons for the plan were more than

³ Joseph Smith, Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* B. H. Roberts, ed., 7 vols. (Salt Lake: Deseret News Press, 1902-1932), 1:357-8. A perch, or rod, is a linear measure equal to 5.50 yards or 16.5 feet, making the streets 132 feet wide. This prompted Wallace Stegner to quip that “streets eight rods wide [were] enough, just in case there are traffic problems in Heaven, to allow for ten lanes of automobiles plus parallel parking on both sides. Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 25.

⁴ D.W. Meinig, “The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (June 1965): 198.

⁵ Martha Bradley, “Building Community: The Fundamentalist Mormon Concept of Space,” *Communal Societies* 21 (2001): 5.

⁶ Wallace Stegner, *Mormon Country* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1970), 28.

just a desire for orderly settlement. In a letter accompanying his plan, Joseph Smith enumerated the benefits accrued by settling in a nucleated pattern. Farmers and their families, who were often isolated from society by the distances they had to travel from their farms to population centers, which society “has been, and always will be, the great educator of the human race.” With easier access to village life, they would be able to enjoy all the societal advantages found in access to schools, public lectures, and other meetings. They would be able to surround their homes with the “same intellectual life, the same social refinement as will be found in the home of the merchant or banker or professional man.”⁷

The plat for the City of Zion provided the general outline for settlement in the Great Basin, but on a much smaller scale. As the Saints were agriculturalists, communities of 20,000 were not feasible, but a village was. Settlements established in the West may have been unlike the plan Smith outlined, but their morphology grew out of the same theological and philosophical concepts.⁸ Just as the City of Zion was to be established to provide social benefits, the village system was designed to facilitate group life, knitting the people together into a cohesive whole.⁹ The villages that the Saints established were unique in many respects. While there were other groups that established communitarian villages, the Church was the only faith to move their entire church to the West. In addition, much of the trans-Mississippi West was settled by individuals establishing isolated land claims rather than villages. This pattern was reinforced by the Homestead

⁷ Jackson, 230.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ronald W. Walker, “Golden Memories: Remembering Life in a Mormon Village,” *BYU Studies* 37 (1997-1998): 212.

Act (1862) that required people to live on their property and improve it to gain legal title to it. The isolated farmstead is so predominant in the West that many are surprised to discover the presence of true farm villages.¹⁰ Saints were also unique in that while other millennialists set a time for the return of Christ, they appointed a place, a Zion that would have to be built up before His triumphant return.¹¹ That Zion was to be anchored in the stakes established in the West. Isaiah 52:2-4 reads:

Enlarge the place of they tent, and let them stretch forth the
curtains of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen
thy stakes.

For thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy
seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited.

Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou
confounded...

They took this to mean that the Church, the tent, would expand, and there was
nothing that any worldly influence could do to prevent it.

A Place to Grow Saints

The Great Basin was a place where they could establish themselves free from the
persecutions of the world and be strengthened and prepared to “break forth on the right
hand and on the left,” spreading the restored gospel throughout the whole earth, much
like Joseph Smith said that the City of Zion would fill the earth. Both to pre-empt
settlement by those who were not members of the Church and to ensure a strong foothold
in the Great Basin, Brigham Young called people to establish small agricultural

¹⁰ Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952), 4.

¹¹ D.W. Meinig, “The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (June 1965): 197.

settlements throughout the region. Nearly four hundred Mormon villages were founded during his lifetime. As settlements spread out from Salt Lake, Young tried to keep settlements spaced about ten miles apart from each other to claim the land more fully and provide a resource base upon which each community could draw.¹²

Young was very clear about his intentions in establishing villages in the West. He said:

We want all the Latter-day Saints to understand how to build up Zion. The City of Zion, in beauty and magnificence, will outstrip anything that is now known upon the earth. The curse will be taken from the earth and sin and corruption will be swept from its face. Who will do this great work? Is the Lord going to convince the people that he will redeem the center Stake of Zion, beautify it and then place them there without an exertion on their part? No. He will not come here to build a Temple, a Tabernacle, a Bowery, or to set out fruit trees, make aprons of fig leaves or coats of skins, or work in brass and iron, for we already know how to do these things. He will not come here to teach us how to raise and manufacture cotton, how to make hand cards, how to card, how to make spinning machines, looms, etc., etc. We have to build up Zion, if we do our duty.¹³

That duty was taken very seriously by members of the Church. Members called or directed to settle specific areas viewed the call as coming from the Lord. In southern Utah, where conditions could be especially harsh, the persistence rate of around 50% was low compared to other Utah counties where it was over 75%.¹⁴ The pattern established was such a strong one that in 1937, nearly a century after the first LDS settlement in the

¹² Charles S. Peterson, "Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape," in Richard H. Jackson, ed., *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 94.

¹³ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1886), 10:172.

¹⁴ Dean L. May, Lee L. Bean, and Mark H. Skolnick, "The Stability Ratio: An Index of Community Cohesiveness in Nineteenth-century Mormon Towns," in *Generations and Change: Genealogical Perspectives in Social History*, ed. Robert M. Taylor, Jr. and Ralph J. Crandall (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1986), 155. quoted in W. Paul Reeve, "A Little Oasis in the Desert": Community Building in Hurricane, Utah, 1860-1920," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 62 (Fall 1994): 223.

West, that settlers near Malta, Idaho established a new community following the traditional pattern.¹⁵

Using the village system to build up Zion was not just a commandment from Church leaders, though that was enough for members of the church. Doctrine and Covenants 1:38 reads: “What I the Lord have spoken, I have spoken, and I excuse not myself; and though the heavens and earth pass away, my word shall not pass away, but shall all be fulfilled, *whether by mine own voice or by the voice of my servants, it is the same.*” (italics mine) A commandment from the leadership was the same as a commandment from the Lord. In 1838, Joseph Smith specifically said that “it was the duty of the brethren to come into cities and build and live, and carry on their farms out of the cities, according to the order of God.”¹⁶ This made gathering and settling virtually a sacrament upon the land.¹⁷ Here was the place “where the city of Zion would be erected, where they would “dig in,” as Prophet Joseph predicted, and the Devil would not again root them out. In this place they would build Zion by their own plan, live life by their own pattern, and not law of gentile design would be foisted on them.”¹⁸ President John Taylor (successor to Brigham Young) explained that:

In all cases in making new settlements the saints should be advised to gather together in villages, as has been our custom from the time of our earliest settlement in these mountain valleys. The advantages of this plan, instead of carelessly scattering our over a wide extent of country, are many and obvious to all those who have a desire to serve the Lord. By

¹⁵ Dean L. May, “The Making of Saints: The Mormon Town as a Setting for the Study of Cultural Change,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 45 (Spring 1977): 77.

¹⁶ Smith, 3: 56.

¹⁷ Meinig, 198.

¹⁸ Nels Anderson, *Desert Saints: The Mormon Frontier in Utah* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1942), 67.

this means the people can retain their ecclesiastical organizations, have regular meetings of the quorums of the priesthood, and establish and maintain day and Sunday schools, Improvement associations, and Relief Societies. They can also cooperate for the good of all in financial and secular matters, in making ditches, fencing fields, building bridges, and other necessary improvements. Further than this they are a mutual protection and a source of strength against horse and cattle thieves, land jumpers, etc., and against hostile Indians, should there be any; while their compact organization gives them many advantages of a social and civic character which might be lost, misapplied, or frittered away by spreading out so thinly that inter-communication is difficult, dangerous, inconvenient, and expensive.¹⁹

Sociologist Lowry Nelson in his 1952 landmark study *The Mormon Village* listed four reasons why the village system was particularly favorable to the village plan.

1. It provided security.
2. It facilitated cooperative efficiency by placing the members of the community in ready touch with the directing officers of the group.
3. It made for contentment, in that social intercourse was facilitated. Even in the pioneer stages these villages were of sufficient size to make possible the maintenance of religious, educational, and other social institutions.
4. By separation of residence areas from arable lands a more advantageous utilization of the lands was made possible – common pasturing of the fields after harvest, common fencing at first, were made possible by the fact that crops were stored and stacked in the village.²⁰

In other words, the village system facilitated settlement in the Great Basin because it met definite needs. As Henry Nash Smith discussed in his classic 1950 study *Virgin Lands: The American West as Symbol and Myth*, the West was conceived as a land of

¹⁹ Cited in Feramoz Y Fox, "The Mormon Land System: A Study of the Settlement and Utilization of Land under the Direction of the Mormon Church" (Ph. D diss, Northwestern University, 1932), 142-3. in May, 77.

²⁰ Nelson, 52-3.

opportunity waiting to be peopled and exploited.²¹ The Mormon Village was thought to be perfectly suited to such a milieu.

The *Deseret News* for September 11, 1861, described much of the area that became the state of Utah as “measurably valueless, excepting for nomadic purposes, hunting grounds for the Indians, and to hold the world together.”²² Despite the scarcity of good farming land, rainfall, and timber, and the possible depredations of the Ute and Navajos, the Great Basin was the place God had chosen and preserved as a refuge for his people, and whatever disadvantages it had would guarantee the isolation that would make it a safe place to gather.²³ A discourse by Apostle George Q. Cannon given in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on August 10, 1873 is instructive. He told the Saints assembled there that “good countries are not for us. . . . [But] the worst places in the land we can probably get and we must develop them.” Otherwise, the time would not be long “before the wicked would want it” if the saints settled in a richer country. They should thank God, even if all they had was “a little oasis in the desert where few can settle.”²⁴ Eager to be free from the persecutions that followed them since the Church was established in New York in 1830, the Saints willingly settled on marginal lands for the peace they would afford.²⁵

²¹ Henry Nash Smith, *Virgin Lands: The American West as Symbol and Myth* (New York: Vintage Books, 1950).

²² Quoted in Neal R. Peirce, *The Mountain States of America: People, Politics, and Power in the Eight Rocky Mountain States*, (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1972), 187.

²³ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 113.

²⁴ George Q. Cannon, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1886), 16:143-4.

²⁵ W. Paul Reeve, “A Little Oasis in the Desert”: Community Building in Hurricane, Utah, 1860-1920,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 62 (Fall 1994): 224.

Despite the marginality of the land that the Saints settled on for agricultural purposes, it suited the leadership of the Church perfectly for the real purpose behind coming to the Great Basin, the establishing of the Kingdom of God on Earth.²⁶ Most settlers came to the West seeking economic opportunities, but the opportunities sought by the Saints were social ones, to take the diverse party of people that accepted what they believed to be the restored gospel on earth and forge them into a harmonious group. “We found a Scotch party, a Welch party, an English party and an American party,” one Saint wrote to the *Deseret News*, “and we turned Iron Masters and undertook to put all these parties through the furnace and run out a party of saints for building up the Kingdom of God.”²⁷ Brigham Young, in many sermons and addresses indicated that the Great Basin was ideally suited to the growing of Saints, if nothing else. In fact, Saints were the “staple crop grown in the garden of Joseph [Smith].”²⁸

There can be no doubt that the first few years that the Saints spent in the West were not a time of general prosperity. The Great Basin has very little water, and the Saints expended huge amounts of energy constructing irrigation works and preparing land that had never before felt the bite of a plow for the sowing of seeds. The transcontinental railroad was two decades coming, and the cost of freighting in goods from the East or from the South, from ports in California, was prohibitive. Essentially everything used, worn, or eaten had to be produced locally. Brigham Young encouraged this economic

²⁶ Eugene E. Campbell, *Establishing Zion: The Mormon Church in the American West, 1847-1869* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1988), 147.

²⁷ *Deseret News* December 25, 1852 in Dean L. May, “The Making of Saints: The Mormon Town as a Setting for the Study of Cultural Change,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 45 (Spring 1977): 76.

²⁸ Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1886), 8:83.

isolation as a means of assuring social isolation.²⁹ This harsh environment assuredly left an impression on the lives of the Saints, but the intense social experience lived in the Mormon village probably shaped the people even more.³⁰

After arriving in the Salt Lake valley, immigrants would generally have a brief stay in Salt Lake, then be distributed out among other settlements or directed to initiate new ones. It was in these settlements where the social conditioning took place, not just on Sundays at church, but in the less formal daily contact that the village system afforded. Order, unity, and community were the values that Joseph Smith hoped to inculcate people within his City of Zion by concentrating people under a theocratic authority, which is what villages did.³¹ The sense of community created transcended the frontier individualism characteristic of other western settlements, putting the Saints at odds with much of antebellum America in ways other than religion.³² This social concentration, including the individual's subordination to the group, was a key to the great successes that the Saints enjoyed.³³

The exact methods and meanings behind the development of community will be investigated in another chapter, but for now, suffice to note that members of the Church who settled in the West were determined to make religion the most important factor in

²⁹ The area from Salt Lake City to Provo proved to be the exception to the isolation when they were able to mine the miners chasing gold further West.

³⁰ Dean L. May, "People on the Mormon Frontier: Kanab's Families of 1874," *Journal of Family History* 1 (Summer 1976): 188.

³¹ Leonard J. Arrington, Feramorz Y. Fox, and Dean L. May, *Building the City of God: Community & Cooperation among the Mormons*, 2nd ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1992), 3.

³² Carol Cornwall Madsen, "Creating Female Community: Relief Society in Cache Valley, Utah, 1868-1900," *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (Fall 1995): 128-9.

³³ Nancy Jacobus Taniguchi, "Rebels and Relatives: The Mormon Foundation of Spring Glen, 1878-90," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48 (Winter 1980): 368.

the development of new communities. They felt that their time, talents, and everything the Lord had blessed them with should be used in building up the Kingdom of God.³⁴ From the very beginning, of a new settlement, the primacy of religion for most of the Saints was reflected in the environment that they constructed. Churches and religion were not afterthoughts for when all the chores had been done, but an integral part of the community from the beginning.

The first structure constructed in most communities, even before cabins or other conveniences,³⁵ was a place to conduct religious services, generally a bowery (see figure 20).³⁶ A bowery is by its nature a temporary construct, and only provided the most rudimentary of comforts for worshipers. When settlers surveyed the new town site, one of the first orders of business was the planning of the large block in the center of town for public buildings (see figure 21), a block which was often called the “temple block” which showed the aspirations of the town builders.³⁷ This pattern held true even in Mormon settlements far removed from the Mormon Culture Region, such as Cardston, Alberta,

³⁴ Joel Edward Ricks, *Forms and Methods of Early Mormon Settlement in Utah and the Surrounding Region, 1847 to 1877*, Monograph Series vol. 11, no. 2 (Logan, Utah: Utah State University Press, 1964), 27.

³⁵ Stewart L. Grow, *A Tabernacle in the Desert* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book Company, 1958), 15.

³⁶ For the main settlement in Salt Lake City, the first permanent religious structure erected was the old tabernacle on Temple Square. Allen D. Roberts, “Religious Architecture of the LDS Church: Influences and Changes since 1847,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Fall 1975): 318. While L.D.S. society was monolithic, there were obviously those with varying degrees of commitment; some followed family, kin and other lodestars, hence the ubiquitous “Jack-Mormon.” As with any other community, there were contrarians, the lazy, the noncommittal, and the backslider who did have the same zeal for religion that their neighbors had.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Canada.³⁸ As soon as population and finances would permit, a tabernacle would be constructed.³⁹



Figure 20: Old Salt Lake Tabernacle and Bowery.



Figure 21: Price, Utah Tabernacle, Stake Offices, Carnegie Library, Courthouse

³⁸ Nelson, 223.

³⁹ Except in Mexico. One possible reason for this exception is that in Mexico, all churches are the property of the state, and leaders could not see the wisdom of expending huge amount of money and energy in the construction of a tabernacle only to immediately turn it over to the government. Instead, they built a fine academy building that they used for church services, dances, and other community events in much the same manner that tabernacles were used in the communities that had them in the United States and Canada.

As Joseph Smith's plan for the City of Zion was never accorded the status of revelation, the Saints did not follow it exactly. Indeed, the environment of the Great Basin precluded that. They were, however, in the founding of numerous Mormon villages, faithful to the principles embodied therein. The exigencies created by the environment helped to ensure sufficient isolation for these communities to develop in many of the ways that the Saints and their leaders desired. It did not create a completely homogenous society, but created a dominant culture of communitarianism.

CHAPTER 3

BUILDINGS AT THE CENTER

Reasons for Building Tabernacles

There were generally three different motivations for the construction of a tabernacle in a specific community. The first was that the leadership of the Church in Salt Lake directed communities to build one. Leaders did this in settlements that they believed were to become important central communities for gatherings and large meetings.¹ The decision was also made in areas that the Church desired to strengthen their claim to, legally and emotionally. In 1863, Brigham Young decided that the struggling cotton mission in St. George needed a shot in the arm. To rally the community, he determined that a tabernacle would be constructed. It was to be a monumental structure that would categorically state, “we are here to stay.”² This proposed centerpiece of the capitol of Utah’s Dixie would do more than encourage the Saints. The construction would provide work that would maintain the dignity of craftsmen by providing meaningful employment for many struggling to survive in the harsh environment. Though Young did not often subsidize communities, he chose to in this case because of the strategic importance of the colony. In his letter to the colony, he wrote, “I hereby place at your disposal, expressly to

¹ Crystal Wride Jenson, “The Geographical Landscape of Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region,” (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1992), 27.

² Douglas D Alder and Karl F. Brooks, *A History of Washington County: From Isolation to Destination* (Utah State Historical Society, 1996), 54-55.

aid in the building of afore-said meeting house, the labor, molasses, vegetable and grain titling of Cedar City and all other places south of that city. I hope you begin the building at the earliest practicable date: and be able with the aid thereby given, to speedily prosecute the work to completion.”³

The second condition was that an individual ward decided to construct a particularly large and fine ward chapel which they then would refer to as a tabernacle. The third and by far the most common was that a Stake decided independently to construct one, as in the case of the Fremont Stake Tabernacle. Though the Church was and is a monolithic religion, individual settlements were granted a large degree of autonomy, a policy reinforced by the difficulty of communication. President⁴ George A. Smith, at the dedication of the Fremont Stake Tabernacle in Rexburg, Idaho, indicated that he “was surprised when he heard it was to be built, surprised when he heard it was built without church aid, surprised when he heard it was paid for, and again when \$500.00 of the \$3,000.00 appropriated by the church for seating had been returned.”⁵ The presence of a tabernacle generally indicated a community of several thousand people to provide a resource base to draw upon for construction. This was not always the case though. Loa, Utah only had a population of 499 in 1920 when the Wayne Stake decided to construct one.

³ Ibid.

⁴ The president of the Church also serves as the president of the Church building committee. He would then logically been a person who should have had intimate knowledge of the plans to construct a tabernacle.

⁵ Paul W. Jensen, “Tabernacle Restoration & Rehabilitation for The City of Rexburg: Rexburg, Idaho,” Proposal by The Architects Studio, Pocatello, Idaho. (Updated 1979), 2. One can only speculate on the exact reason why President Smith was surprised when he heard the building was to be built, but it is the author’s opinion that it was because of the relative youth of the community.

Leaders at the stake and ward level understood as well as general leadership in Salt Lake that building projects brought the people in their stewardship together. One bishop commented that he “would hate most of all to be bishop in a ward which has no building project,” because of the level of cohesiveness such projects brought.⁶ Rank and file members were not left out of the decision to initiate a tabernacle. Members and leaders alike in the Unitah Stake in eastern Utah were talking about the building of a tabernacle over a decade before construction was started in Vernal. Six years before the project was officially approved and ground was broken, lumber was cut and stacked in preparation of the anticipated building.⁷ In Paris, Idaho, there was an “active town consciousness, and a continual desire to ‘put Paris on the map.’”⁸ The debate over the design and construction of the building was a topic of constant debate, a dialogue that became so heated that Paris residents were admonished to “work unitedly and sacrifice our feelings if not in accord with those of our file leaders.”⁹

Boosterism

The literature about boosterism in the U.S. West is sizable, but it has not addressed developments in LDS communities where the construction of tabernacles was often the

⁶ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 265.

⁷ Kathleen M. Irving and John D. Barton, *From Tabernacle to Temple: The Story of the Vernal Utah Temple* (Vernal, UT: S.T. Tabernacle Enterprises, 1998), 9-10.

⁸ Lisa B. Reitzes, *Paris: A Look at Idaho Architecture* (Boise, ID: Idaho State Historic Preservation Office, 1981), 39.

⁹ Ibid. One resident of Paris informed me that the reason that the north and south towers of the façade are different is that the factions could not agree on which design would be the best, though no reference could be located in contemporaneous sources validating the story.

focus of that booster spirit.¹⁰ Such boosterism was a powerful force for growth as it “dominated nineteenth-century thinking about frontier development” across the West.¹¹ Towns would often form booster societies that took out articles in eastern newspapers or other publications to promote their particular project, town, or settlement, each promising that with the right mix of investment and promotion, they could be the next Chicago, St. Louis, etc.¹² The ultimate symbol of permanence and importance in a Mormon community was the construction of a temple, but very few were able to marshal the resources and approval from Salt Lake to build one. The decision to build a tabernacle, however, did not have to come from Salt Lake.

The citizens of Rexburg involved themselves in a concentrated, concerted effort to bring in new settlement. Their breathless optimism mirrors that in many towns in the American West during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On January 29, 1906, twenty-five Rexburg merchants and businessmen met and organized the Commercial Club with “The sole objective...to promote commercial and social interests of the city and Upper Snake River Valley.”¹³ To further this end, they decided to

¹⁰ The most current treatment of boosterism and booster literature is David Wrobel’s *Promised Lands: Promotion, Memory, and the Creation of the American West* (Lawrence: University of Kansas, 2002). He does not discuss Mormon boosterism. Two themes that reoccur in the booster literature that he discusses are the West as an Eden, and the irrigated West being compared to the Nile. The Saints were not seeking an Eden as much as they were fleeing from Babylon. They did not seek to establish an area comparable to the Nile River Valley with the “fleshpots of Egypt,” but named their river that flowed into their “Dead Sea,” the River Jordan, harking to a promised land of a different, spiritual character. Where Wrobel’s analysis is especially useful is his discussion of a regional identity being forged and nurtured by a reaction to the “other.” (Wrobel, 184).

¹¹ William Cronon. *Nature’s Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1991), 34.

¹² Cronon relies on the abundant research on western boosters. See 23-54, 396-7 N. 45.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 123.

prepare, print, and distribute three booklets on Rexburg. The club also determined to secure a full-page advertisement and a two page write-up in *Sunset* magazine.¹⁴

The Commercial Club was not alone in its desires. The front page of the May 17, 1909 edition of *The Current Journal*, Rexburg's newspaper, carried the headline "The Rexburg Boosters" that contained a call to "Meet and organize a club for the purpose of promoting the best interests of the pioneer city of the Snake River Valley."¹⁵ One of the motivations for forming the club was "the fact that we had greater resources than any other settlement in this country, but if we neglected our opportunities, other places would surpass us and gain by their energy what we lose through indifference."¹⁶ The January 5, 1912 souvenir edition of the *Journal*, which had the dedication of the Fremont Stake Tabernacle as the cover story, was equally fervent in its determination in "call[ing] attention to some of the resources, attractions, and progress of our splendid valley and its rich alluvial soil, healthful climate, pure water, and enterprising citizens."¹⁷ The tabernacle in their midst announced to the world that Rexburg had arrived and was ready to provide everything the new settler would need.

Regardless of the reason for undertaking the construction process, a tabernacle represents a huge sacrifice on the part of the Saints, and was often a bold move given the

¹⁴ "To Advertise Rexburg," *The Current Journal* (Rexburg, Idaho), 2 September 1909. *Sunset* is not well indexed, and the author was not able to determine if the Commercial Club was successful in their endeavor. He was able to determine, however, that Twin Falls, Burley, Boise, and St. Anthony, all Idaho communities with tabernacles, were able to secure a write up in the development section. Boise and Idaho Falls also had advertisements to promote settlement in the magazine in 1909-11.

¹⁵ "The Rexburg Boosters," *The Current Journal*, (17 May 1909), 1.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ This was on the front page. Evidently the person setting the type failed to take into account that the year was no longer 1911 as the masthead indicated that it was the January 5, 1911 edition. To make matters even more confusing, when *The Current Journal* was put on microfilm, this edition shows up in both years.

financial situation of the church. Concerning the construction of the new tabernacle on Temple Square, Stewart L. Grow said:

The audacity of the planning which lay behind the announcement, and the scope of the project being undertaken, can be appreciated when it is realized that probably few, if any, auditoriums in America or the world were more commodious than the one announced by President Wells. Further, the project was to be constructed in a frontier area not yet served by a railroad and in which manufactured items such as steel building components were practically unobtainable.¹⁸

The problems faced in outlying settlements created a further burden in that the few shipping routes that had been established converged in Salt Lake, necessitating additional shipping from there or paying for a special trip directly from the source of materials or eastern suppliers. Apostle Franklin D. Richards helps explain why the Saints were willing to sacrifice so much. He said:

When I think of Logan and Cache County, I realize that you are blessed almost beyond your brethren and sisters in other Stakes of the Territory. You have a tabernacle here, second to none as a place of worship for the Saints of this Stake. You are supplied with other public buildings that place you in a good, comfortable position, such as a splendid court house, and a good, substantial college building, and you are in a position, as a people, by means of that college, to enjoy all the general benefits of a liberal and classical education and of knowledge that may be imparted unto you, not only in the laws and ordinances of the Church and the Kingdom of God particularly, especially and pre-eminently, but also in the arts as well as the sciences. You certainly occupy a very excellent position. But this is no reason why you should slacken your efforts. On the contrary, this prosperity should induce you to increase your diligence in all good things.¹⁹

Their tabernacle was an integral part in producing those benefits.

¹⁸ Stewart L. Grow, *A Tabernacle in the Desert* (Salt Lake: Deseret Book Company, 1958), 29-30.

¹⁹ Franklin D. Richards, *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1886), 24: 329-30

The United Order

Bureaucratic movements within the Church also heavily influenced the building of tabernacles. Between 1874 And 1876 the United Order was established in every major settlement of the Saints. Starting in St. George, members of the United Order would consecrate everything they owned to the Order, whose board would then assign a stewardship to the member. Membership in the Order was not compulsory, but there was tremendous social pressure to join. In *Building the City of God*, Leonard Arrington outlines the movement and traces its history through all the settlements that were under an Order at one time. For the purposes of this study, though, we need to know that the United Order was based on five ideas. First, the earth, and everything on it, belonged to the Lord. Second, there should be economic equality among the Saints. This was not an absolute equality, but a relative one that at least would ensure that everyone was employed and their basic needs were met. Third, surplus income was to be used for community betterment. The system was to promote thrift and make possible the rapid accumulation of money to purchase communal machinery and other things that would benefit the community. If everyone complied with the agreements made in establishing the order, a sense of union and brotherhood would be established, and a stronger sense of community attained. Fourth, freedom of enterprise should prevail, as each steward was free to manage his affairs as he saw fit. Fifth, there should be group economic self sufficiency.²⁰ It was a community movement with the emphasis on village self-

²⁰ Leonard J. Arrington, "The Mormon Utopia," *Halcyon* 10 (1988): 133.

sufficiency rather than on inter-village exchanges.²¹ This policy reinforced the insular nature of the center-facing villages.

Only a handful of tabernacles were constructed during the run of the United Order. The Order's biggest contribution to tabernacle construction was the development of the community spirit that Church leaders began to look to develop by other means as Orders dissolved throughout Mormondom. Also, beginning in the early 1870's, much greater differentiation in Church architecture was evident. While most meetinghouses continued to serve double duty as churches and schools, more and more began to be used solely for religious purposes, especially as school districts began to build their own schools and towns built town halls.²² In 1876, Brigham Young further set the stage for the central significance to communities of tabernacles by announcing that the Salt Lake Stake held no "center stake" authority over other stakes, but that all were equal in their dealings with each other.²³

The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877

Probably one of the most important yet least studied aspects of Church history is the priesthood reorganization of 1877, which had a huge impact on the construction of tabernacles. The United Order not only proved that the Saints were not ready for living the higher law of consecration, but that there were many serious leadership and

²¹ Feramorz Y Fox, "Experiment in Utopia: The United Order of Richfield 1874-1877," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 32 (Winter 1964): 359.

²² Allen D. Roberts, "Religious Architecture of the LDS Church: Influences and Changes since 1847," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Fall 1975): 311.

²³ Hartley, William G. "The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877: Brigham Young's Last Achievement," *BYU Studies* 20 (Fall 1979): 5.

organizational weaknesses in the Church at the ward, stake, and general levels that sorely needed to be addressed. Up to this point, members of the Quorum of the Twelve presided over many geographical areas of settlement, many serving double duty as stake presidents. During the last few months of his life (April to August, 1877) Brigham Young created a new structure for the quorums of the priesthood and organized and re-organized the existing stake structure. Elder George Q. Cannon said of this important step in Church government: "He set the priesthood in order as it had never been since the first organization of the church upon the earth. He defined the duties of the apostles, he defined the duties of the seventies, he defined the duties of the high priests, the duties of the elders and those of the lesser priesthood, with plainness and distinctness and power -- the power of God -- in a way that it is left on record in such unmistakable language that no one need err who has the Spirit of God resting down upon him."²⁴ This general reorganization of the Church into a new order began at a general conference in St. George in April, 1877 and continued throughout the summer. This Church reorganization was to mark the close of President Young's mortal ministry. He died in Salt Lake City on the 29th of August, 1877, only ten days after organizing Box Elder Stake. That stake was the nineteenth in the series of Stake organizations under this new plan and program of Church organization outlined in this document sent to the stakes on July 11, 1877.

The changes instituted during the priesthood reorganization were so sweeping that some scholars have referred to it as the "Mormon Reformation." Seven new stakes were created out of the existing thirteen. One hundred forty wards were added to the one hundred and one that existed previously. Fifty three new members of stake presidencies

²⁴ James R. Clark, "Circular of the First Presidency, July 11, 1877: Organization of Stakes and Priesthood Quorums" *Messages of the First Presidency*, 2:283.

were ordained, and young men were ordained to the priesthood for the first time.²⁵

Sociologists Valerie Bugni and Ronald Smith have noted that organizational development not only consists of changes in administration like setting new lines of authority, rules, and working procedures, but also requires a change in the working environment.²⁶ The church was organized much more clearly along stake lines, and the stakes were given greater autonomy, especially in the light of Brigham Young's declaration that there was no hierarchy of stakes with the Salt Lake Stake at the top. This freedom included even greater latitude than previously enjoyed to plan and execute the construction of ward meetinghouses and tabernacles.²⁷ While tabernacles had been built as early as the 1850's (See Figure 22), the greatest number and the most architecturally impressive buildings were not constructed until after the 1877 reorganization. Of the twenty three extant tabernacles in Utah, only four were completed before 1877 (see figure 22).²⁸

The reorganization influenced the construction of tabernacles in two very clear ways. One of the features to the Great Awakening for the rest of Christian America was the destruction of the notion of territoriality: the idea that a church or congregation was identified within a geographically defined location.²⁹ From the Nauvoo period on, the

²⁵ Leonard J. Arrington, *Brigham Young: American Moses* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 394.

²⁶ Valerie Bugni and Ronald Smith, "The Role of Architecture and Sociology in Organizational Development" *Connections: AIA Las Vegas Forum Newsletter* (June 2002): 2.

²⁷ Richard W. Jackson, *Places of Worship: 150 Years of Latter-day Saint Architecture* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 108.

²⁸ Allen D. Roberts, "Religious Architecture of the LDS Church: Influences and Changes since 1847," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Fall 1975): 318.

²⁹ J.B. Jackson, "The Order of Landscape: Reason and Religion in Newtonian America," in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographic Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 157.

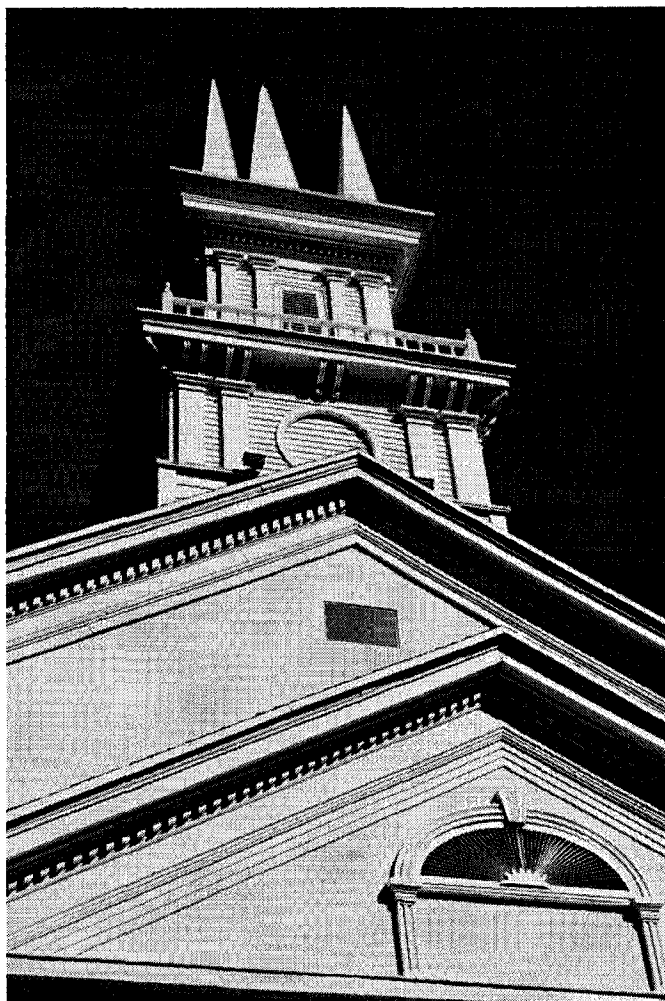


Figure 22: Spires of the Bountiful, Utah Tabernacle, Built 1857-1863. It took so long because shortly after ground was broken, the Utah War commenced. For a while the foundation was used to store grain. Actual construction took approximately three years.

Church held to the notion of territoriality, making the bishops of wards responsible for the temporal welfare of the saints that resided within their ward boundaries. A letter from the presidency of the Church sent to wards and stakes on July 11, 1877 directed Church leaders to strengthen territoriality. It instructed “that every family, no matter how far removed from settlements, is recognized and numbered with the people of the nearest Ward. It is expected that every member of the church will have his name enrolled in the

church record of the Ward and Stake in which he lives, or else he will not be recognized as a member of the church.”³⁰ Bishops were to account for each member of the their ward, ensure that all the priesthood quorums were staffed, guarantee that an effective ward teaching program was conducted, and turn in quarterly reports of membership, finances, and ward activities, among other things.³¹

The reorganization of the Salt Lake Stake included the building of the Assembly Hall on Temple Square for stake priesthood meetings. (Figure 21) The Assembly Hall was built by direct order from Brigham Young for that purpose. He even helped design the new building. To accommodate the new construction, the old tabernacle was razed.³²

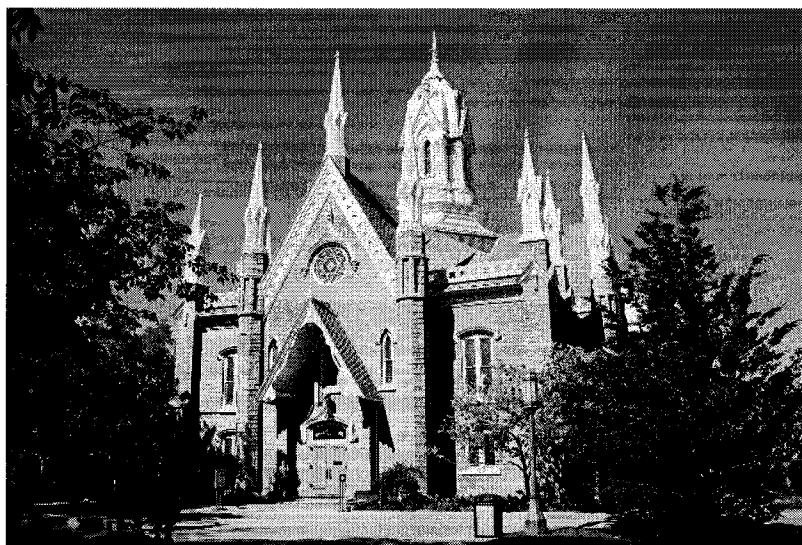


Figure 23: Assembly Hall on Temple Square, Salt Lake City

³⁰ Clark, 2:284.

³¹ This program requires that Elders are assigned as “block teachers” that are to visit all the families on their block weekly to ensure that the spiritual and temporal needs of the families are met. They were to report back to the bishop if any family had requirements that the Church could help to meet. This program survives in the Church today as the monthly Home Teaching program. Daniel H. Ludlow, ed., “Bishop, History of the Office,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, Vol. 1, (New York: Macmillan, 1992).

³² Hartley, William G. “The Priesthood Reorganization of 1877: Brigham Young’s Last Achievement.” *BYU Studies* 20 (Spring 1979): 22.

This building is a tabernacle, but because it sits right next to the new tabernacle, it was referred to as the Assembly Hall to avoid confusion. During the next seven years, each of the cities that held a reorganization conference in a bowery (Morgan, Coalville, Manti, Richfield, Paris, Cedar City, Provo, Moroni, Panguitch, Wellsville, Smithfield, and Brigham City, though the last was started shortly before the reorganization) built a tabernacle.³³ These buildings were architecturally distinct from previous Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival tabernacles in utilizing Gothic Revival or Victorian styles.³⁴

In these new tabernacles, a stronger link was to be forged between the members and the leadership in Salt Lake. The reorganization letter instructed that "Once in every three months a conference of the officers and members of each Stake will be held, and it will be the duty of the Apostles to attend these as often as practicable. The Twelve have been relieved from presiding over districts, and they will devote themselves to traveling and preaching the gospel to the people, and see that the officers in the several Stakes do their duty."³⁵ These new quarterly conferences began in every stake, taking the place of the annual, semi-annual, or completely random conferences of the past. With few

³³ Ibid., 31.

³⁴ Paul L. Anderson, "Mormon Tabernacle Architecture: From Meetinghouse to Cathedral," unpublished lecture, Utah Heritage Foundation Lecture Series, Assembly Hall, 12 April 1979. The July 11, 1877 letter may have had an impact on this architectural differentiation. One section reads, "Every settlement should be provided with a library for general reading, and great care should be taken in the selection of books, so as to have those of the most useful and instructive character. Works upon architecture and gardening should receive special attention, and no library should be without several works of this description. By the aid of these works a better taste for buildings and other improvements will be developed, and the effect will soon be visible in the improved style of dwellings which will be erected all over the Territory. Clark, 2:289.

³⁵ Clark, 2:286.

exceptions, each of the quarterly conferences would be visited by a member of the Quorum of the Twelve or the First Presidency.³⁶

Community Maturity

The presence of a tabernacle in a community was seen by members as an indicator of the maturity of the community. Average members as well as leaders desired to have one in their town. Community members, who may or may not have been members of the Church, often lobbied for the construction of a tabernacle. The Commercial Club of Rexburg, Idaho in particular lobbied for the construction of a tabernacle. Their purpose in that and other community development was because of “the fact that we had greater resources than any other settlement in this country but if we neglected our opportunities other place would surpass us and gain by their energy what we lose through indifference.”³⁷ The stake presidency of the Union Stake in La Grande was encouraged to build a tabernacle by authorities from Salt Lake. “Apostle M.F. Cowley spoke encouragingly of the enterprise of the people in undertaking to build a house for the stake. [He] promised that all would receive double for all they should contribute for this purpose.”³⁸

As the membership of the church increased, stakes split, and new stakes would plan and construct new tabernacles to hold their meetings as well. The decision to undertake what could be a very expensive and time consuming process was in many ways the easy

³⁶ Hartley, 27.

³⁷ “The Rexburg Boosters,” 1.

³⁸ Ellen S. Bean, Ariel S. Bean, and Barbara Bean Miller, “History of the Union Stake – La Grande Oregon Stake, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 1901-1980,” Unpublished manuscript in possession of the author (La Grande, OR, 1951 and 1980), 58.

part. Gathering the requisite funds in areas that were generally cash poor was often a challenge. Prior to 1918 when procedures for funding construction were put into place, Church headquarters funded construction projects on an ad hoc basis, from about 30% under Joseph F. Smith to 50% under Heber J. Grant, depending on the financial condition of the church at any given time, with the remainder of construction costs being borne by the members of the stake or ward that initiated the project.³⁹

Financing Construction

These members at the local level resorted to a wide variety of methods to pay the 50%-70% of the construction costs. One method was simply by freewill donations of labor or money. Even little children were encouraged to donate to the building fund. A great benefit of this method is that it gave all members a feeling of pride and ownership for their building.⁴⁰ In addition to these freewill offerings, each member was usually asked to tithe or donate every tenth day of their labor to building the edifice, a method used for a variety of public works projects.⁴¹ Some units funded construction by selling shares in the new building.⁴² The Teton Stake in Driggs, Idaho, after securing a construction loan from a bank in Salt Lake City, held a week long carnival to raise the remainder needed. One of the biggest money makers of the carnival was the creation of a

³⁹ Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 121.

⁴⁰ Janell Brimhall, "'Diversities of Gifts': The Eclectic Architecture of Early LDS Churches," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 68 (Summer 2000): 157.

⁴¹ Roberts, 306.

⁴² Ronald W. Walker, "'Going to Meeting' in Salt Lake City's Thirteenth Ward, 1849-1881: A Microanalysis," in Davis Bitton and Maureen Ursenbach Beecher, eds., *New Views of Mormon History: A Collection of Essays in Honor of Leonard J. Arrington* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1987), 148.

rivalry between different districts in the selection of a carnival queen and king. Every ward or district was allowed to cast votes for their choice, their number of votes being determined by the amount of money donated to the building fund.⁴³

Another method involved stake leadership allotting wards a dollar amount to raise and let the ward decide what method suited their situation best. Leaders did not, however, excuse themselves from contributing to the fund. If anything, they were more demanding of themselves than of the general membership. President Mark Austin of the Fremont Stake wanted assurances that construction costs for their tabernacle would be paid. At a stake priesthood meeting, he “asked for more than an upraised hand supporting the project.”⁴⁴ He asked for pledges of money and then set the example by pledging \$1,000. Quickly, other community pillars also made large subscriptions. By the end of the meeting, others had pledged smaller amounts, with a total of almost \$12,000 being promised. Ultimately, about thirty thousand dollars were pledged.

The following story is told about the Blackfoot, Idaho tabernacle:

The leaders of the Blackfoot Stake, when the decision to build was made, were President James Duckworth, Counselors Nofear Davis and Heber C.C. Rich. The three men met prior to the construction for the purpose of making allotments to the stake membership for contributions to build the tabernacle. The first to be considered was their own allotment. Counselor Nofear Davis was asked to leave the room. After careful deliberation on the part of the two remaining, they allotted him \$250. He returned and Heber C.C. Rich left. His allotment was set at \$250 also. Now came President Duckworth’s turn. When he returned to the room, he learned their decision – his allotment was \$1000. “You believe honestly in your hearts,” said the president, “that I should donate \$1000?” “Yes,” they answered. “You believe,” retorted President Duckworth, “that I am able

⁴³ Benjamin Driggs, Harold Forbush, and Lewis Clements, *History of the Teton Valley* (Rexburg, ID: East Idaho Publishing, Co., 1970), 181-2

⁴⁴ David Crowder, *Rexburg Idaho: The First One Hundred Years 1883-1983* (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, 1983), 163. Decisions were made by common consent. But this also implied obligation: by raising your hand, you were agreeing to bind yourself to the decision that had just been made.

to do that?" "Yes," again they answered. "All right," he replied, "I will pay \$2000." And he paid in cash. He always believed in going the second mile.⁴⁵

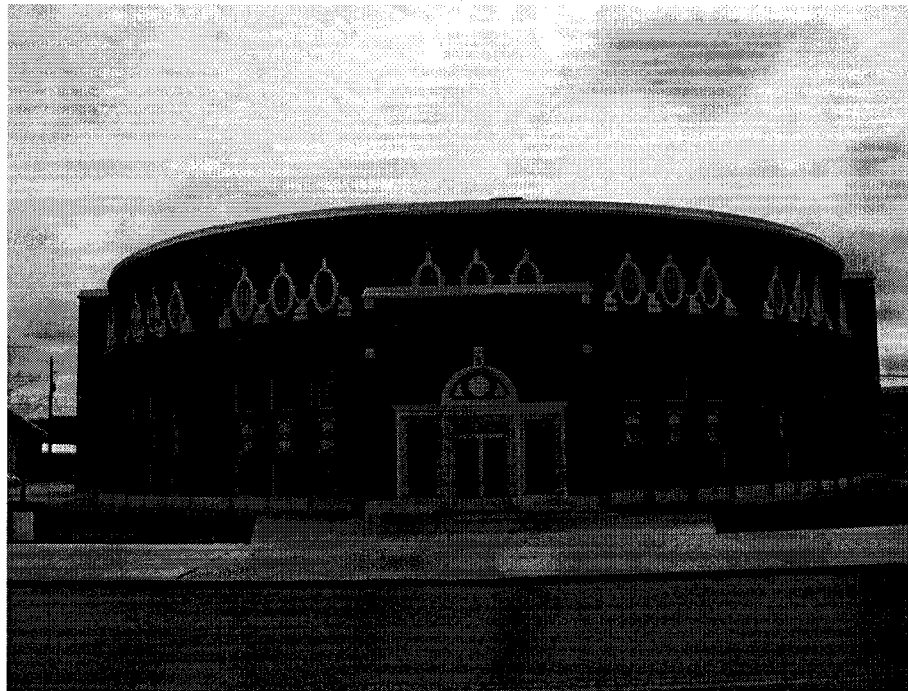


Figure 24: Blackfoot, Idaho Tabernacle.

Location

The location that the Saints chose for these buildings is instructive as to the building's importance. The vast majority of these buildings sat on the main street of the town, usually on the equivalent of Main and Center in the central square that was set apart for community buildings when the town was laid out. If it was not possible to build on the central location, another highly visible spot was chosen. For example, the Star Valley Stake Tabernacle in Afton, Wyoming sits on a hill overlooking the town, and in a time when houses were smaller and trees not as well established, the building could be seen

⁴⁵ Bingham County, Idaho, Centennial Book Committee, *Bingham County, Idaho* (Dallas: Taylor Publishing, 1985)

from quite a distance. Even in Mormon communities, money did often factor into the decision of where to build. The consensus of the Stake Presidency and other surveyors was that the Fremont Stake Tabernacle should be on Main Street, and on a corner lot, if possible. The Commercial Club in particular lobbied for it to be situated on Main Street. The problem was that it would be considerably more expensive to purchase a lot on Main Street than elsewhere. Upon considering all the options, the Stake Presidency decided to buy a site directly north of the tithing office, offered by Willard A. Ricks for a price of \$750.⁴⁶ Many Commercial Club members still wanted the tabernacle on Main Street but were told that they would have to raise the difference between the Ricks' lot and a Main Street lot, which amounted to about \$4,000. When the club was unable to raise the requisite funds, the stake announced that the Ricks' property was being purchased.⁴⁷

Regardless of the exact method used to pay for the buildings, it was hard work, cooperative effort, and sacrifices that allowed the tabernacles to be built. The Saints were no strangers to hard work and sacrifice. Many had sold everything they had to be able to come to the Promised Land, many forsaking their families and countries to go gather with the Saints. Most understood that the sacrifice was not over when they reached the Great Basin. One person remembers that upon their arrival in their new Great Basin home "his father unyoked the oxen and led the family into the brush where they knelt down and [his] father prayed 'not for riches, but that they might be faithful come what may, life or death.'"⁴⁸ Most Latter-day Saints, with their reverence for Church authority and the

⁴⁶ Crowder, 163. This site lies only one half block north of Main Street.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952), 133.

belief that their leaders were divinely inspired were willing to make whatever sacrifices that were asked of them.⁴⁹

The stories about sacrifice to build the tabernacles that dot the Mormon Culture Region are legion. In Wellsville, no contracts were let out for the construction. Young girls thinned and hoed beets to make money for the tabernacle fund. Members donated hay, grain, veal, cheese, butter, and eggs to be sold in Salt Lake City to raise more money. The Relief Society held quilting bees. Young boys helped out on the building site, running, fetching, and digging as directed by workers.⁵⁰ Saints donated cattle and horses as well as their agricultural output to pay for the Cardston Stake Tabernacle in Cardston, Alberta.⁵¹ One brother who worked for a brick company in Vernal, Utah had taken part of his pay in brick to be able to build a nice home for his family donated his bricks to the construction of the Uintah Stake Tabernacle and lived the rest of his life in a log cabin.⁵² When the Wayne Stake Tabernacle was receiving an addition, the women of the town showed up in force to sand the new hardwood floor by hand.⁵³

The citizens of St. George were intent on having the finest materials available for their tabernacle, so they ordered 2244 panes of glass from New York City. The glass had to be shipped all the way around South America and freighted up from Los Angeles.

⁴⁹ W. Paul Reeve, "A Little Oasis in the Desert": Community Building in Hurricane, Utah, 1860-1920," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 62 (Fall 1994): 231.

⁵⁰ Wellsville Historical Committee, *Windows of Wellsville* (Providence, UT: Keith W. Watkins and Sons, Inc., 1985), 382.

⁵¹ *Chief Mountain Country: A History of Cardston and District* (Cardston, Alberta, Canada: Cardston and District Historical Society, 1978), 308.

⁵² Irving and Barton, 10.

⁵³ Miriam B. Murphy, *A History of Wayne County* (Utah State Historical Society, Wayne County Commission, 1999), 323.

Before the shipping agent would release the glass, the shipping bill of \$800 had to be paid. David Cannon, local leader and leading citizen of St. George, was chosen to raise the money to bring the glass from California. The day before his departure, despite the fact that he had only raised \$200, he prepared to go to California to pick up the glass. Meanwhile, in the nearby town of Washington, Danish immigrant Peter Nielson had saved \$600 in gold to enlarge his home. After a sleepless night, because he knew of the dilemma facing Brother Cannon, he walked several miles from Washington to St. George to give the money to Brother Cannon, catching him as he was leaving. Soon thereafter, people who owed Brother Neilson money for years began to repay him and he was still able to expand his home. Visitors to the St. George Tabernacle today will see that many of the original panes are still in place.⁵⁴

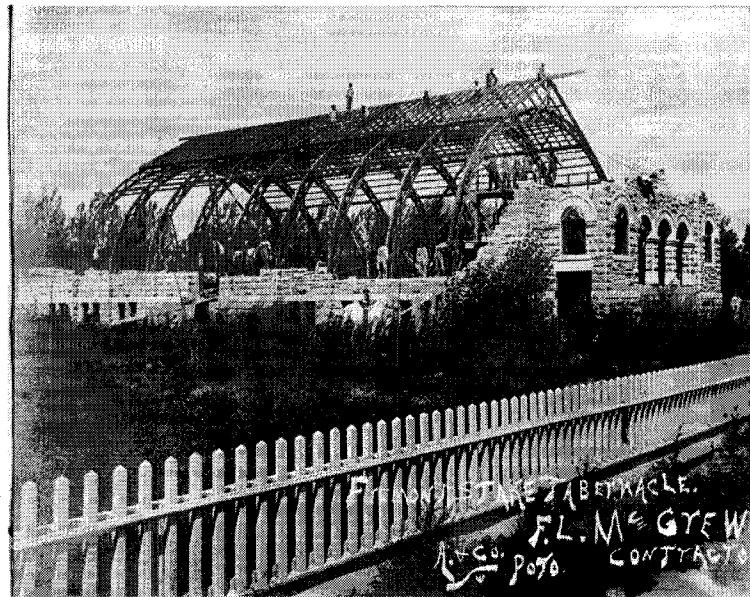


Figure 25: Construction of the Fremont Stake Tabernacle, Rexburg, Idaho, 1911

⁵⁴ Infowest.com, "15. St. George Tabernacle," *St. George Walking Tour*, 1994, accessed 5 July 2005; available from <http://www.infowest.com/Utah/colorcountry/History/tabernacle.html>; Internet.

Local historians often look back at the building of the tabernacle in their community as one of the times that defined who residents were as a community and group of Saints. Kathleen Irving and John Barton said, “The crowning communal achievement of Ashley Valley’s early history was the 1907 completion of the Uintah Stake Tabernacle. The faith of the turn of the century pioneers was fire hardened and shaped on the anvil of adversity and hard work. Sacrifice of time, effort, and scanty means finished their faith in the furnace of the Almighty’s workshop.”⁵⁵ The sacrifices asked of them, while causing a few to turn away from the Church, were for most a source of great pride.

Vernacular Elements

Though tabernacles represented a significant investment, the Saints were remarkably willing to experiment or make up the plans as they went along. The plans for the Salt Lake Tabernacle were either non-existent or so incomplete that decisions such as where to place the organ and the choir seats were not made until the shell of the building was well under way.⁵⁶ When advised that adding a full basement to the Fremont Stake Tabernacle would only increase the cost of construction by \$100, the stake presidency decided to add one even though the plans did not call for one. Numerous buildings were changed to coincide with the whims of the builders at the time, changes that never had to undergo the scrutiny of an engineer or pass an inspection for compliance with modern building codes.

⁵⁵ Irving and Barton, 7.

⁵⁶ Grow, 40.

Especially before the coming of the railroad, materials to construct the tabernacles were mainly limited to whatever the Saints could find in the area or produce locally. This did not slow the Saints down much as they found ways to get around the lack of materials. One feature that is common in numerous tabernacles was faux hardwood finishing. The Great Basin is lacking in hardwoods, so craftsmen would painstakingly paint pine doors and paneling to look like they were made of fine grained hardwood. (Figure 26) When building the new tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City, the designers wanted marble pillars to support the balcony. Since marble was not available to the Saints at the time, boards were glued together and turned on a lathe to make the pillars, which were then painted to look like a fine marble. (Figure 27)

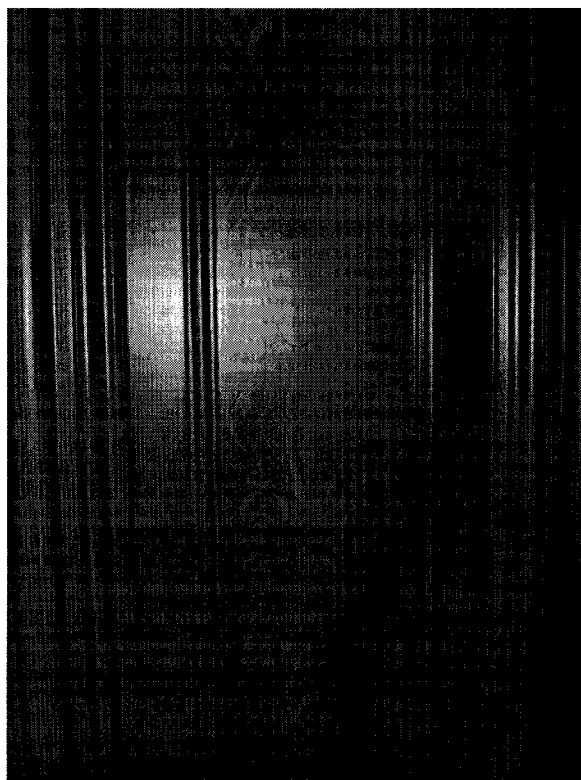


Figure 26: A pine door panel in St. George Tabernacle painted to look like hardwood

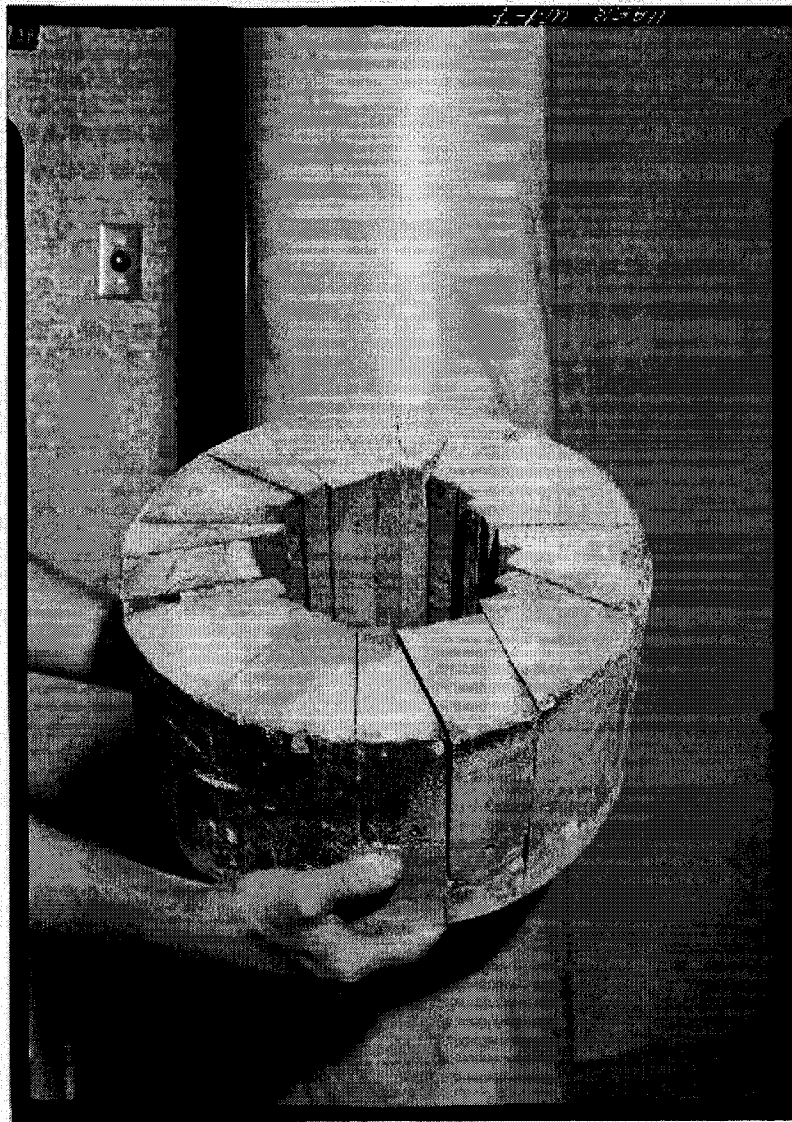


Figure 27: Cross section of pillar with painted pillar behind, Salt Lake Tabernacle

Perhaps the greatest example of the Saints making do with the materials at hand is in the construction of the roof of the new Salt Lake Tabernacle. The nine foot thick dome was constructed without nails, using wooden pegs and rawhide wrappings to secure the joints.



Figure 28: Detail close-up view of wooden peg fastenings in the roof of the Salt Lake Tabernacle; note lapped joint fastened with iron bolts using washers fashioned from oxen shoes

Non-Mormon Involvement

Other than in the Salt Lake area, most Mormon settlements had few if any non-Mormon residents. In some areas, the Saints were so well established that they precluded any “gentile intrusions,” such as in the Sanpete Valley, where thirty years of L.D.S residence transpired before any significant non-LDS settlement occurred. Nevertheless, there were settlers of different faiths that recognized the benefits that a tabernacle would provide to their community. Shortly after the Rigby Idaho Stake Tabernacle was begun, Stake President John Hart received the following letter:

Spencer, Idaho
Hon. J.S. Hart,
President, Rigby Stake, Menan, Idaho

Dear Sir:

It has come to our attention that the Latter-day saints under your presidency are contemplating the construction of a tabernacle. Though not of your faith, our company for many years has been well acquainted with your people and have come to feel that the progress and development, which is so striking there, has been due them. Therefore, as a small token of our esteem and respect and our desire for their further progress, it is a pleasure to enclose our check of \$500 to be used toward the construction of such a tabernacle as you may contemplate.

Again assuring you of our high esteem and personal regard, both of yourself and those whom you represent, we are

Yours truly,
Wood Livestock Co.
By J. L. Hagenbarth, President⁵⁷

In Vernal, Utah, Charles A. Neal, an Episcopalian, moved into the valley just as the Uintah Stake Tabernacle was nearing completion. He had training in electrical wiring so he offered to wire the building and install the first lights for free if the stake would purchase the materials, a proposition that the stake gladly took him up on.⁵⁸ Understanding the benefits that the entire community could realize, the stake presidency of the White Pine Stake in Ely, Nevada took the opportunity presented by being interviewed by newspaper reporters to ask community members for donations.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Patricia L. Scott, *The Hub of Eastern Idaho: A History of Rigby Idaho, 1885 – 1976* (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, 1976), 87. In 2005 dollars, \$500 works out to be over \$7000.

⁵⁸ Irving and Barton, 16, 18.

⁵⁹ “Work Speeds at New Tabernacle,” *Ely Record* (Ely, Nevada), 30 September 1927, 1, and “L.D.S. Tabernacle Walls are Rising, Building is Shaping,” *Ely Daily Times* (Ely, Nevada), 28 September 1927, 1. The author has been unable to determine if any responded to the invitation. Part of the *Ely Record* article is very clear about the benefits that Ely would enjoy with a tabernacle. It reads, “The trustees announce that the building will be thrown open for all gatherings of a community nature, such as conventions held by fraternal, religious, civic, and political organizations or receptions given in honor of distinguished guests,

Works in Progress

Once the construction cost was covered and the building was completed, most of the lots that the tabernacles were located on remained un-landscaped as was common for most public spaces in the nineteenth century. For the first seventy-five years or so of the Saints' residence in the Great Basin, though public parks and gardens were often landscaped, lawns were not an important feature of a well kept house or church. As American society at large began to change its attitude about the value of landscaping, members of the Church began to change theirs as well. For the Fremont Stake tabernacle, during the years 1912 to 1925 the only landscaping was a few willows and poplar trees, and meadow grass irrigated from a ditch. In the summer, sheep were grazed around the building to keep the grass down.⁶⁰ Sometime in the early 1920's, H.F.C. (Chris) Pieper, the caretaker of the tabernacle, came across the prayer given by President Smith at the dedication. The words "that the grounds of this building may be beautified and most desirable unto the saints and most pleasing and acceptable unto thee" convinced him to change that situation.⁶¹ In 1925, he persuaded the stake presidency to approve a beautification project. Mr. Pieper spent three months on his knees with a 2X4 leveling a hundred wagonloads of topsoil so an irrigation system could be installed. Hedges and ornamental trees were planted, and flowerbeds were added around the building. The grounds became a virtual show-place, and inspired many other area residents to beautify

whenever desired. Aside from the property value of the structure the other benefits that the tabernacle brings to the city and county can not [sic] be appraised. Ely has long needed a meeting place of larger proportions than is now available, suitable for serving banquets in connection, and this new structure will fill all the requirements most ideally."

⁶⁰ Pieper, Mr. and Mrs. Albert. "Landscaping the Tabernacle Grounds." *Snake River Echoes*. 10 (1981): 34.

⁶¹ Ibid.

their yards as well.⁶² Sometimes the landscaping did not turn out quite as planned.

When the Union Stake Tabernacle was completed in La Grande, Oregon, Box Elder trees were planted around the perimeter of the lawn, surrounding the tabernacle. These trees were later cut down and burned when “the Box Elder bugs became disturbing factors by their too frequent attendance at church meetings.”⁶³

Sometimes the changes to the completed tabernacles were a little more substantial than the addition of grass and trees, though this is unsurprising considering the amount of use they received. The entire front of the Logan Tabernacle was remodeled, removing the steps that brought people to the second floor from street level and providing access to the lower levels from the front of the building.

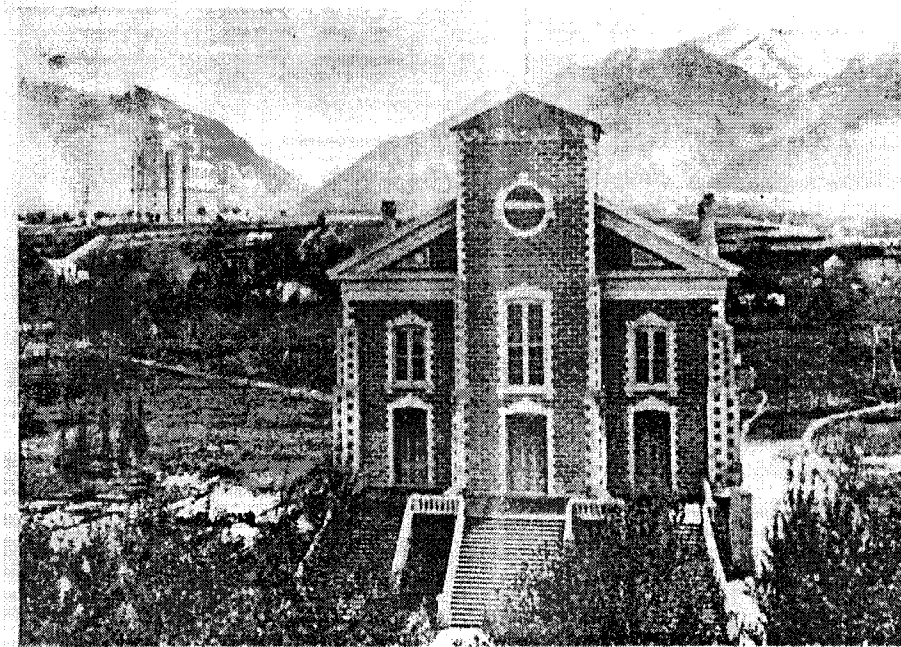


Figure 29: Logan Tabernacle, Logan, Utah, before remodeling.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Bean, Bean, and Miller, 61.



Figure 30: After remodeling.

Others went through several organs, boilers, public address systems, and a few, like the new Salt Lake Tabernacle, had their balconies added after the buildings had been in use. When the tabernacle in Rexburg, Idaho was outfitted with a font in the basement, one sister commented that it was “indeed an improvement over cutting a hole in the ice on the river.”⁶⁴

Tabernacles, even the finest ones were generally vernacular, bricolage buildings, planned and executed by people without formal training in engineering or architecture. This sometimes led to problems in the construction. The balcony of the St. George Tabernacle provides a good example of this. The story is told on the website of the St. George Temple Visitor’s Center. It reads:

⁶⁴ Louis J. Clements, comp., “Rexburg Tabernacle History.” *Snake River Echoes*. 10 (1981): 31.

The Balcony Incident. One of the most unusual events in the building of the Tabernacle happened after the U-shaped balcony was crafted and firmly in place. Miles Romney, master builder, schooled in English architecture and supervisor of the Tabernacle construction designed two elegant circular staircases. He called them his crowning achievements. They were attached to either side of the foyer-type room at the entrance to the main hall. As the people ascended both staircases the top steps lead onto and were even with the balcony. It seemed a perfect architectural arrangement. There was just one problem. Upon close observation, Brigham Young discovered the balcony was so high, people sitting there could not see the pulpit. Miles Romney reminded the prophet the stairways were permanent and could not be moved. So, Brigham Young recommended the balcony be lowered. And while everyone thought this impossible, Brigham Young surprised them by devising an ingenious plan. This caught the interest of Miles Romney who agreed and complied. Strong men were stationed at each post of the U-shaped balcony. With the use of braces and jacks, each man in unison with the others, using his full physical strength lifted the whole balcony in one piece at one time. The posts were cut off to the desired height by other workers and the balcony was replaced, lower than before. Brigham's plan had worked. Today, Tabernacle audiences who climb up the staircases to their original height will step down an easy 8 steps to the balcony, but that is alright, because now they can see the pulpit just fine.⁶⁵



Figure 31: Stairs leading to balcony in St. George Tabernacle

⁶⁵ St. George Temple Visitor's Center. "St. George Utah Tabernacle." St. George Temple Visitor's Center. 10 April 2005, accessed 5 July 2005; available from <http://www.stgeorgetemplevisitorscenter.org/tabstory.html>; Internet.

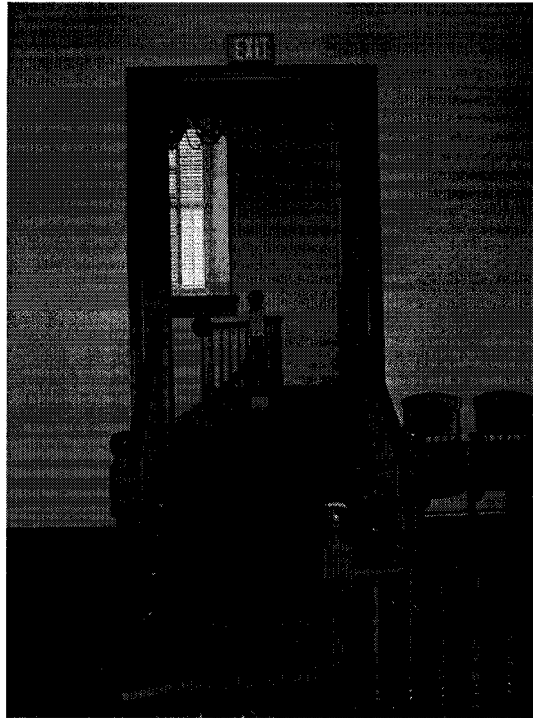


Figure 32: Stairs from landing down to balcony in the St. George Tabernacle



Figure 31: Balcony of St. George Tabernacle at its current height.

The lives of faithful Latter-day Saints ultimately point to the sacred implication of the temples. In the communities that had tabernacles, however, the religious and social activities of the wards were focused on those buildings. Tom Carter of the Utah Historical Society says that “inside the temple, the Latter-day Saint experienced [the realm of the Lord]... The meetinghouse, on the other hand, belongs fully to the present, and here members of the group congregate for regular worship, receive the sacrament, and conduct the practical business of the ward. The temple is circumspect, closed, and ultimately sacred, the meeting house is enthusiastic, open, and social.”⁶⁶ The tabernacle belonged to the present; it is the venue for everyday community interactions.

Besides the use of the Salt Lake Tabernacle for General Conference and the unity that fosters, tabernacles fit into the notion of who Latter-day Saints are and how they view themselves as a people, helping cement the creation of a Mormon identity. For example, the St. George Tabernacle is closely associated with the practice of paying tithing. During the depression of the 1890's, the church was deeply in debt. Lorenzo Snow, the fifth president of the Church, wrestled with the indebtedness problem for many days. After serious prayer and contemplation, he felt prompted to call a special conference in St. George, which was experiencing a drought as well. Standing at the pulpit in the St. George Tabernacle, he first praised the assembled Saints for their faith and courage, but then paused and the congregation became very quiet. He then said that “the time has come for every Latter Day Saint to do the will of the Lord and pay his tithing in full. That is the word of the Lord to you and it will be the word of the Lord to every settlement

⁶⁶ Tom Carter, “A Hierarchy of Architectural Values,” in Sanpete County Commission, Albert C. T. Antrei and Ruth D. Scow, eds., *The Other Forty-Niners: A Topical History of Sanpete County Utah 1849-1983* (Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1982), 460.

throughout the land...”⁶⁷ On the way back to Salt Lake, he stopped at every settlement along the way to deliver the same message. As the Saints responded to the call of their leaders the church was able to pay its debt. Sufficient rain came in time to save the crops of the Saints in Utah’s Dixie as well. One Saint said the lesson the Church learned was “the value of sacrifice in the eyes of the Lord.”⁶⁸ Since that time, the Church has remained debt free and tithing continues to be strongly encouraged by the Church. Incidentally, the video dramatization of the event, which was filmed in the St. George Tabernacle, is recommended for use in lessons about tithing in almost every lesson manual in the Church.

Almost Every Use Imaginable

These buildings were at the center of the political life of the Saints as well. Every president between Theodore Roosevelt and Richard Nixon except Warren G. Harding spoke from the pulpit of the Salt Lake Tabernacle, and President Taft also spoke in the Provo Tabernacle. On a more local level, numerous political rallies were held in tabernacles throughout the Mormon Culture Region. For example, when the Cache Valley chapter of the Territorial Women’s Suffrage Association was formed in 1889, it was formed in the Logan Tabernacle.⁶⁹ They were not just used for serious political and

⁶⁷ <http://www.infowest.com/Utah/colorcountry/History/tabernacle.html>

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Carol Cornwall Madsen, “Creating Female Community: Relief Society in Cache Valley, Utah, 1868-1900,” *Journal of Mormon History* 21 (Fall 1995): 142.

church meetings, though. When the midget General Tom Thumb came to Utah in 1869, he gave a performance in the Ogden Tabernacle.⁷⁰

Tabernacle buildings were used for just about every purpose imaginable. Most performed the function of a civic center, hosting plays, pageants, operas, school graduation exercises, concerts, high school seminary programs, community meetings, basketball, lyceums, etc.⁷¹ In many communities, the privilege of using the building was extended on a non-partisan basis. The community was only too happy to take the Stakes up on their offers. In the 1920's, the Rexburg *Current Journal* carried advertisements for plays, choir concerts, dances, or other entertainment with regularity, so much so, that one particular column on page 5 was the space for upcoming events in the tabernacle. In tabernacles equipped with a basement, they were especially popular places for social events, particularly in buildings without a gymnasium. (See figure 34) These basement activities were a part of the development of the feeling of community, a place to see and be seen. According to Rexburg resident Edna Taylor:

The stake event of the year was always the Gold and Green Ball, when all the wards crowded into the basement until the beautiful decorations could hardly be seen. One had to keep a sharp lookout to keep one's partner from bumping into the posts as the whole crowd moved in the same direction around the room. Everybody came to these balls. It was fun to see parents and grandparents dancing with their young teenagers and many older folks lining the sides of the hall watching.⁷²

⁷⁰ Richard C. Roberts, and Richard W. Sadler, *A History of Weber County* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society; [Ogden]: Weber County Commission, 1997), 186.

⁷¹ Smithfield Historical Society, *Smithfield...as a city on a hill: A history of Smithfield, Utah 1859-2001* (Smithfield, UT: Smithfield Historical Society, 2001), 192.

⁷² Edna Taylor, "Dances," *Snake River Echoes* 10 (1981): 39.

In Mormon towns where the distinction between church and state was often hard to see, tabernacles often served as the courthouse as well with town offices located in the basement.



Figure 34: Banquet in the Cedar City Tabernacle

Because the communities they were erected in were generally overwhelmingly LDS, there is little distinction between Church use and community use. There were times, however, that use of the buildings by those not of the LDS faith was significant. Contrary to the position taken by many writers of Utah history, Brigham Young's intolerance of other group may have been greatly exaggerated.⁷³ The tabernacle on

⁷³ Keith Melville, "Theory and Practice of Church and State During the Brigham Young Era" *BYU Studies* 3 (Autumn 1960): 54.

Temple Square was available to itinerant preachers to speak from the pulpit. In 1871, Brigham Young said to the people of Ogden that "Accord to every reputable person who may visit you, and who may wish to occupy the stands of your meetinghouses to preach to you, the privilege of doing so, no matter whether he be a Catholic, Presbyterian, Congregationalist, Baptist."⁷⁴ The Salt Lake Tabernacle in particular was a focal point for non-Mormons. Travel accounts from visitors to the Salt Lake area almost invariably included their impression of their obligatory visit to the Salt Lake Tabernacle and the sermon they heard there. Sometimes if the visitor was a clergyman, they would be invited to address the congregation. Henry Kendall, a Presbyterian minister, asked Brigham Young if he had any objections to the establishment of Protestant churches in Utah. Not only did Young not express any objections, he invited Kendall to preach in the tabernacle on a Sunday morning to a group that Kimball described as "large, respectful, and attentive."⁷⁵ On another occasion, Dr. J. H. Reiner, a prominent Roman Catholic minister was invited to address a congregation in the tabernacle.⁷⁶

Salt Lake was not the only place where non-Mormon preachers were invited to speak from the pulpit of a tabernacle. In Cardston, Alberta, Anglican priest Cannon S. H. Middleton was told by the stake president that whenever he needed the tabernacle, he was free to use it because of the good that he did for the community.⁷⁷ One Father had a

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Henry Kendall, "A Week in 'Great Salt Lake City,'" *Hours at Home* 1 (May 1865): 63-66. in R. Douglas Brackenridge, "Presbyterians and Latter-day Saints in Utah: A Century of Conflict and Compromise, 1830-1930," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 80 (Winter 2002): 207.

⁷⁶ Andrew Jenson, "January 16, 1898," *Church Chronology* (Salt Lake: Deseret News Press, 1914).

⁷⁷ *Chief Mountain Country*, 191.

similar experience in St. George. The following is an extract from a Catholic curate to his superior in 1879.

During Father Scanlan's stay in Silver Reef he had, by his works etc, attracted the attention of the St. George Mormon church authorities, who, whilst opposed to his work, & the cause in behalf of which, he labored so zealously, could not help appreciating his zeal & sacrifice in the prosecution of his undertakings, and at the same time admiring him for his gentleness & firm but unassuming character joined with his great ability. As a mark of their appreciation, they invited him to hold services in their "Tabernacle"...In last May he celebrated High Mass (Mormon choir furnishing the music) in the tabernacle as St. George, before a congregation of not less than 3000 persons, all of whom with but few exceptions were of the Mormon faith."⁷⁸

Of the occasion, one French Catholic said "It was the grandest event I ever witnessed in the history of the Catholic Church."⁷⁹

Uses by non-Mormons were not restricted solely to preaching from the pulpit. The Union Stake Tabernacle in La Grande had the largest gymnasium in the area, so both La Grande High School and Eastern Oregon Normal School played their basketball games there in the 1930's. Fire twice destroyed the La Grande High School building. On both occasions, the Union Stake presidency offered the use of the tabernacle and recreation hall for use as an interim school.⁸⁰ The school board gladly accepted the offer on both occasions. Though primarily for use in religious services, tabernacles were truly versatile buildings in serving their communities.

In examining their construction, we can see that tabernacles reflect the social climate of the communities in which they were built and show some of the best goods and skills

⁷⁸ Francis J. Weber, "Catholicism among the Mormons," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 44 (Summer 1976): 146.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Bean, Bean, and Miller, 62.

that the Saints had to offer. They were also true community centers, serving both the LDS community and the non-LDS community.

CHAPTER 4

SYMBOLS AND SIGNIFICANCE

It is one thing to show that tabernacles are historic buildings, that they were widely used and enjoyed in their communities and what they tell us about them. It is much harder to get at what they meant to the communities that built them. The stories about and the events that happened in tabernacles, while fascinating, are too numerous to list, and are probably better left to the antiquarian. This study looks at the deeper significance of the buildings on the landscape and what they can tell us about the people who built them. The built environment that people leave behind is an incredibly rich store of information. Though what is left behind is the consequence of actions, we can discern attitudes, decisions, and specific results in the wood, brick and stone craftsmen have left in buildings.¹ A problem arises with reading the landscapes left behind. Common landscapes, however important they may be, are by their nature hard to study by using traditional methods of historical inquiry.² Architecture is indeed significant, but the significance it had to groups in the past may be transmitted imperfectly or not at all to

¹ D.W. Meinig, "The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene," in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographic Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 44-5.

² Pierce F. Lewis, "Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene," in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographic Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 19.

succeeding generations.³ Notwithstanding our imperfect understanding of the significance behind tabernacles, we can understand a good deal about the processes that have transpired to more fully place tabernacles within their historical context. Scholars from many different disciplines can help us to do that.

History

Several good works have been produced by historians like Robert Hine, John Mack Faragher, and Thomas Bender on the topics of place and community, and how they relate to community.⁴ One work that stands out is Pulitzer Prize winning *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790*, by Rhys Isaac.⁵ Isaac recognized the importance of the parish church and later on, the courthouse, in providing a venue for community gatherings and the transmitting of community values to the general populace, both functions fulfilled by tabernacles in Mormon villages. Another is Martha J. McNamara's *From Tavern to Courthouse: Architecture & Ritual in American Law*.⁶ She shows that town halls and courthouses in New England were developed not only to give the law and lawyers status, but to demonstrate to townspeople the importance of the law in society, much like tabernacles and the Priesthood Reorganization of 1877.

³ Ronald W. Smith and Valerie Bugni, "Symbolic Interaction Theory and Architecture," (Article forthcoming in the *Journal of Symbolic Interaction*,, 2006): 11.

⁴ Robert V. Hine, *Community on the American Frontier: Separate But Not Alone* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1980); Robert V. Hine and John Mack Faragher, *The American West: A New Interpretive History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000); John Mack Faragher, *Sugar Creek: Life on the Illinois Prairie* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Thomas Bender, *Community and Social Change in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978). More on these works will be addressed later in support of the sociology section.

⁵ Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790* (New York: Norton and Company, 1982).

⁶ Martha J. McNamara, *From Tavern to Courthouse: Architecture & Ritual in American Law* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004).

Geography

Though this thesis is the work of a historian, it recognizes the great value in taking an interdisciplinary approach to the topic to see the wide range of interpretations available, particularly in the fields of geography and sociology. Crystal Wride Jensen's thesis "The Geographical Landscape of Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region," investigates tabernacles from the perspective of a geographer, but she does so through the framework provided by geographer Pierce F. Lewis.⁷ Lewis' "Axioms for Reading the Landscape" listed seven axioms to be used when studying landscapes.⁸

First is the axiom of landscape as a clue to culture. The ordinary landscape created by humans provides strong evidence of who we were, are, and are working to become. Culture is reflected in the landscape. Tabernacles, then, are a valuable reflection of the culture that produced them, even though they may not show the complexity of the social relations that produced them. Second is the axiom of cultural unity and landscape equality. This states that nearly every item in the human landscape in some way reflects the culture that created it and that every item produced by a society, in their roles as clues to culture, are equally important. The axiom of common things explains that however important they may be, common landscapes are hard to study by conventional academic means. Fourth is the historic axiom. It states that in attempting to discern the meaning of landscapes, an understanding of their historical context is vital. The geographic (or ecologic) axiom explains that it is not only important to study landscapes within their

⁷ Crystal Wride Jensen, "The Geographical Landscape of Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region," (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1992).

⁸ Lewis, 11-32. The axioms are merely guidelines, and the article contains many corollaries and caveats for applying the axioms when studying landscapes.

historic context, but within their geographic context, an approach I have attempted to use throughout this thesis. The sixth axiom is the axiom of environmental control. Cultural landscapes are closely related to their physical environments. Because of that, a basic knowledge of the physical landscape is required to understand them, as in understanding the arid nature of the Great Basin and its influence on the development of Mormon villages. The last, the axiom of landscape obscurity is evident to those who have studied buildings or other human landscapes for meanings. It indicates that while landscapes convey many messages, they do not speak clearly, so we need to know just what questions to ask.⁹

Sociology

A useful framework for greater understanding of the significance of tabernacles can be borrowed from sociologists, and that is the theory of symbolic interaction. For the purposes of this investigation, the theory of symbolic interaction reveals that “the search for construction, knowing, and performing the self often occurs in relation to designed physical environments,”¹⁰ or that the physical environment is an active participant in the lives of people. The theory teaches us that physical objects and place provide more than

⁹ Another useful framework for the study of landscapes by a geographer is provided by Donald Meinig, “The Beholding Eye: Ten Versions of the Same Scene,” in *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographic Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). The ten ways that he lists to study a landscape are: landscape as nature, landscape as habitat, landscape as artifact, landscape as system, landscape as problem, landscape as wealth, landscape as ideology, landscape as history, landscape as place, and landscape as aesthetic. The approach that you take depends on the purpose behind undertaking the study.

¹⁰ Smith and Bugni, 6.

a setting for conduct, that the settings are active players in the way people act, usually through influence rather than by direct interaction.¹¹

Sociologists Ronald W. Smith and Valerie Bugni have used the theory of symbolic interaction, and applied it to architecture. Though their work primarily applies to discovering ways to design more effective and useful buildings, their research can be used to look at existing buildings for patterns and meanings. They contend that symbolic interaction applies to our understanding of architecture in three ways. The first deals with identity formation: “designed physical environment[s] and the self are intertwined with both potentially influencing and finding expression in the other,” or that our environments helps determine how we perceive ourselves. The second deals with symbolism: “designed physical environments contain and communicate our shared symbols and meanings for life.” They show others what the builders feel are important. The third indicates that the physical environment is not just a backdrop for our actions, but that “buildings, places, and objects act as agents to shape our thoughts and actions.”¹² When each of these three categories are explored with regard to tabernacles, the significance of the buildings in the communities they resided in becomes much clearer.

Smith and Bugni indicate that the physical environment and identity are intertwined. Infrastructure is part of the social community because it helps to define who people are.¹³ The understanding we have of ourselves is formed in relation to the spaces we inhabit. In

¹¹ Ibid., 10, 24.

¹² Ibid., 2.

¹³ J.D. Wulforth and Evan Glenn, “Irrigation, Community, and Historical Development along the Upper Snake River,” *Agricultural History* 76 (Summer 2002): 445.

part, we define ourselves by the spaces themselves.¹⁴ Spaces can both reflect who we are and what we would like to project about ourselves to others.¹⁵ Sociologist E. Doyle McCarthy explains why this is, noting that “(1) Physical objects play a central role in constituting and maintaining the self; (2) Physical objects provide the self with a stable and familiar environment; (3) The acts of touching and grasping physical objects play a central role in our reality construction and maintenance; and (4) The self’s relationship with the physical world is a social relationship.”¹⁶ What this means for our discussion is that all human landscape has cultural meaning. Geographer Pierce F. Lewis explains, “Our human landscape is our unwitting autobiography, reflecting our tastes, our values, our aspirations, and even our fears, in tangible, visible form. We rarely think of landscape that way, and so the cultural record we have “written” in the landscape is liable to be more truthful than most autobiographies because we are less self-conscious about how we describe ourselves.”¹⁷ The landscape that we leave behind reveals and influences our creation of identity more than historians often give it credit for.

Identity Formation: Place

The construction of buildings ties into identity formation most noticeably in relation to two concepts that historians, geographers, and sociologists all have grappled with:

¹⁴ Martha Bradley, “Building Community: The Fundamentalist Mormon Concept of Space,” *Communal Societies* 21 (2001): 3.

¹⁵ Smith and Bugni,, 9.

¹⁶ McCarthy, E.Doyle.. “Toward a Sociology of the Physical World: George Herbert Mead on Physical Objects.” *Studies in Symbolic Interaction* 5 (1984): 105-121, in Smith and Bugni,, 5.

¹⁷ Pierce F. Lewis, “Axioms for Reading the Landscape: Some Guides to the American Scene,” in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographic Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 12.

“place” and “community.” Historian and geographer Richard Francaviglia has indicated that there is now a growing interest in the meaning of place as an essential element in the human drama.¹⁸ It elicits itself, among other ways, in the desire to protect the environment or preserve the character of the built environment with historic preservation.¹⁹ Wallace Stegner indicated that “Most Americans are not placed but displaced persons....Western Americans are the most displaced persons of all.”²⁰ This did not hold true for Latter-day Saints. As far as a people who felt a sense of place in the Great Basin, the Saints are probably without par, though many would argue that Native American groups would match or exceed them. They viewed prophecies from both the Bible and from modern days as foretelling their destiny to live in the mountains of the West. Isaiah 35:1 reads “The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose,” which the Saints took to mean that by building their irrigation projects in the Great Basin, the area then known as the Great American Desert, they fulfilled the prophecy. As for modern day proclamations, we can look to Joseph Smith. While the Saints were suffering intense persecution in Illinois in 1842, Smith prophesied “that the saints would continue to suffer much affliction, and would be driven to the Rocky Mountains.” Though some would apostatize, and others would meet the martyr’s fate, many would live to “assist in making settlements and build

¹⁸ Richard V. Francaviglia, *Believing in Place: A Spiritual Geography of the Great Basin* (Reno and Las Vegas: University of Nevada Press, 2003), xiv-xv.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Wallace Stegner, *The American West as Living Space* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press), 22.

cities and see the saints become a mighty people in the midst of the Rocky Mountains.”²¹ What the Saints created in their mountain retreat was a distinctive community that was a result of natural conditions and conscious design.²² This was not because the Saints were blinded to the problems that the land represented, but rather they judged that other considerations were more important. One settler in Utah said “How did I come to settle in Emery County? I was called on a mission by President John Taylor, Brigham Young organized the mission, but he died in 1877. I came here in 1878...I have done my best to fill that mission call I received seventy-one years ago. That mission is not over yet, nor will be until I am called home.”²³ Place was strongly tied to faith.

Identity Formation: Community

The concept of place is strongly tied to the creation of a sense of community. Martin Ridge cited three reasons that a community needs to exist. First, the community must have a reason to be there, which in the case of the Saints was escaping persecution of mobs and the desire to live according to the dictates of their religion. Second, it must have a compelling centripetal force, such as adherence to doctrine or the priesthood organization. Third, it must have place, or geographic specificity, in this case was the

²¹ James E. Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, Missionary Reference Library (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 24-5.

²² Edward A Geary, “For the Strength of the Hills: Imagining Mormon Country,” in *After 150 Years: The Latter-day Saints in Sesquicentennial Perspective*, Charles Redd Monographs in Western History No. 13, eds. Thomas G. Alexander and Jessie L. Embry (Midvale, UT: Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 1983), 80.

²³ Quoted in Stella McElprang, Comp., *Castle Valley: A History of Emery County* (Salt Lake City: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1949), 306. in Nancy Jacobus Taniguchi, “Rebels and Relatives: The Mormon Foundation of Spring Glen, 1878-90,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48 (Winter 1980): 368-9.

Great Basin.²⁴ The geographic specificity is very important. Historian Robert Hine wrote “The group must exist in a definable space, and its geography and architecture feed its sense of belonging together....In this old building every nick is part of the shared experience. The known horizon and the shared walls are the stuff of community.”²⁵

Tabernacles not only sat at the center of the towns, the places if you will, of the Saints, but they played an important part in the development of community. Community is a term that is difficult to work with. Many have understood a community to simply be a locality, but as historian Thomas Bender points out, community is “a social network characterized by a distinctive kind of human interaction.”²⁶ It is both a thing and a feeling, comprised of streets and buildings and series of relationships among people.²⁷ Robert Hine indicates that there are three essential elements of community: a shared sense of place, compact size, and commonly assumed values, all three which were assured by the design of the Mormon Village.²⁸ Though they all went about it in a different manner, Ridge, Hine, and Bender all recognize the importance of shared values in the development of a community.

Mormon communities are interesting because they actually contain narratives of community building. Sociologist Goodsell Todd notes that “If we arranged most community studies chronologically by the period of time examined, and charted the

²⁴ Martin Ridge, “Robert Hine and Communitarianism,” *Pacific Historical Review* 70 (Summer 2001): 479.

²⁵ Hine, 21.

²⁶ Bender, 10-11.

²⁷ Faragher, 155.

²⁸ Michael Steiner, “Robert Hine, Sense of Place, and the Terrain of Western History,” *Pacific Historical Review* 70 (Summer 2001): 461.

narrative of community found collectively in those studies, the story would read that first there was community...and then it collapsed, and it collapsed, and it collapsed, and so on. Only occasionally do we find the story of *community building*: that at certain times, a group of people collectively define a reality greater than themselves, and take whatever action is necessary to make that reality effective in their lives.”²⁹ Part of why the Saints were able to build strong communities is that Mormon villages were very stable.

Historian John Mack Faragher in his book *Sugar Creek* indicates that communities operate most effectively with direct, face to face connections between people, face to face meetings no doubt made often at the tabernacle given their centrality in towns.³⁰

Commenting further on the topic, Martin Ridge avers “What makes a community is not so much the reason it was formed as the centripetal force that keeps it stable.”³¹

Robert Hine and John Mack Faragher indicate in their *The American West: A New Interpretive History* that the strongest centripetal force that keeps a community together is religion. Community embodies some cherished ideals of the Saints, such as cooperation and sacrifice for the greater good, the nobility of agriculture and the plat of the city planned by “Brother Joseph.”³² These ideals were not imposed by Church leadership, but adopted because the exigencies of living in the Great Basin, though they

²⁹ Todd, Goodsell, “Maintaining Solidarity: A Look Back at the Mormon Village,” *Rural Sociology* 65 (September 2000): 358.

³⁰ Faragher, 144.

³¹ Ridge, 480.

³² Members of the Church still refer to each other as brother and sister, but it is understood in the Church that Brother Joseph refers to Joseph Smith.

were certainly encouraged as a means to bind the Saint together in communities.³³ Emil Durkheim wrote that designed objects and spaces are an integral part of the social lives and serve as “collective representations” of a community.³⁴ In pioneer Utah, other than the family, which was and is the basic unit of the Church, the local congregation was the most important unit of society. Tabernacles were not only the religious centers of the community, but also were the places that could serve as the collective representation of community because the tabernacles were the places where social ties between friends and neighbors were formed or strengthened, and familial were relationships strengthened.³⁵ There was a multiplicity of meetings for numerous Church auxiliaries that not only served to socialize the members who often came from a wide variety of backgrounds, but fostered the creation of community. When Stake Conference was held in the La Grande tabernacle, members would open their homes to other members who had to travel long distances to attend.³⁶ This would not have been necessary if the building were smaller and unable to allow so many to attend and receive council from their leaders. When the Yellowstone Stake in St. Anthony, Idaho held Stake Conference, meals were served in

³³ Nancy Jacobus Taniguchi, “Rebels and Relatives: The Mormon Foundation of Spring Glen, 1878-90,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48 (Winter 1980): 378, and Dean L. May, “The Making of Saints: The Mormon Town as a Setting for the Study of Cultural Change,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 45 (Spring 1977): 76-77.

³⁴ Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1976).

³⁵ Joseph Heinerman, “The Mormon Meetinghouse: Reflections of Pioneer Religious and Social Life in Salt Lake City,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 50 (Winter 1982): 341.

³⁶ Ellen S. Bean, Ariel S. Bean, and Barbara Bean Miller, “History of the Union Stake – La Grande Oregon Stake, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 1901-1980,” Unpublished manuscript in possession of the author (La Grande, OR, 1951 and 1980), 81.

the basement between conference session, providing not only food, but an opportunity for members to catch up with old friends and create new ones.³⁷

Mormon communities were also held together because covenants members made to help one another. Hine and Faragher, speaking of this phenomenon wrote:

As Churches formed the founding members often signed covenants that formally bound them together. The covenant of the Buck Run Church in Kentucky, for example, spoke the language of *communitas*: the members solemnly agreed to “watch over each other in brotherly tenderness,” to edify one another, to succor the weak, to bear each other’s burdens, and to hold in common all “hands and hearts.” These were the strongest bonds a community could claim. The ideal of the small, close-knit community was carried deep in the minds of most settlers, and a covenanted community was a sacred enterprise, reaching down to the smallest detail of helping one’s neighbor when in trouble or gone astray.³⁸

Part of the baptismal covenant of a Latter-day Saint is to signify the person’s willingness to “come into the fold of God, and to be called his people, and are willing to bear one another’s burdens, that they may be light; Yea and are willing to mourn with those that mourn, yea, and comfort those that stand in need of comfort.”³⁹ Saints, after baptism, attempted to follow the council of Moroni in the *Book of Mormon*. Moroni 6:4 reads:

and after they had been received unto baptism, and were wrought upon and cleansed by the power of the Holy Ghost, they were numbered among the people of the church of Christ, and their names were taken, that they might be remembered and nourished by the good word of God, to keep them in the right way, to keep them continually watchful unto prayer, relying alone upon the merits of Christ, who was the author and the finisher of their faith.⁴⁰

³⁷ Max and Bonnie Atkinson, comp., *History of the Yellowstone – St. Anthony Stake, 1909 – 1986* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1986), 21.

³⁸ Hine and Faragher, 367.

³⁹ *The Book of Mormon: Another Testament of Jesus Christ* (Salt Lake: Corporation of the President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981), Mosiah 18:8-9, p. 181.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, Moroni 6:4, p. 520.

These and other tenants made Saints feel that promoting and maintaining a strong community was the only way to fulfill their covenanted obligations to the Lord.

Leonard Arrington noted that “as one studies each community of Latter-day Saints, he gets the impression that the community was always in the process of building or creating some symbolic expression of its corporateness – its Zion character – its communitarian single-mindedness.”⁴¹ Tabernacles served as a collective representation of the community by being the places where any meeting of consequence occurred. Simple narratives of community building are insufficient to explain how tabernacles contributed to community solidarity because of their pervasiveness.⁴² Any group too large to meet in a home regardless of the purpose usually met in the tabernacle if the town had one. Its grounds were no doubt the site of many more informal meetings among town meetings because all of the farmers’ fields were out of town, and the likelihood of running into a neighbor in the middle of town as daily trips to and from the field were made was strong. The buildings could serve as a constant reminder to people of why they were living in the small Mormon communities in the first place.

Communication of Symbols

Further applying Smith and Bugni’s definition of symbolic interaction to the Mormon experience, it seems reasonable to suggest that tabernacles are part of a “designed physical environment [that] contain[s] and communicate[s]...shared symbols and

⁴¹ Leonard J. Arrington and Melvin A. Larkin, “The Logan Tabernacle and Temple,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 41 (Fall 1973), 302.

⁴² Goodsell, 373.

meanings for life” in Mormon communities. Geographer Yi-Fu Tuan warned in his seminal work *Topophilia* that there is a human need to see order, patterns, and relatedness in reality, whether those characteristics actually exist or not, that some claim to see patterns where none actually exist.⁴³ Tabernacles, as noted, sit at the center of town after town in the Mormon Culture Region, and that very placement is symbolically significant. The sheer number of repetitions rules out coincidental placement of the buildings. Geographer Richard Poulsen indicates that “symbols are timeless storehouses for anything a culture produces of enduring significance.”⁴⁴ In fact, Poulsen says that meanings can only be stored in symbols.⁴⁵ Visual symbols can help us understand the stories that people tell about the places they inhabit.⁴⁶ Francaviglia says that because human beings communicate using visual symbols, such as petroglyphs, pictographs, drawings, and maps, we must study those symbols to understand the stories people tell about places.⁴⁷ Despite this, many historians, in their desires to find out what peoples real motivations were ignore the meanings that those people gave to symbols. “One of the greatest problems of our day,” writes Mary Douglas, “is the lack of commitment to common symbols.”⁴⁸ Early Saints had no reservations about using certain symbols openly. The all-seeing eye was placed over the doors of businesses, and the handclasp

⁴³ Yi-Fu Tuan, *Topophilia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 32.

⁴⁴ Richard C. Poulsen, *The Pure Experience of Order: Essays on the Symbolic in the Folk Material Culture of Western America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 5.

⁴⁵ Clifford Geertz, “Ethos, World-View and the analysis of Sacred Symbols,” *Every Man His Way*, ed. Alan Dundes (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1968), 303. in *Ibid.*, 70.

⁴⁶ Francaviglia, 11.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Mary Douglas, *Natural Symbols* (New York: Vintage Books, 1973), 19. in Poulsen, 3.

was a common motif in cemeteries. Building locations and materials had dimensions other than property value, cost of materials, and pure visual appeal.

Every mature culture has symbolic landscapes that represent a shared set of ideas and memories that bind people together.⁴⁹ Taking the broad view, we can see that all landscapes can be symbolic, an expression of the striving to reach a spiritual goal. Donald Meinig contended that they are the “expression of a persistent desire to make the earth over in the image of some heaven.”⁵⁰ Sites and buildings have the ability to condense meanings and values expressed as social relations.⁵¹ The repetition of forms satisfies cultural creative impulses in ways that may appear mundane to the outsider but provide meaning for others in the same group. Placement of doors, chimneys, window, and buildings in the community all help define space and time with highly important symbolic meanings for those who build and live in communities.⁵²

Historian John M. Findlay in *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940* looks at four different planned communities in the West.⁵³ He claims that the purpose of highly organized areas serve to provide markers for resident’s mental maps, orienting them and helping them find their place spatially and socially in their communities. While tabernacles certainly served as a highly visual landmark and

⁴⁹ D.W. Meinig, “Symbolic Landscapes: Some Idealizations of American Communities,” in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographic Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 164.

⁵⁰ D.W. Meinig, “Reading the Landscape: An Appreciation of W.G. Hoskins and J.B. Jackson,” in D.W. Meinig, ed., *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes: Geographic Essays* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 228-9.

⁵¹ Smith and Bugni, 10.

⁵² Poulsen, 16.

⁵³ John M. Findlay, *Magic Lands: Western Cityscapes and American Culture After 1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992).

reference point for navigating Mormon communities, they had the additional function of helping to define sacred space.

The laying of a plat when establishing a community, especially one based on the plat of the City of Zion, is an exercise in creating sacred space which goes beyond the simple desire to create isolation and control the landscape. Wallace Stegner's "Mormon trees," Lombardy Poplars, which are pervasive in the Mormon Culture Region, were planted partly because they are hardy and grow quickly and provide shade. They also outlined the sacred space that comprised a village.⁵⁴ By symbolically setting the boundaries of the villages, an exercise in restraint, the Saints were thus able to experience a universe that was more fulfilling.⁵⁵ This is because the repetition reinforced the identity of the builder with sacred time.⁵⁶ The village itself, by defining the space as sacred, was turned into a sanctuary from the world.⁵⁷ In studying the Mormon Village, Lowry Nelson said that he manner in which rural people arrange their buildings on the land is one of the most important features in determining the nature of their social organization.⁵⁸ By symbolically identifying their boundaries, individuals bind themselves to their culture and define their place in society.⁵⁹ Historian Charles Peterson, speaking of the Mormon village said that its purpose went beyond defining territoriality, it:

⁵⁴ Ibid., 120.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 93.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 112.

⁵⁷ Charles S. Peterson, "Imprint of Agricultural Systems on the Utah Landscape," in Richard H. Jackson, ed., *The Mormon Role in the Settlement of the West* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1978), 95.

⁵⁸ Lowry Nelson, *The Mormon Village: A Pattern and Technique of Land Settlement* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1952), 3.

⁵⁹ Poulsen, 6.

was a sacrament upon the land – an edifice of worship. It also responded to both the resources and the contour of its environment with extraordinary affinity. Both product and creator of a powerful sense of community, its responses to economic impulses were only secondary, allowing it to enjoy a dimension for survival not often found in the exploitative landscapes of the West.”⁶⁰

Sacred spaces serve to center us. Buildings and landscapes “speak to spiritual dimensions that affect us in many ways, introducing order and meaning into all-too-often chaotic and perplexing realms of existence.”⁶¹ Tabernacles served as the building at the geographic and spiritual center of towns to center the people. Centrality within sacred space is not a new concept. The temple of Solomon had varying gradations of holiness in the interior spaces, from the outer court to the holy of holies. The sacred groves of Druids and other tree worshipers had a particularly holy tree near the center of the grove. Sacred space is composed of circumference and center, with the circumference offering protection and security, whereas the center provides “mystical union and renewal.” In sacred space, there is always a holier space within a sacred space.⁶² This coincides with the ancient veneration of the *omphalos*: the sacred navel or divine center. Leonard Arrington notes that the purpose of the gridiron pattern of streets and addresses determined by proximity to the temple in Salt Lake City was to underscore the importance of the temple. Until the era of tabernacle building was over, only the Utah communities of Salt Lake City, St. George, Logan, Manti, Mesa in Arizona, Cardston in Alberta, and Laie in Hawaii had temples. The greater number of communities, by far, was centered on a tabernacle. This does not mean that a temple was less important in

⁶⁰ Peterson, 102.

⁶¹ Bradley, 3.

⁶² Poulsen, 118-119.

these communities, just beyond their means. Tabernacles sat at the center of towns in part to remind people what their priorities should be and where their desires should be directed. This function was magnified in communities whose tabernacle had a bell. The clock and bell in the St. George tabernacle regulated the life of the entire community.⁶³

The centrality of tabernacles in Mormon communities was something recognized by those who were not members of the Church. The Salt Lake Tabernacle was, for the lack of a better term, an essential stop on the tour of Salt Lake. For example, when Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony made their first visit to Utah to promote women's suffrage, they sought permission to speak in the Tabernacle, which Brigham Young granted.⁶⁴ The notoriety of that tabernacle was and is reinforced by the reputation of the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. Other tabernacles had choirs though that performed before audiences of non-Mormons.⁶⁵ The Ogden Tabernacle Choir,⁶⁶ for example, sang at the opening meeting of the Irrigation Congress in Portland, Oregon in 1905.⁶⁷ Tabernacles were recognized for more than just the singing ability of the Saints. The Salt Lake Tabernacle, St. George Tabernacle, and Wasatch Stake Tabernacle in Heber City, Utah, were all subjects of study of the Historic American Buildings Survey, recognizing the architectural contribution that they have made to the nation.

⁶³ Edward A Geary, "For the Strength of the Hills: Imagining Mormon Country," in *After 150 Years: The Latter-day Saints in Sesquicentennial Perspective*, Charles Redd Monographs in Western History No. 13, eds. Thomas G. Alexander and Jessie L. Embry (Midvale, UT: Charles Redd Center for Western Studies, 1983), 82, and www.lds.org.

⁶⁴ Joan Smyth Iverson, *The Antipolygamy Controversy in U. S. Women's Movements, 1880-1925: A Debate on the American Home Front* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1997), 25.

⁶⁵ Heber J. Grant, *Gospel Standards* (Salt Lake: Improvement Era, 1942), 168.

⁶⁶ The Ogden Tabernacle Choir was formed in 1859 and was dissolved in 1949. During the group's existence, they were almost as well known as the choir based in the Salt Lake Tabernacle.

⁶⁷ Andrew Jenson, "August 18, 1905," *Church Chronology* (Salt Lake: Deseret News Press, 1914).



Figure 35: The Daily Graphic, December 16, 1885.

Sometimes the recognition of tabernacles' importance was not so positive. When Madame Sarah Bernhardt visited Salt Lake City in 1908, she refused to enter the tabernacle, or any other "Mormon building."⁶⁸ A generation earlier in 1880, one prominent Presbyterian clergyman "went so far as to advocate that a satisfactory solution to the "Mormon problem" would be to gather all the Mormon leaders into their tabernacle 'and turn the U.S. artillery loose upon them.'"⁶⁹ Figure 35 shows how the Salt Lake Tabernacle figured into the popular perception of Latter-day Saints. The hammer that is going to drive the final nail in to the coffin of Mormonism is labeled "Decision of U. S. Supreme Court (in *Murphey v Ramsey* to uphold the federal law disenfranchising polygamists)," while lightning is striking the tabernacle, not the temple, endowment house, or any other building, in the background.

The Salt Lake Tabernacle continues to this day to be representative of the Church to much of the world. A simple internet search on Google for "Mormon" returns a massive number of hits relating to the Mormon Tabernacle Choir. The choir is so pervasive that the group "Families Against Cults" refers to the Church as "The Caroling Cult."⁷⁰ In 2004, Christian apologist Ravi Zacharias and other notable evangelicals spoke in the tabernacle; the first time since 1899 that an evangelical preacher had the privilege. The event caused a controversy among many Christians who felt that Zacharias was way too

⁶⁸ Jenson, "May 21, 1906,"

⁶⁹ R. Douglas Brackenridge, "Presbyterians and Latter-day Saints in Utah: A Century of Conflict and Compromise, 1830-1930," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 80 (Winter 2002): 213.

⁷⁰ Dan and Agusta Harting, "The Caroling Cult," *Families Against Cults*, 1999, accessed 5 July 2005; available from <http://www.ibac.org/html/fac103.html>; Internet.

conciliatory to the mostly LDS audience.⁷¹ The visiting ministers were allowed to bring their own musical performer. Singer and songwriter Michael Card led the congregation in several songs, which led Craig Hazen, professor of Christian apologetics at Biola University to say “it was surreal to see evangelicals worshipping in Spirit and Truth *at the center of Mormon power and influence.*”⁷²

The Agency of Buildings

The third part of Smith and Bugni’s analysis of symbolic interaction and buildings addresses the ways in which people give buildings agency and how they thus play a role in community influencing interactions. Tabernacles had a direct influence on community cohesiveness from their inception. Building projects, especially the larger, more intricate tabernacles, required sacrifice to build and lots of time at the construction site interacting with other members of the community. Once completed, the buildings contained “symbolic cues that communicated messages to people,” serving as a constant reminder of their expected roles in the community.⁷³ Martha Bradley indicates that “The spaces we create also represent and reproduce the dominant order and values of our societies at a given time. Material places, spatial types are created or modified to shape people’s activities, relationships, and beliefs in specific ways as well as to further particular values

⁷¹ Pauline J. Chang, “Evangelical Defends Decision to Speak at Mormon Tabernacle,” *The Christian Post*, 28 December 2004, accessed 5 July 2005; available from <http://www.christianpost.com/article/education/625/section/evangelical.defends.decision.to.speak.at.mormon.tabernacle/1.htm>; Internet. There are several articles online and discussion boards that talk about the event in great detail.

⁷² Mark Ellis, “Evangelicals Speak at Mormon Tabernacle for First Time in a Century,” Assist News Service, 10 December 2004, accessed 5 July 2005; available from http://www.cephas-library.com/ecumenical/ecumenical_evangelicals_speak_at_mormon_tabernacle.html; Internet.

⁷³ Valerie Bugni and Ronald Smith, “The Symbolic Approach to Physical Environments,” *Connections: AIA Las Vegas Forum Newsletter* (December 2002 and January 2003): 2.

and interests.”⁷⁴ The environment teaches social order. Tabernacles become more than just buildings, they served as tangible indication of the values the community has.

Tabernacles were the site of numerous priesthood training meetings throughout the Mormon Culture Region. The fact that such fine buildings were constructed for such a purpose reinforced the importance of the priesthood. A tabernacle’s placement and design served to foster cohesiveness among those Saints fortunate enough to have one because the reinforced the priesthood as the dominant force in social ordering.

⁷⁴ Bradley, 1.

CHAPTER 5

THE END OF AN ERA

The age of tabernacle building ended over fifty years ago, the last being built in Ogden, Utah in 1953. (See figure 36) Only five tabernacles were constructed after 1930, most of them outside of Utah. Since tabernacles were such important buildings, it might seem puzzling why the construction of tabernacles ended. However, the reasons that tabernacles are no longer constructed by the church are numerous. This chapter discusses the reasons that the Church moved away from tabernacle construction. It also addresses the issues of memory and historic preservation, investigating the ways in which the buildings remain significant, though not Church wide, but locally.

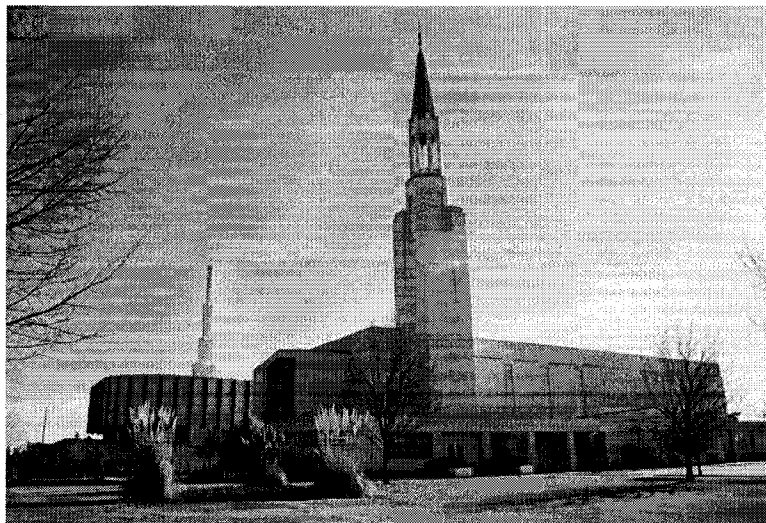


Figure 36: Ogden Tabernacle in the Foreground with the Ogden Temple Behind

Reasons for Decline

Before 1890, most meetinghouses and tabernacles, though they could be decorative and very fine, were functional structures, never intended to be status symbols. After 1890 though, several monuments were produced. Other than the construction of temples, the decision to build a meetinghouse of any kind was a local decision. Some stakes took advantage of this structural arrangement and began to compete with others to find who could build the biggest and nicest tabernacle for their stake, a practice that Church headquarters strongly discouraged.¹ Probably the biggest reason, however, for the decline in tabernacle building had to do with the worldwide growth of the Church. Not only did the Church grow in membership, but the organizational structure of the Church changed. From 1900 to 1930, wards and stakes were made into smaller units that were more responsive to the needs of the members. These smaller units with greater oversight from Salt Lake City were less able to build expensive tabernacles.² The changes in LDS architecture is as much a story of change in Church philosophy and organization as it is the story of the adoption of new technologies or styles.³

The end of tabernacle building coincided with a meteoric rise in the number of Church members. The period 1940 to 1960 saw Church membership double.⁴ Between

¹ Richard Jackson, *Places of Worship: 150 Years of Latter-day Saint Architecture* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), viii.

² Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 95.

³ Allen D. Roberts, "Religious Architecture of the LDS Church: Influences and Changes since 1847," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Fall 1975): 307.

⁴ Martha Sonntag Bradley, "The Cloning of Mormon Architecture," *Dialogue: Journal of Mormon Thought* 14 (Spring 1981): 23.

1940 and 1970, membership tripled.⁵ Most of this membership growth occurred outside of the Mormon Culture Region. Cultural geographer D. W. Meinig asserted that the dedication of the Los Angeles Temple in 1956 was not only a cause for rejoicing by the Saints in California, but an event of profound sociological and theological significance.⁶ It underscored that the Church was no longer just a Utah church and recognized that sacred funds were better used providing temples and meetinghouses to the Saints outside Utah than in building elaborate tabernacles where the church was already well established. The idea of a Mormon commonwealth “self contained and sufficient to its own future” became untenable, especially since the Saints were being counseled not to come to Utah, but to build up the church wherever they happened to live.⁷ The standardized planning that the Church used to replace the old system of building construction was economically expedient, especially in light of the fact that throughout most of the 1960’s, a one million dollar project was started somewhere in the world every day. Standardized planning was a way to protect the sacred tithing funds used to build those buildings. Building expenditures remain the single largest budget item for the Church to this day.⁸ There are numerous critics of the resulting cookie cutter approach to building construction, but the Church is in the business of saving souls. The construction of beautiful buildings is an admirable but secondary pursuit.

⁵ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 235.

⁶ D.W. Meinig, “The Mormon Culture Region: Strategies and Patterns in the Geography of the American West, 1847-1964,” *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 55 (June 1965): 219.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 264.

After 1900, churches began to be used for more Church auxiliary meetings. Beginning in 1921, Salt Lake began to discourage wards from building separate Relief Society halls and provided them with space in new ward and stake buildings.⁹ The Church also adopted the program of the Boy Scouts of America, and space was needed for scout meetings. Auxiliaries for the young men and women were created and space was needed for their meetings. The number of meetings held multiplied until some harried member penned the 14th Article of Faith to accompany the thirteen others written by Joseph Smith. It reads:

We believe in meetings – all that have been scheduled, all that are now scheduled, and we believe that there will yet be scheduled many great and important meetings. We have endured many meetings, and we hope to be able to endure all meetings. Indeed we may say that if there is a meeting, or anything resembling a meeting, or anything that we might possibly turn into a meeting, we seek after these things.¹⁰

Most tabernacles did not lend themselves to hosting multiple meetings simultaneously. Figures 37 and 38 show the Wellsville Tabernacle floor plan. The upper level is taken over entirely by the main chapel and the lower level had to accommodate the boiler, pumps for the organ, stake offices, font, and restrooms, leaving very little room for auxiliary meetings. The two story design does not lend itself to the efficient movement of people to various Sunday school, priesthood, and other auxiliary meetings. It lacks a library to store Church curriculum. It is not handicap accessible without major modifications. Contrast to the design of a modern stake center shown in figure 39.

⁹ Allen D. Roberts, "Religious Architecture of the LDS Church: Influences and Changes since 1847," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Fall 1975): 312.

¹⁰ The actual 13th Article of Faith reads: "We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men; indeed, we may say that we follow the admonition of Paul – We believe all things, we hope all things, we have endured many things, and hope to be able to endure all things. If there is anything virtuous, lovely, of good report or praiseworthy, we seek after these things." The Articles of Faith are part of a letter that Joseph Smith wrote to a newspaper editor who enquired about the basic beliefs of the Church.

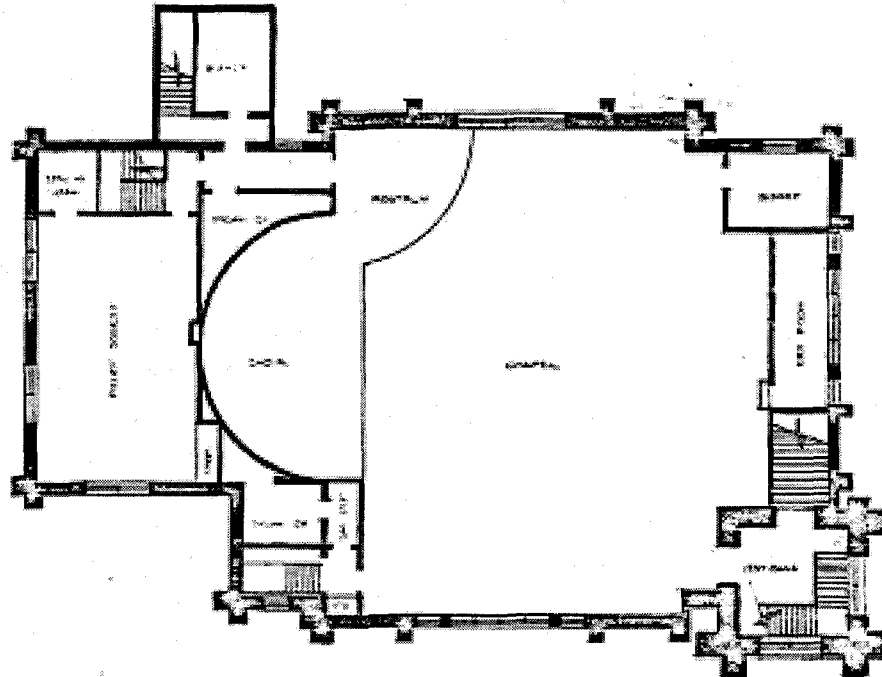


Figure 37: Main level of the Wellsville Tabernacle

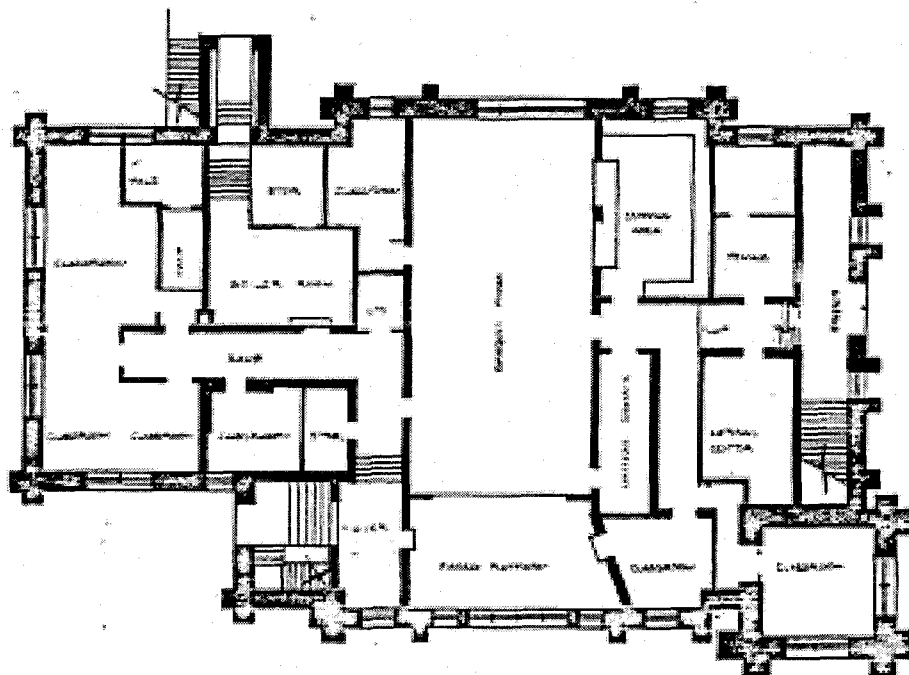


Figure 38: Basement Level of Wellsville Tabernacle

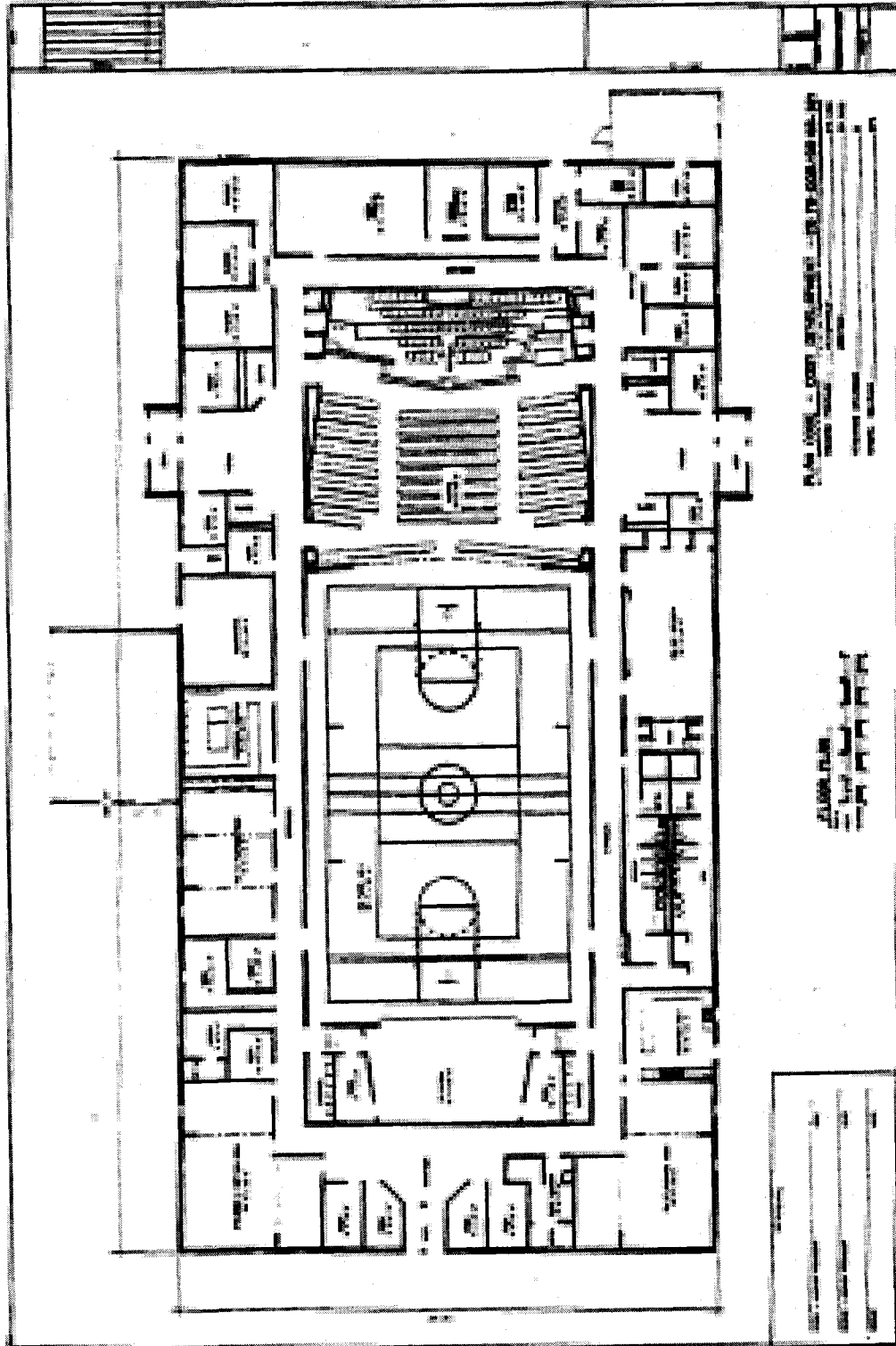


Figure 39: Typical Stake Center Floor Plan

Not only does the newer design for stake centers contain enough classrooms for the expanded schedule of church meetings, but in many places up to four wards use the same building by holding their meetings during different times on Sunday.¹¹ Typically one ward uses the classroom space while another utilizes the chapel for the sacrament meeting with the gymnasium being used for overflow seating. Plans also exist to quickly turn the buildings into an emergency shelter should disaster strike the community.



Figure 40: Balcony of Garland, Utah Tabernacle - Note the curved benches on the ends of the balcony.

Technological advances contributed greatly to the decline of tabernacles. One of the most distinctive features of tabernacles was the use of a balcony. The addition of a balcony to a building lacking a public address system greatly added to the number of people that could attend meetings and hear what the speakers were saying.

¹¹ In areas where the growth of the Church is particularly fast, up to six wards meet in the same building, though this necessitates a slightly shortened schedule, reducing the normal three hour schedule by fifteen minutes.

Unfortunately, adding a balcony also greatly increased the cost and complexity of the construction process. New and better public address systems coupled with closed circuit television enabled stakes to fill every room in a stake center and have everyone present see and hear the speakers perfectly. An FM transmitting system also comes standard in new buildings that allow for amplification for the hard of hearing and translation services.

Climate control is another area where technology has changed radically in the last 150 years. Many of the early tabernacles relied on a stove in the middle of the main room, which could be filthy and woefully inadequate, to heat the building. More modern buildings were equipped with a boiler, but this did little to help when meeting goers were sweltering in the summer heat, especially for congregations that have come to expect modern heating and air conditioning in their meetinghouses. Closely related is the fact that modern congregations have different ideas about personal space and comfort in church. Not only were the benches in most tabernacles unpadded, but they were placed quite close together to maximize the number of people the building would hold.

Simply retrofitting a building with improved climate control or public address systems is not quite as simple as one may imagine. If work was begun on a tabernacle, workers were faced with the nightmare of having to bring very old buildings into compliance with modern code requirements. Pocatello, Idaho architect Paul Anderson, in his report to the City of Rexburg on the restoration and rehabilitation of the Rexburg Tabernacle drolly stated that “code requirements have obviously evolved a great deal since 1911.”¹² The cost of the bare minimum of work to bring the building to code was

¹² Paul W. Jensen, “Tabernacle Restoration and Rehabilitation for The City of Rexburg, Rexburg, Idaho,” (Pocatello, ID: The Architects Studio, March 30, 1979), 3.

estimated to be \$241,584.¹³ To fix everything that needed work on the exterior would be \$172,928.¹⁴ Total cost for restoration - \$626,812.¹⁵ In 1911, the building cost \$35,000 to construct. When the Church was faced with the same decision of what to do with the Uintah Stake Tabernacle in Vernal, Utah, they discovered that it would cost hundreds of thousands of dollars to meet minimum standards and still not meet any church need.¹⁶ When stake leaders approached both the city of Vernal and Uintah County about the Church donating the building to be used as a civic center, both declined because of the cost that would be required to maintain it.¹⁷



Figure 41: Architects proposal for wheelchair accessible ramp for the Rexburg Tabernacle. Fortunately, engineers were able to make the building handicap accessible without such a radical alteration of the building's appearance.

¹³ Ibid., 20.

¹⁴ Ibid., 16.

¹⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁶ Kathleen M. Irving and John D. Barton, *From Tabernacle to Temple: The Story of the Vernal Utah Temple* (Vernal, UT: S.T. Tabernacle Enterprises, 1998), 1.

¹⁷ Ibid., 29.

Economic factors also influenced the curtailment of building expensive tabernacles. During the general prosperity of the 1920's, about ten tabernacles were built. In the 1930's, only two were constructed, the switch to cheaper standardized plans no doubt hastened by the exigencies of the Great Depression.¹⁸ Organizational changes within the church also led to the decline of tabernacle building. By the 1930's, the essential programs of the Church as it is organized today were well established and the architecture reflected this. Newer meetinghouses had more bishop's offices, Relief Society rooms, recreation halls, and classrooms.¹⁹ Tabernacles no longer provided the link to general Church Leadership that they once did as Stake conferences attended by general authorities that used to be held quarterly were now held every other year.²⁰ In 1953, the Church moved to take more control over the building program. As part of their efforts to standardize plans and control costs, the "international" style was developed for meetinghouses.²¹

Pioneer Tabernacles are too big, yet cannot be easily subdivided in ways that make them compatible with the current church program.²² Nevertheless, the church experimented with several ways to make the buildings more usable to be able to save them. Some were fitted with additions that housed classrooms, a gymnasium, a kitchen,

¹⁸ Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890-1930* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 122.

¹⁹ Martha Sonntag Bradley, "The Cloning of Mormon Architecture," *Dialogue: Journal of Mormon Thought* 14 (Spring 1981): 21.

²⁰ Crystal Wride Jenson, "The Geographical Landscape of Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region," (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1992), 35-6. Even the bi-annual visits are changing as the Church grows. Leadership in Salt Lake has recently instituted a program where stakes in certain districts that are not to be reorganized receive a broadcast from Salt Lake for them specifically.

²¹ Allen D. Roberts, "Religious Architecture of the LDS Church: Influences and Changes since 1847," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Fall 1975): 327.

²² Mark Leone, "Why the Coalville Tabernacle Had to be Razed," *Dialogue* 8 (Summer 1973): 34-5.

and improved heating, cooling, satellite reception capabilities (see figure 41) , and bathroom facilities. (see figures 42 through 45)

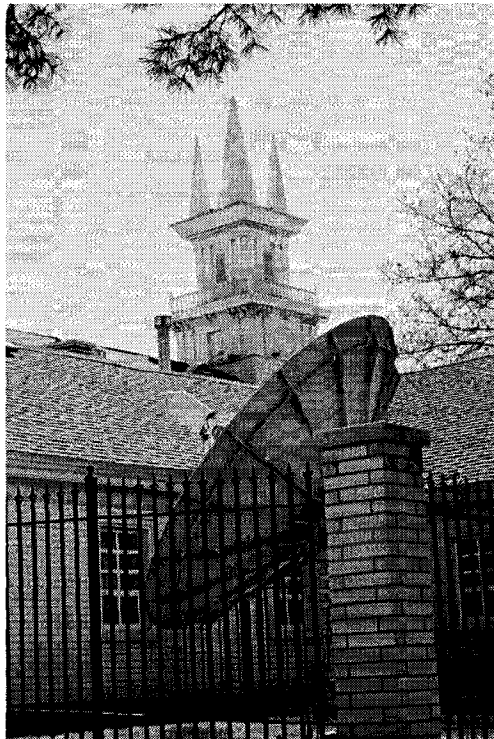


Figure 42: Satellite dish behind the Bountiful Tabernacle.



Figure 43: Old meets new, Randolph, Utah Tabernacle. Detail of where the 1984 addition attaches to the back of the tabernacle.

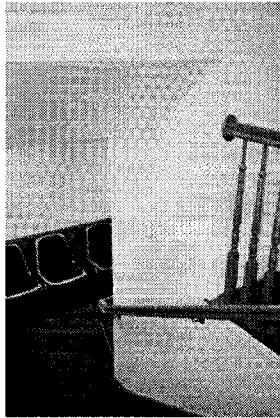


Figure 44: A hole was cut in the foundation of the Manti, Utah Tabernacle to provide access to the addition. Note the thickness of the wall.

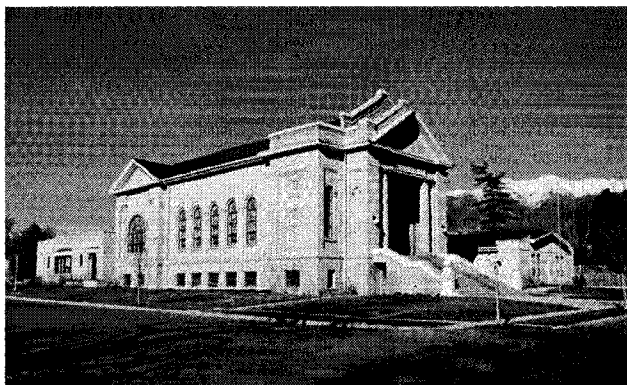


Figure 45: Kaysville, Utah Tabernacle with addition in the rear



Figure 46: Vernal, Utah Tabernacle, now the Vernal, Utah Temple, the first pre-existing building in the history of a church to be converted into a temple

There are several tabernacles that are still in existence, but have passed out of Church ownership. The Wasatch Stake Tabernacle in Heber City, Utah is currently serving as city hall, the interior having been completely redesigned to accommodate offices space. The Rexburg Tabernacle is a civic center, as well as the tabernacles in American Fork and Wellsville, Utah. The Ely, Nevada Tabernacle is currently owned by the White Pine Community Choir which uses the building for community concerts. The Smithfield, Utah Tabernacle was sold to the city in 1954 and converted into a gymnasium. The Blackfoot Tabernacle is now a funeral home. As most of these small towns lack financial resources, most are in poorer condition than those retained by the church.

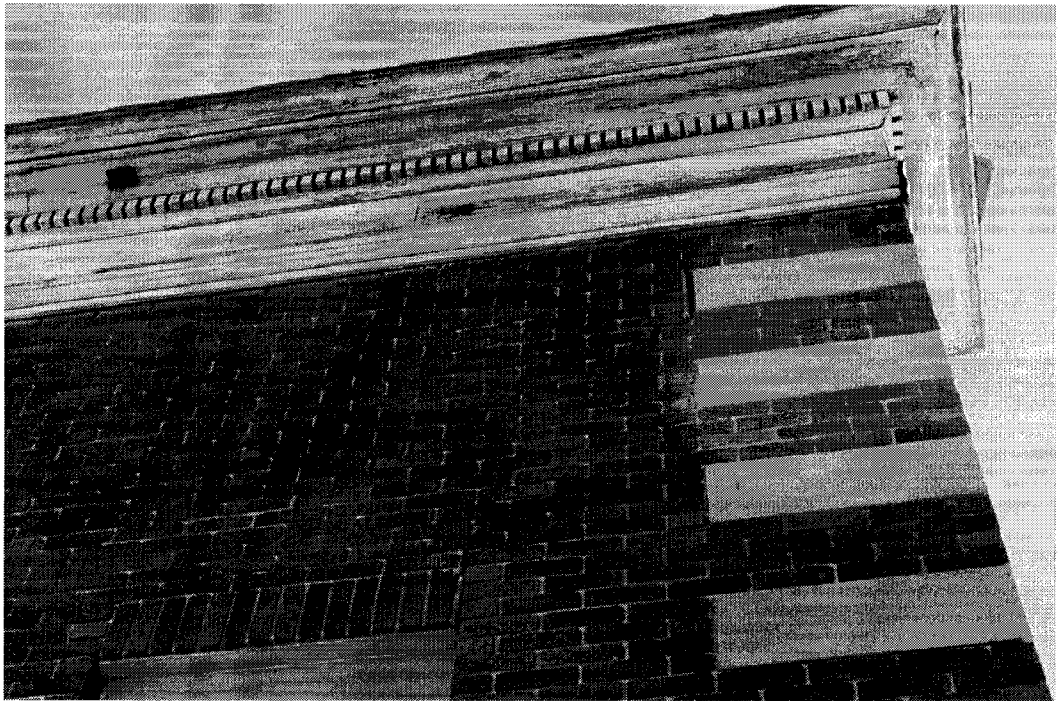


Figure 47: Detail of Ely, Nevada Tabernacle Exterior



Figure 48: Vandalized font in the basement of the Ely, Nevada Tabernacle



Figure 49: Exterior of Smithfield, Utah Tabernacle



Figure 50: Blackfoot, Idaho Tabernacle, Summer 2004

The Fight to Preserve

It was the destruction of a tabernacle that helped to reinforce just how important they can be to the communities that have one. The Church, as already noted, is not in the business of historic preservation, and as Mark Leone put it, “does not maintain museums to its former stages” making “the old buildings...useless and even detrimental.”²³ So, when the Church decided to tear down the Coalville Tabernacle in 1971, it was not part of any new policy or particular malice towards the building. A prior remodeling attempt in 1941 had converted the interior of the chapel to two floors, and that attempt sealed its fate, as further restoration would be too expensive. There were a few who saw the destruction of the tabernacle as part of the march of progress, but most did not agree with the decision. Some community members held protests, sought court injunctions, and addressed the legislature of the State of Utah in an attempt to save the building. The debate became so acrimonious that the *New York Times* even took note.²⁴ When the building, which was the only building other than the two tabernacles on Temple Square and the new Conference Center to host a General Conference, was torn down, many in the Church were so upset they established *Cornerstone*, a non-profit organization that was set up to help preserve the historic architecture of the Church.²⁵

Other communities were more successful in retaining their tabernacles after the church declined to retain and refurbish or restore them. The City of Rexburg successfully lobbied for the sale of the Rexburg Tabernacle for use as a civic center when the church

²³ Mark Leone, “Why the Coalville Tabernacle Had to be Razed,” *Dialogue* 8 (Summer 1973): 34-5.

²⁴ Wallace Tuner, “Mormons Are Distressed by Razing of a 92-Year-Old Tabernacle,” (*New York Times*, March 14, 1971), 58.

²⁵ The Conference Center, other than it was not built by a stake, fits the description of a tabernacle, though nobody in the Church refers to it as one.

contemplated razing it after the Teton Dam flood caused extensive damage to the lower portions of the building in June of 1976.²⁶ Other buildings were not so lucky. The Cedar City Tabernacle was demolished to make room for a new post office on Main Street. Idaho Falls' tabernacle made way for a Deseret Industries building.²⁷ The Nebo Stake Tabernacle in Payson, Utah was sold to a bank then razed. St. Anthony's was demolished to make way for a freeway. Others like the ones in Price, Utah, Cardston, Alberta, and the Grant Stake Tabernacle in Salt Lake City were torn down when they became old, worn out, and ceased to serve a need. Others still fell prey to other calamities and disasters that buildings are subject to. At least four burned, including the Brigham City Tabernacle, which was rebuilt. The Benson Stake Tabernacle in Richmond, Utah fell victim to an earthquake in 1962.

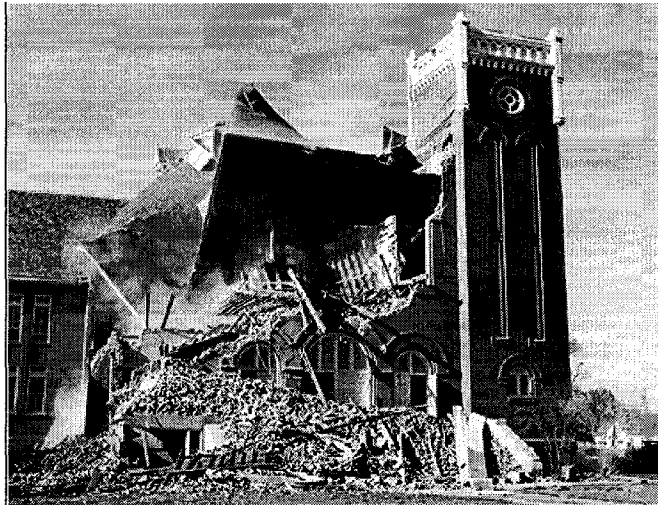


Figure 51: Benson Stake Tabernacle shortly after the earthquake

²⁶ The decision to add a basement in 1911 proved to be a fortuitous one. Because the basement raised the main floor several feet above what the original plans called for, it was spared more severe damage that probably would have condemned the building to the wrecking ball.

²⁷ Deseret Industries is a corporation run by the Church that operates thrift stores and workplace training programs.

The study of tabernacles lends itself well to the issues of memory and heritage that have become so important to scholars in recent decades. Many residents of Mormon towns recognize their tabernacle as being an integral part of their collective past. In her article on the history of Spring City, Utah, Cindy Rice asks the question of what clues remain to the identity of the people that established the town, and the first thing that she mentions is the meetinghouse that sits in the center of town a building that many call a tabernacle.²⁸ One anonymous writer referred to the Coalville Tabernacle as the “emotional glue” of the community, and the subject of pride for many in the town.²⁹ In *A History of Washington County*, Douglas Alder and Karl Brooks are almost rhapsodic in their assessment of the St. George Tabernacle: “The building reigns in the city as a masterpiece of its kind. Residents and visitors alike are fond of it, well beyond their feelings for other LDS structures. The spiritual sanctity created by the sacrifice in building it explains part of that feeling. Many hallowed events that also have occurred there add to the love felt by residents.”³⁰ Another wrote, glowingly, “So grateful were the pioneers for this enclosed place of beauty, it became a focal point of their life and activities.... Today, history has been preserved in the restoration of this jewel of a pioneer structure which still serves St. George as a cultural center.”³¹ In Gary Shumway’s “Blanding: The Making of a Community,” the Blanding Tabernacle is the

²⁸ Cindy Rice, “Spring City: A Look at a Nineteenth-Century Mormon Village,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43 (Fall 1975): 264.

²⁹ Anonymous, “The Coalville Tabernacle A Point of View,” *Dialogue* 8 (Summer 1973): 50.

³⁰ Douglas D Alder and Karl F. Brooks, *A History of Washington County: From Isolation to Destination* (Utah State Historical Society, 1996), 58-9.

³¹ <http://www.infowest.com/Utah/colorcountry/History/tabernacle.html>

only building specifically mentioned as integral in building the community.³² In the *History of the Yellowstone Stake* of St. Anthony, one person wrote “At this time St. Anthony was a young town and many things were in the process of being built to improve the town. People were not too wealthy and many of the Latter-day Saints living in St. Anthony and the surrounding areas gave freely of their time, means, and talents to help build the building.”³³ Residents of Cardston asserted that the acoustics in their tabernacle were the best in the West.³⁴ Statements such as these are strong evidence of a bond people feel with their tabernacles.

Kristie Smith, a Senior at Rigby High in Idaho watched the razing of the tabernacle in her town and wrote the following eulogy to the razing of the built environment of the past in the interest of progress.

ON TEARING DOWN THE TABERNACLE

I passed by the scene of destruction today,
And I wondered what the people would say
Who built up so tall to stand
A monument to God and Land.
I wonder?

I wonder what their eyes would say
As the bulldozer clawed their labor away?
Only to leave the lone white star
That now stands sadly and leads no where.
I wonder?

Would the pioneers' voices cry and shout
As the tawny orange-yellow flame broke out

³² Gary L. Shumway, “Blanding: The Making of a Community,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48 (Winter 1980): 401.

³³ Wanda Swensen, “History of Yellowstone Stake,” Unpublished manuscript in Max and Bonnie Atkinson, comp., *History of the Yellowstone – St. Anthony Stake, 1909 – 1986* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton Printers, 1986), 13.

³⁴ *Chief Mountain Country: A History of Cardston and District* (Cardston, Alberta, Canada: Cardston and District Historical Society, 1978), 36.

To singe the stones and blacken the sky?
Would they yell in a giant chorus, "Why?"
I wonder?

Would those for whom life was a daily struggle
Condone as right this smouldering rubble?
Or do I hear a voice in the timber's glow
Calling, "Change is not always progress, you know?"
I wonder?³⁵

One resident of Ephraim, Utah recalled that despite Church leaders' claim that their tabernacle was unstable and thus should be torn down, that first load of dynamite used to demolish the building only dislodged one stone from the building. The rock flew off the building and landed in the middle of the street while the rest of the building was relatively unscathed.³⁶ There is a similar story to one of the sturdiness of the Rigby Tabernacle. It holds that excessive amounts of explosives were required to take down part of an interior wall when that building was razed because the bulldozer couldn't get the wall to budge. Both stories express confusion over the destruction of seemingly indestructible buildings when the Church cited structural instability as the motivating factor in their removal. In Payson, Utah, one distraught sister took a more direct route to protesting the destruction of the community's tabernacle. She told the author that on the day in 1982 when the building was to be leveled, she stood on the steps keeping the bulldozers at bay for hours before her bishop came and convinced her to let the demolition proceed.³⁷

³⁵ Patricia L. Scott, *The Hub of Eastern Idaho: A History of Rigby Idaho, 1885 – 1976* (Caldwell, ID: The Caxton Printers, 1976), 132.

³⁶ Todd, Goodsell, "Maintaining Solidarity: A Look Back at the Mormon Village," *Rural Sociology* 65 (September 2000): 372.

³⁷ It is possible that the lady was not telling the whole truth about her protest, but just the fact that she went through the trouble of relating the story, true or untrue, twenty-two years after the fact shows the

As with the construction of tabernacles, there were those who were not members of the Church who were also interested in the fate of the buildings. Upon hearing of plans to tear down the Bountiful Tabernacle, the oldest church building in use in Utah, members and non-members alike fought for and won a program of restoration and preservation.³⁸ When actor Robert Redford heard of efforts to save and restore the Vernal Tabernacle, he wrote a letter to the editor of the *Vernal Express* voicing his support for the project.³⁹ Possibly one of the most dramatic indications of support of a tabernacle by someone who is not LDS, is that of Nick Meagher in Vernal, Utah. When he heard in 1995 that the Church was attempting to gather bricks to restore the façade of the tabernacle as it was turned into a temple, he donated a house that was built at the same time as the tabernacle so that it could be dismantled brick by brick and used in the restoration.⁴⁰

How to Make a Building Invisible

Though there are numerous reasons why tabernacles are no longer built, none of them fully explain how buildings that were so important to the Church could have seemingly been so fully forgotten. Today there is little evidence that most in the Church recognize that tabernacles were ever so important to the Saints. Even for those within the Mormon

attachment she felt to the building. She was successful in salvaging the pulpit, a window, and a pew from the building. The items are now on display in the town's museum of which she is a volunteer worker.

³⁸ Leonard J. Arrington and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Experience: A History of the Latter-day Saints* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 264.

³⁹ Kathleen M. Irving and John D. Barton, *From Tabernacle to Temple: The Story of the Vernal Utah Temple* (Vernal, UT: S.T. Tabernacle Enterprises, 1998), 28.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 40. Members of four stakes worked evenings and weekends to dismantle the house, clean, and stack the brick. The house yielded about 16,000 usable ones.

Culture Region, the existence of tabernacles other than one that may be in their community, which they may feel a strong attachment to, is a complete unknown. All know of Salt Lake Tabernacle, and a few seem to be cognizant to the one in St. George, despite the fact that those who live in the core have at least a dozen tabernacles within a two hour drive of their homes, in places where they were born and raised.

There are a several possible reasons for this lack of contemporary knowledge of tabernacles. One is that tabernacles had achieved such a high level of symbolic success for their late nineteenth and early twentieth century builders that they could not adequately represent the communities anymore.⁴¹ Michael Kammen indicates that “We arouse and arrange our memories to suit our psychic needs.”⁴² Both aesthetically and functionally, these buildings are illustrative of a way of life and a way of practicing religion that was no longer tenable in a more modern society. Tabernacles are a regional phenomenon. There were tabernacles constructed in Atlanta, Georgia, Jacksonville, Florida, Manassa, Colorado, four in California, two in Canada, and one in Hawaii, but tabernacles were, for the most part, a feature of the landscape of Utah. Now that the Church is a worldwide church, tabernacles no longer represent the goals the Saints have as a people. Furthermore, tabernacles were the most pervasive symbols of the presence and strength of the Church on the landscape in the Mormon Culture Region.⁴³ The function of these prominent landscape features representing the Church has been taken over by temples. Temples have always been more important, but until recently, they

⁴¹ Mark Leone, “Why the Coalville Tabernacle Had to be Razed,” *Dialogue* 8 (Summer 1973): 32.

⁴² Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991), 9.

⁴³ Crystal Wride Jenson, “The Geographical Landscape of Tabernacles in the Mormon Culture Region,” (M.A. Thesis, Brigham Young University, 1992), 152-3.

were much scarcer. In 1953, the year that the last tabernacle was built, there were nine temples. Now there are one hundred and twenty with nine more announced. These temples are on every continent except for Antarctica, making them much more appropriate symbols for a worldwide church.

The last reason for the decline of tabernacles is that because tabernacles have ceased to perform distinct useful and understandable functions, they have in a sense become invisible. Physically, they are still there, but spiritually they have become redundant.⁴⁴ People still recognize them as buildings of significance, but more in the manner of a museum that you visit occasionally when you want to recall fond memories than a home where lives are fully lived.

Tabernacles were more than beautiful buildings. They were the embodiment of all that healthy, vibrant communities strive for. They represent community, ties to place, dedication to a cause, and the striving for human betterment. The communities that still have one in their midst are blessed to have them. These grand old buildings may not fill the same vital role in the Church that they once did, but as former Idaho State University professor Merrill D. Beal noted, "Surely, the Tabernacle[s] ha[ve] served the people as a fountain of knowledge and culture...and the end is not yet."⁴⁵ They still have a purpose to fulfill in their communities.

The Church has shown a much greater commitment in the last twenty five years in maintaining the tabernacles that remain in its possession, thus protecting this rich cultural and architectural heritage. With the exception of the Ely and Smithfield tabernacles,

⁴⁴ Richard C. Poulsen, *The Pure Experience of Order: Essays on the Symbolic in the Folk Material Culture of Western America* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1982), 101.

⁴⁵ Merrill D. Beal, "The Rexburg Stake Tabernacle: An appreciation and evaluation," *Snake River Echoes* 10 (1981): 28.

those in private hands have received much of the attention and maintenance that they require. It is not so much my hope that all that remain are lavished with endless supplies of money and care as much as that they finally receive the recognition that they are due in the history of the Church and the development of American West.

APPENDIX

PHOTO CREDITS

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35. The Daily Graphic 16 December 1885, courtesy Yale University Library. In Susan Barringer Gordon, *The Mormon Question: Polygamy and Constitutional Conflict in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 223.
36. Ma McArthur, 2003.
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38. Ibid., 143.
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51. http://www.seis.utah.edu/lqthreat/nehrrp_html/1962cach/p1962cak.gif

APPENDIX

PHOTO ESSAY: TABERNACLES IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER



Figure 1: Kaneshville Tabernacle, Council Bluffs, Iowa. Original built in 1847.
Reconstruction in 1996.

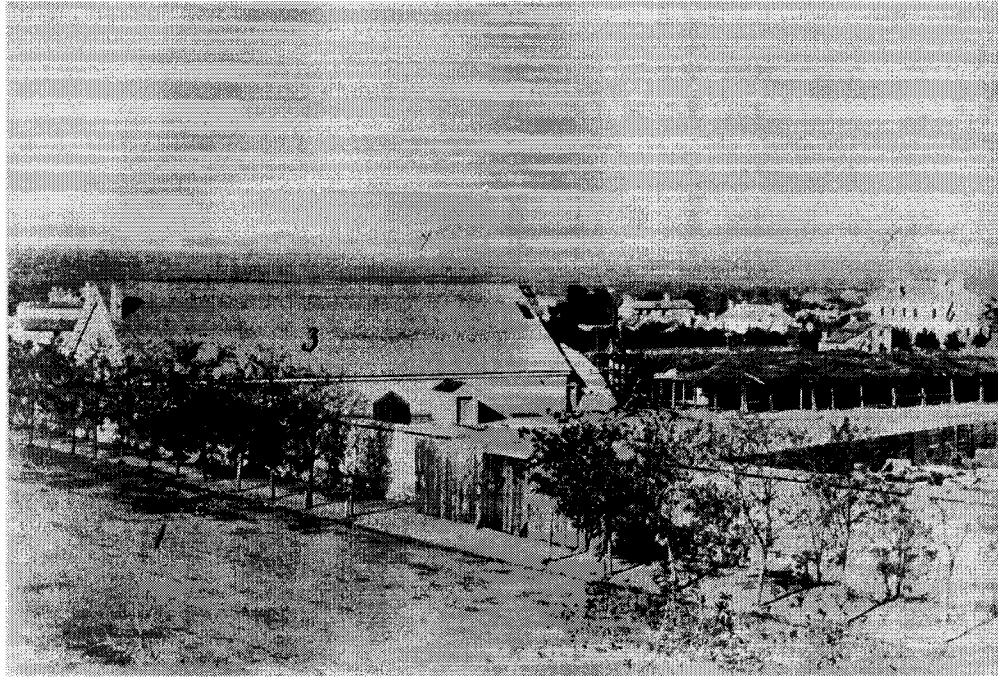


Figure 2: Old Salt Lake Tabernacle and Bowery. Built in 1851-2, it was inadequate to hold all who wanted to attend meetings even before it was finished, so the bowery was constructed behind it. The tabernacle was razed in 1877 to make room for the Assembly Hall.

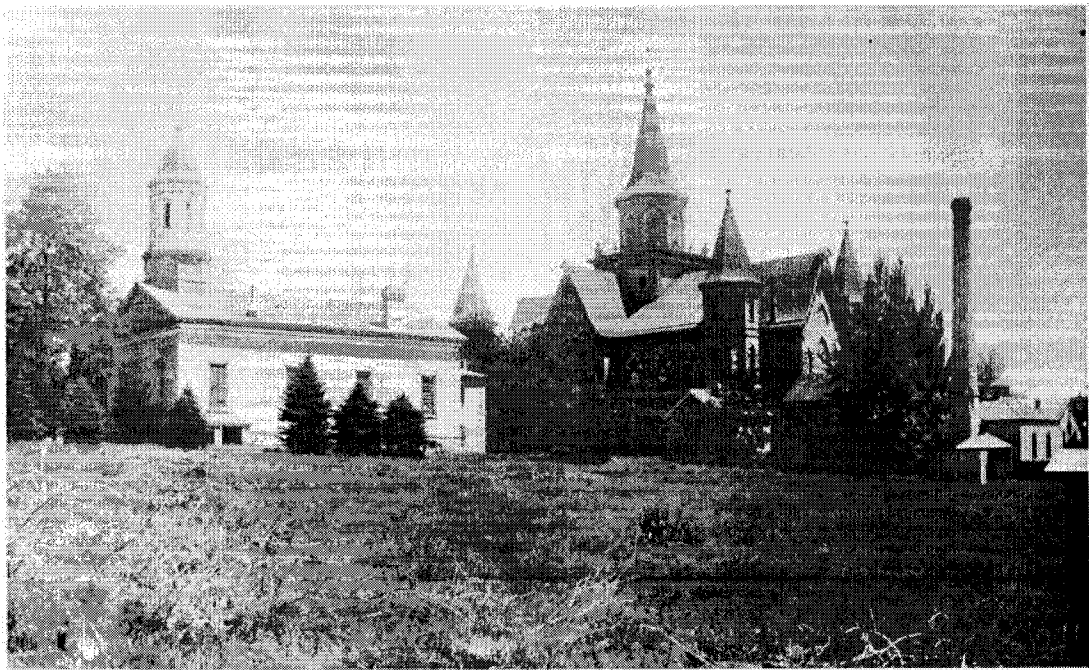


Figure 3: Provo, Utah. Provo's two tabernacles. The one in the foreground is the first one, built in 1852. It was razed 1919.

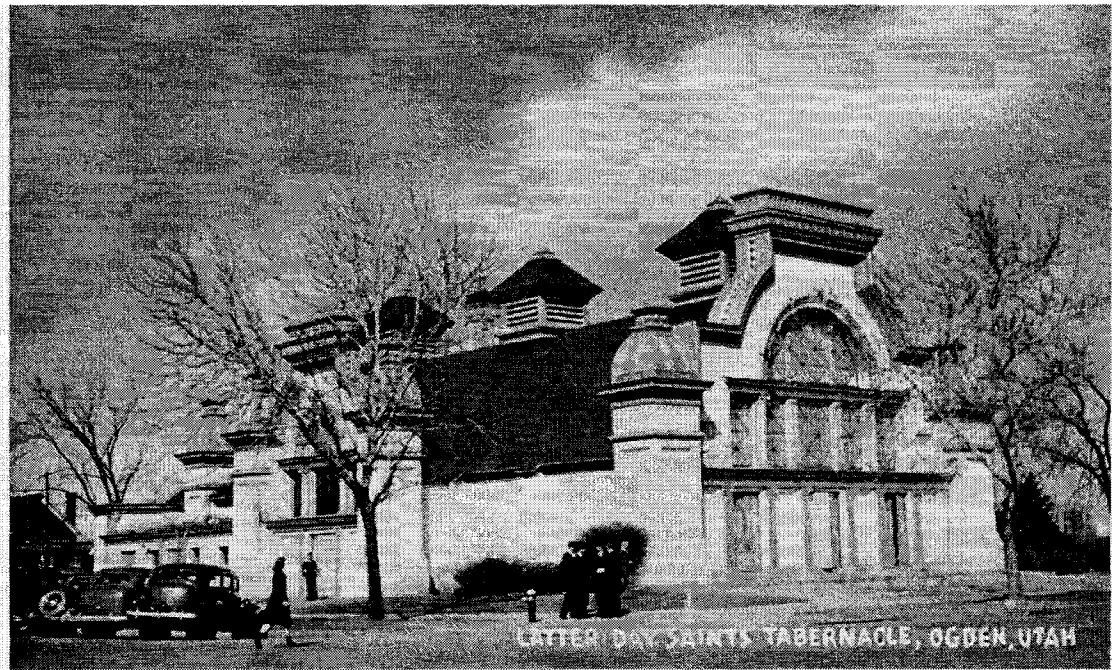


Figure 4: Old Ogden, Utah, (Pioneer) Tabernacle, built in 1856. Razed in the 1970's when Church leadership decided that it detracted visually from the new Ogden Temple.

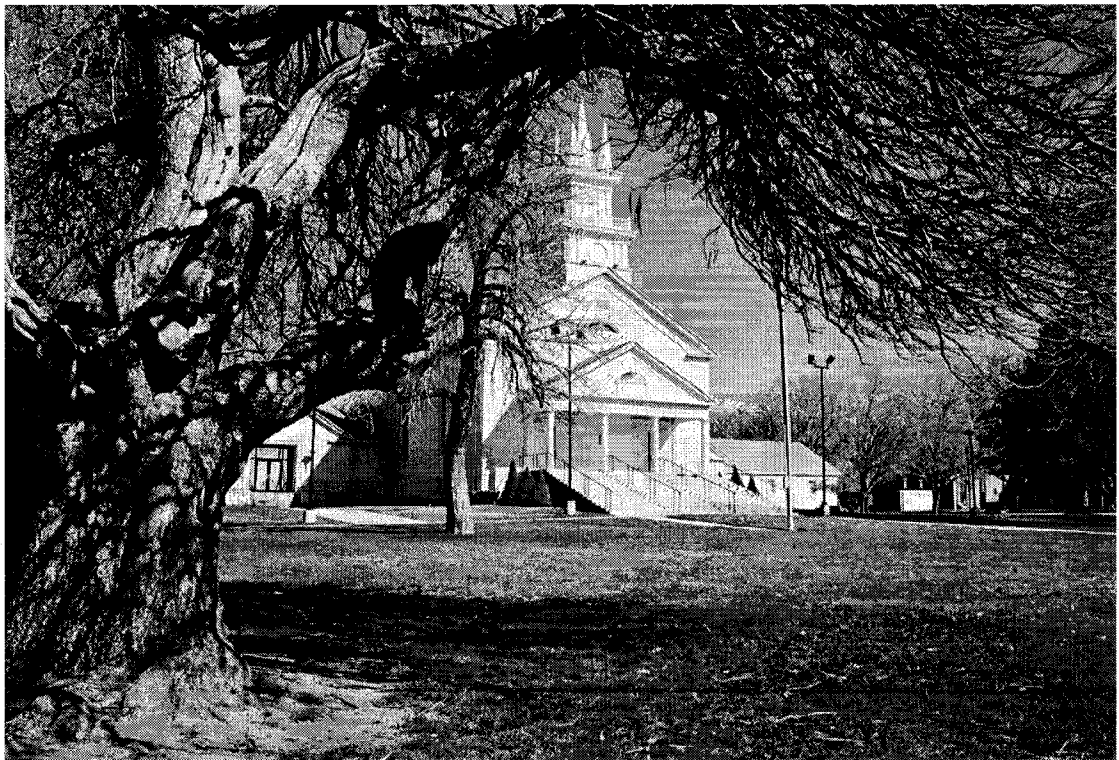


Figure 5: Davis Stake Tabernacle, Bountiful, Utah. Built in 1857, the building is the oldest church building in use in Utah. Modern additions allow it to be utilized for regular Sunday services.

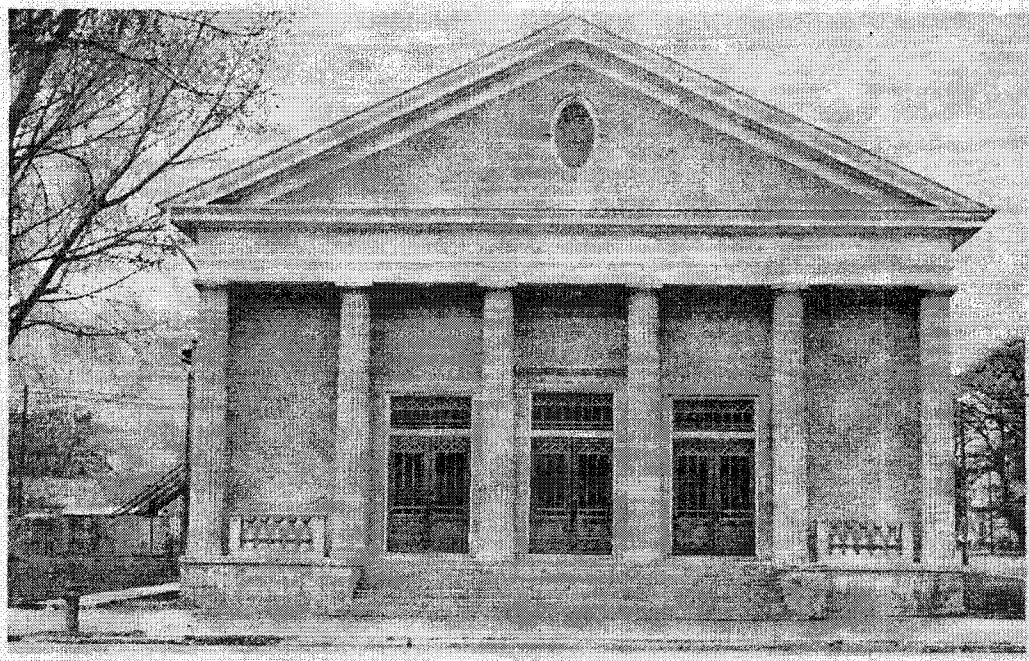


Figure 6: Juab Stake Tabernacle in Nephi, Utah, built in 1860. This view shows the new facade in 1947. The original facade was similar to the old Provo tabernacle. The building is no longer standing.

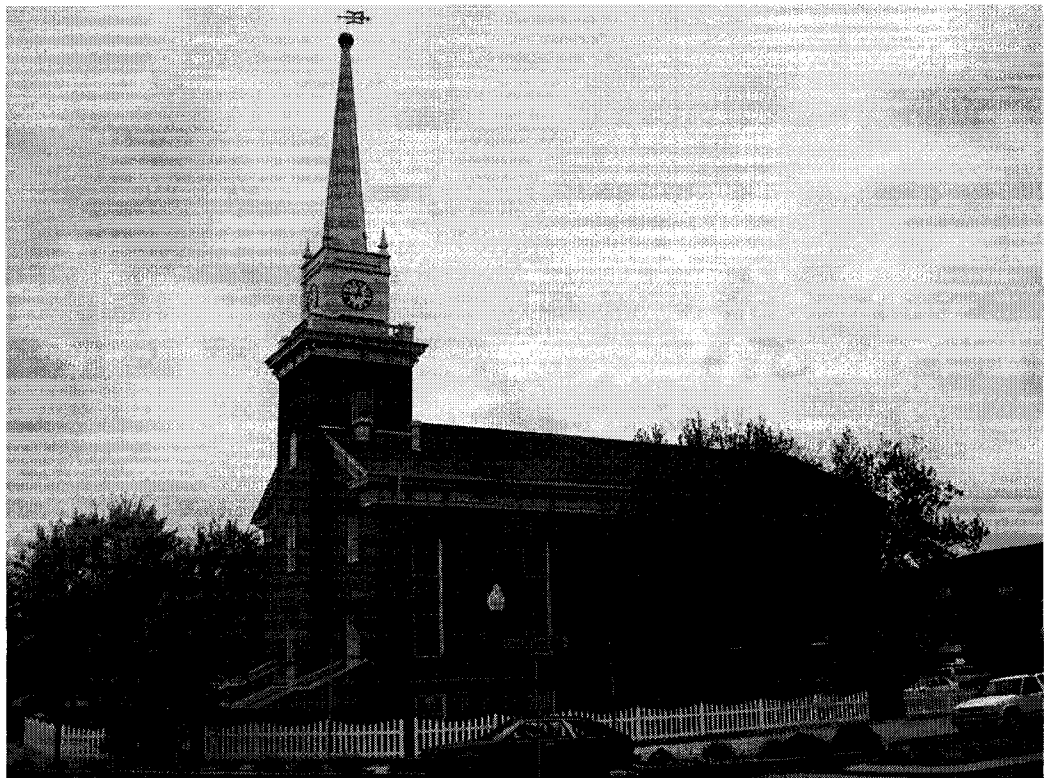


Figure 7: St. George, Utah, Tabernacle, constructed in 1863.

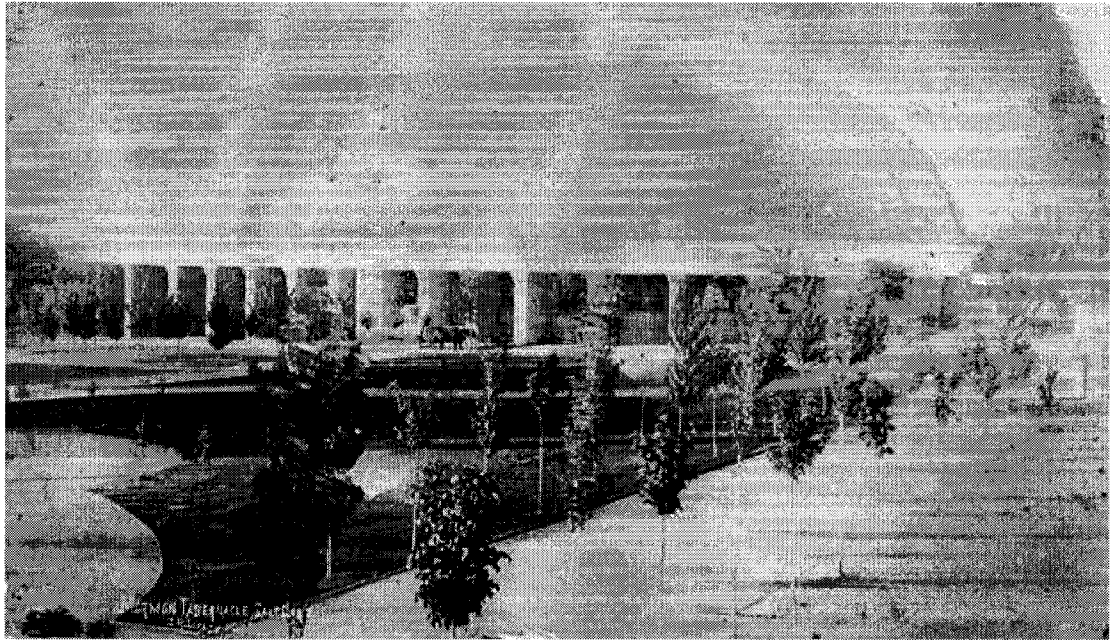


Figure 8: New Salt Lake Tabernacle. Construction on this tabernacle began in 1863.

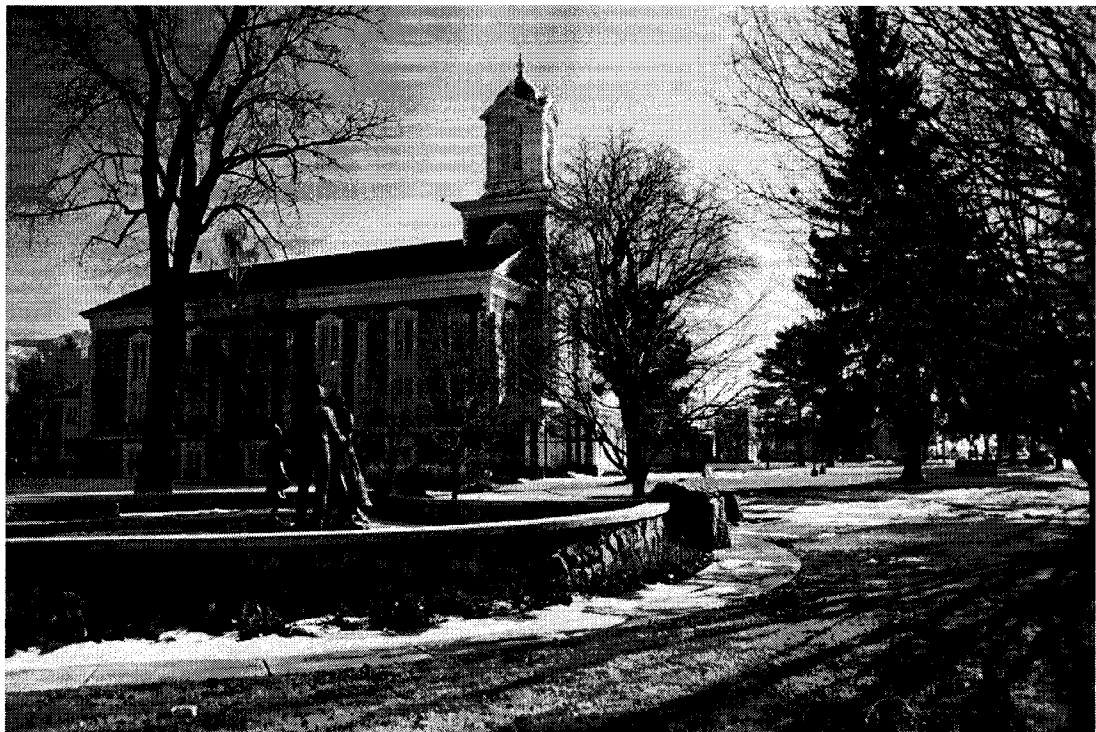


Figure 9: Logan, Utah Tabernacle, built in 1865. The basement has been converted to a family history (genealogy) library.

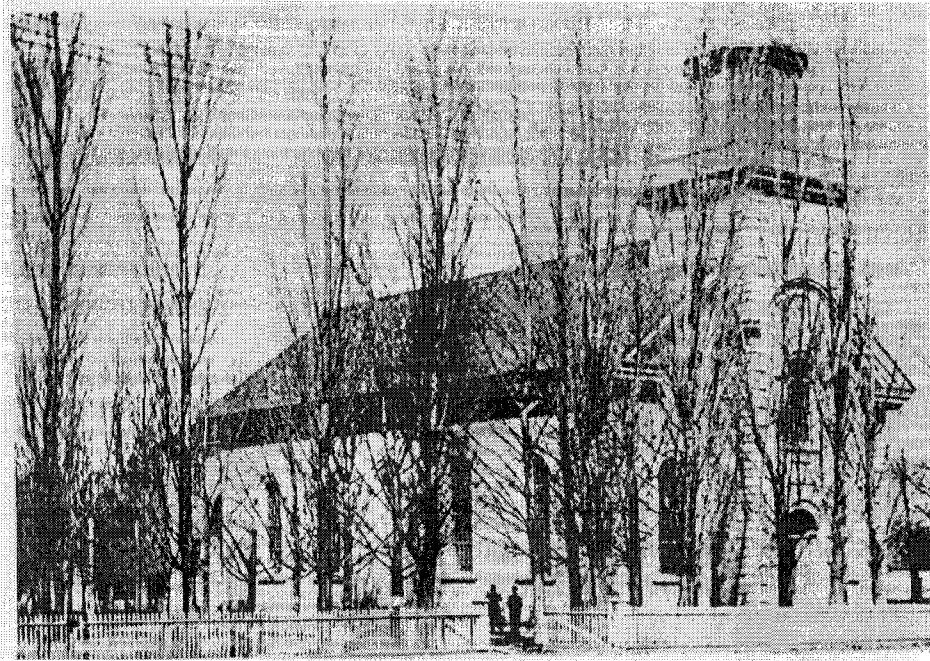


Figure 10: Ephraim Tabernacle, built in 1870.

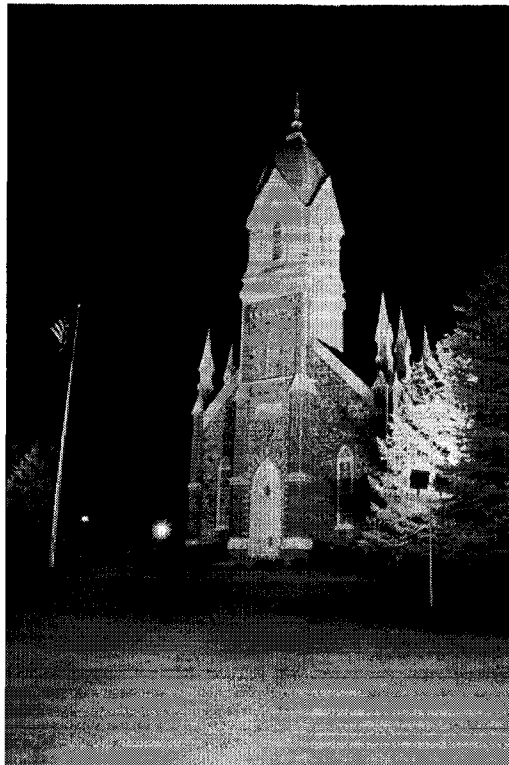


Figure 11: Brigham City, Utah, Box Elder Stake Tabernacle. The building was built in 1877, gutted by fire in 1896 and rebuilt in 1897.

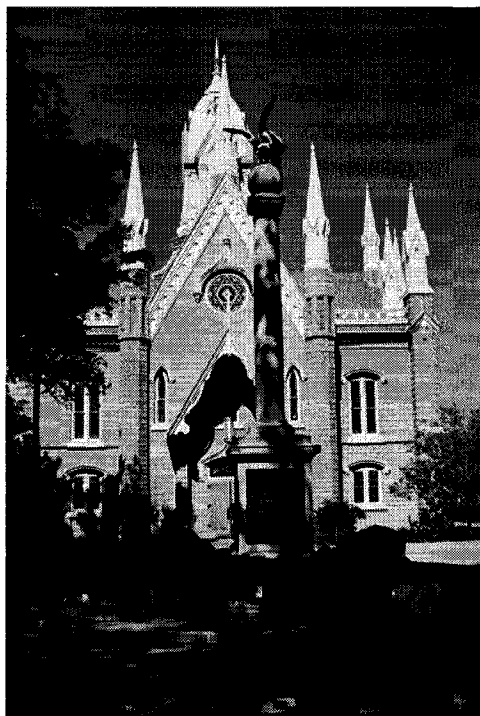


Figure 12: Assembly Hall on Temple Square, Salt Lake City, built in 1877.

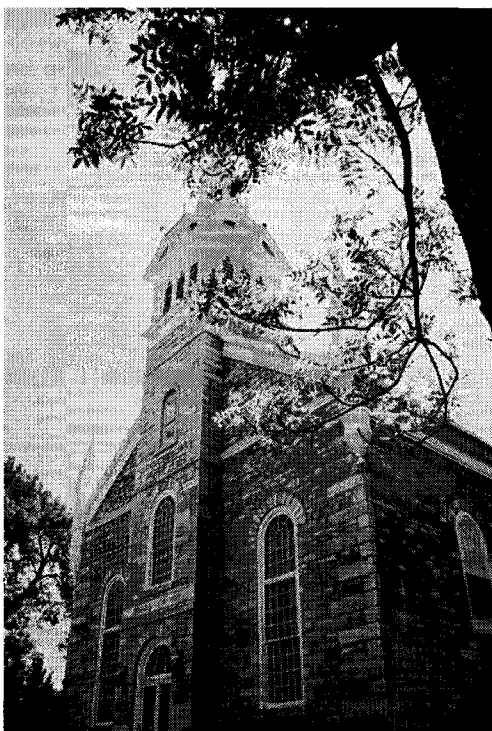


Figure 13: Manti, Utah, built in 1878. This was one of the tabernacles built as a result of the Priesthood Reorganization of 1877.

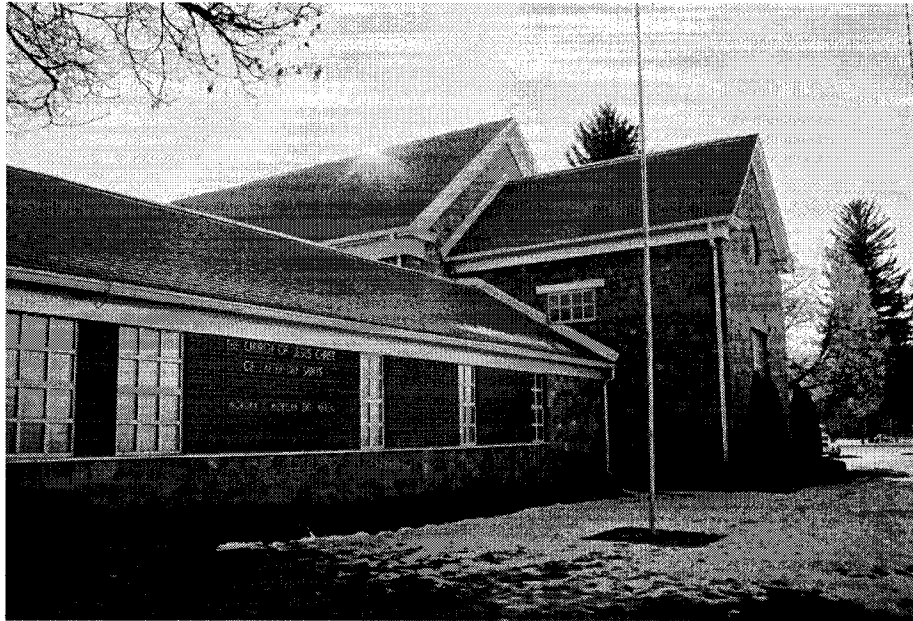


Figure 14: Morgan Stake, Morgan, Utah Tabernacle, built in 1878. In the 1950s, the tabernacle underwent heavy remodeling including an addition that more than tripled the size of the building, closed off the original entrance, got rid of the balcony, and reversed the end of the chapel at which the pulpit sits.

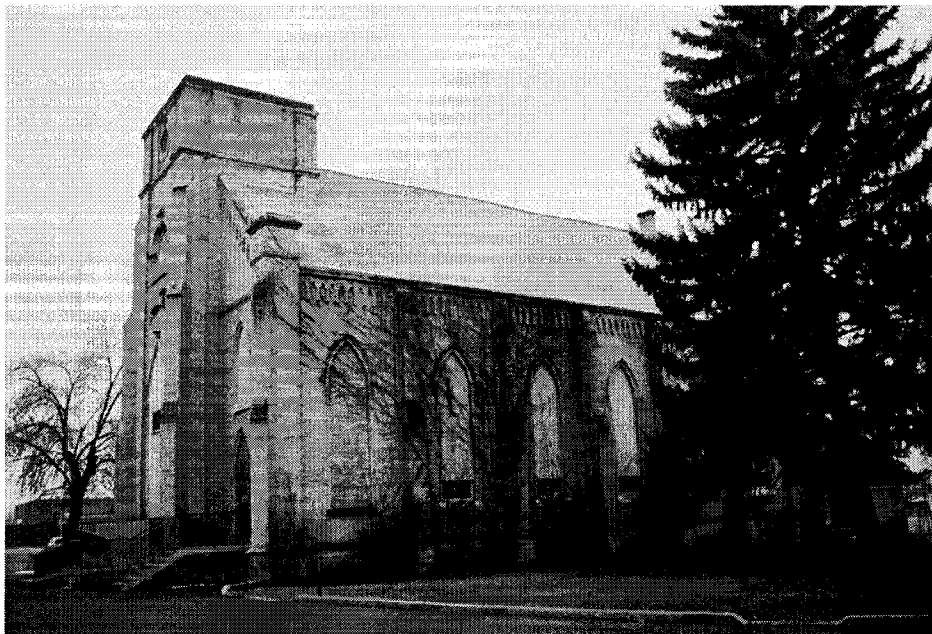


Figure 15: The Smithfield, Utah, Tabernacle, begun in 1881, is in rough shape. In 1954 it was converted into a gymnasium and sold to the city in 1982. The tower was removed when it became unsafe in the 1980s.

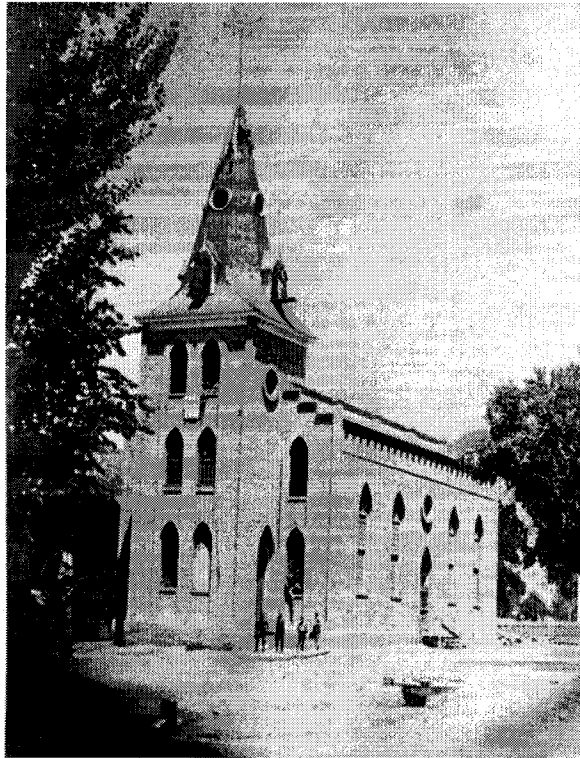


Figure 16: Cedar City, Utah tabernacle while under construction in 1882. Note the men standing in the window wells on the steeple. It was razed in 1932 to make way for a new post office.

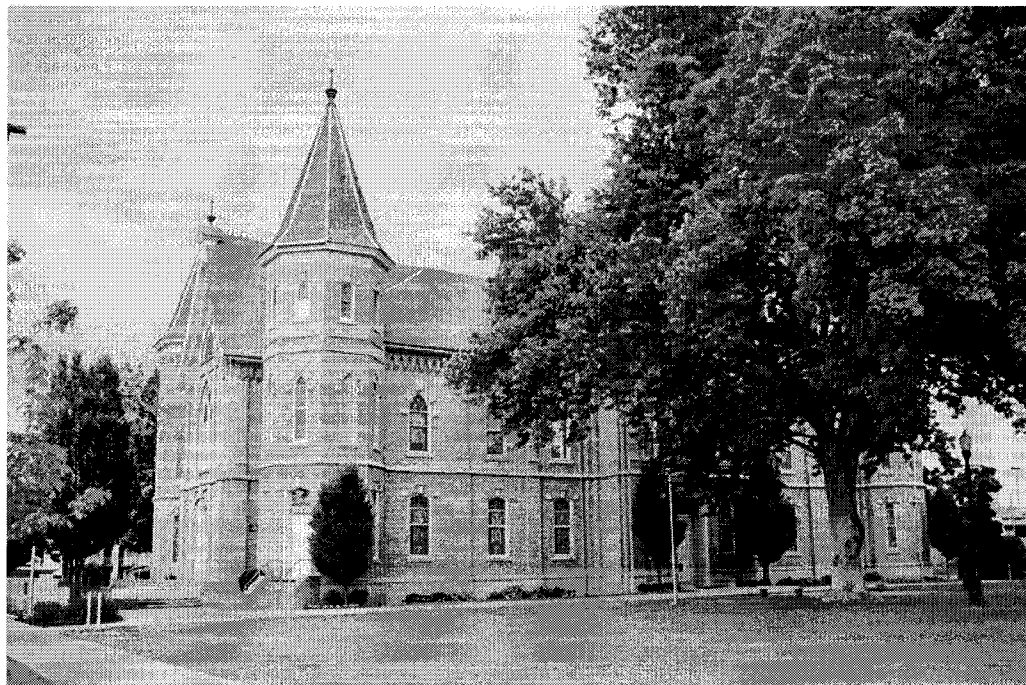


Figure 17: New Utah Stake Tabernacle in Provo, Utah, built in 1883. The center spire was removed in 1950 when it started to make the roof sag.

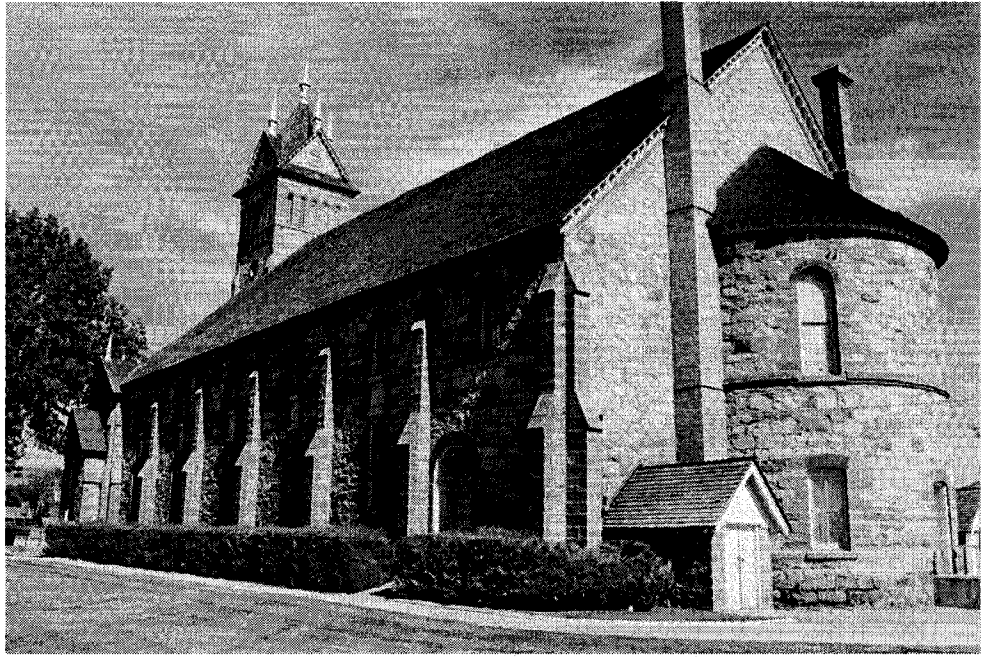


Figure 18: Bear Lake Stake Tabernacle in Paris, Idaho, built in 1884. The rounded area in the rear is where the pipe organ sits.

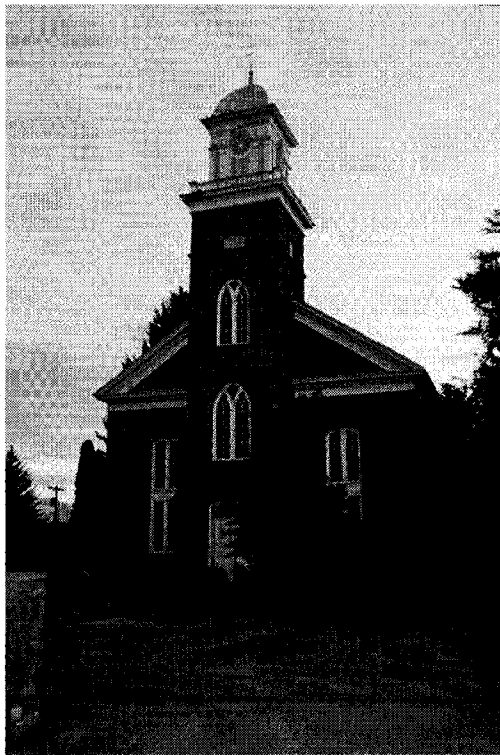


Figure 19: Wasatch Stake Tabernacle, Heber City, Utah, built in 1887. The building, which was studied by the Historic American Buildings Survey, was sold to the city in 1980. It is currently the city hall.



Figure 20: Uintah Stake Tabernacle in Vernal, Utah, begun in 1887. Converted to a temple between 1994 and 1997. It was the first temple to be built in an existing building.

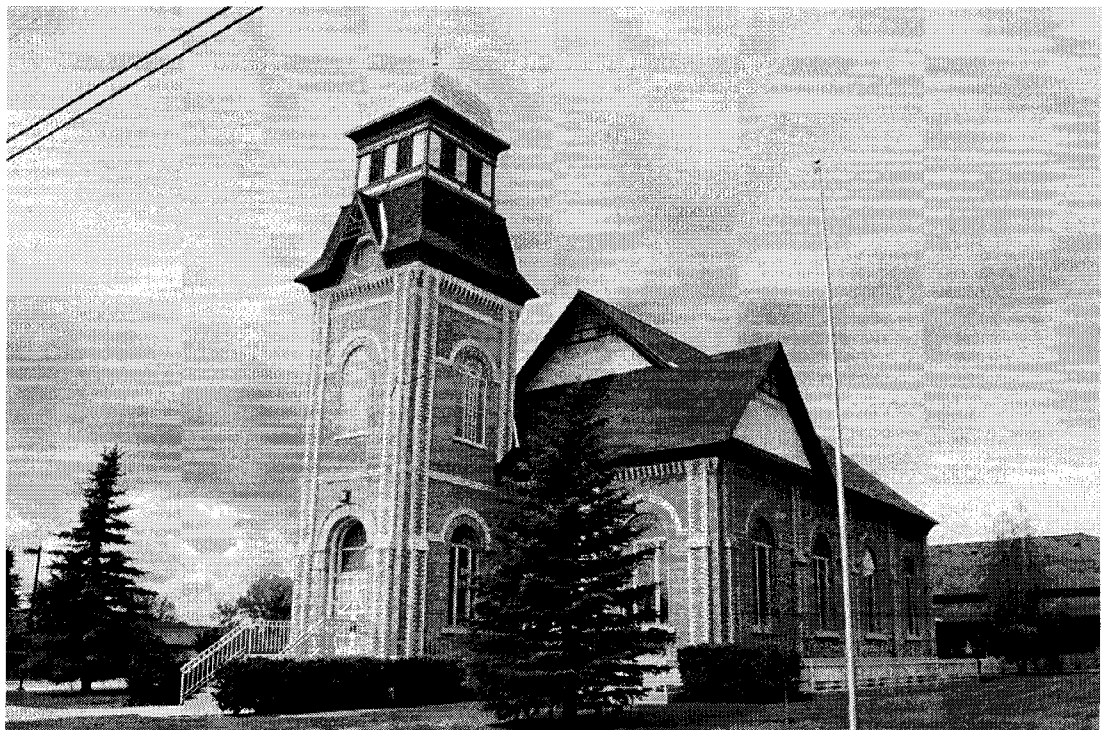


Figure 21: Randolph, Utah Tabernacle, built in 1898. Additions in 1938, 1960, and 1984. This building really stands out because it is still the tallest building in the town.

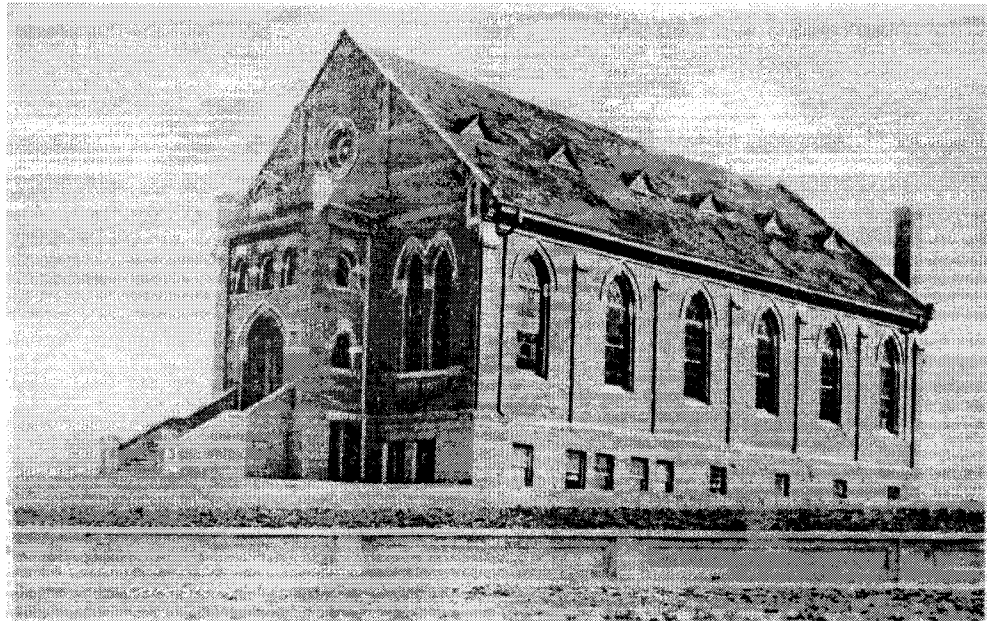


Figure 22: Cardston, Alberta, Canada, built in 1902. This is one of only two tabernacles built outside of the United States.

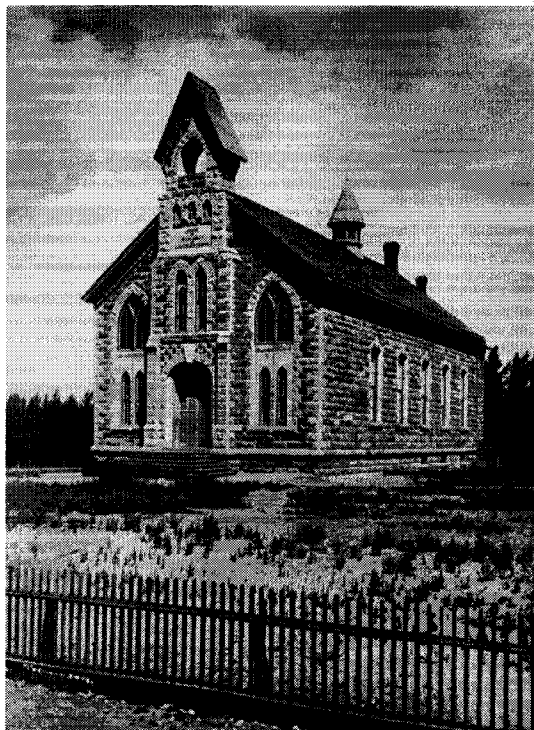


Figure 23: Oakley Idaho Tabernacle, built by the Cassia Stake in 1902. It burned down after a modern stake center was built, possibly due to arson. Note that this was before landscaping was considered vital around buildings.

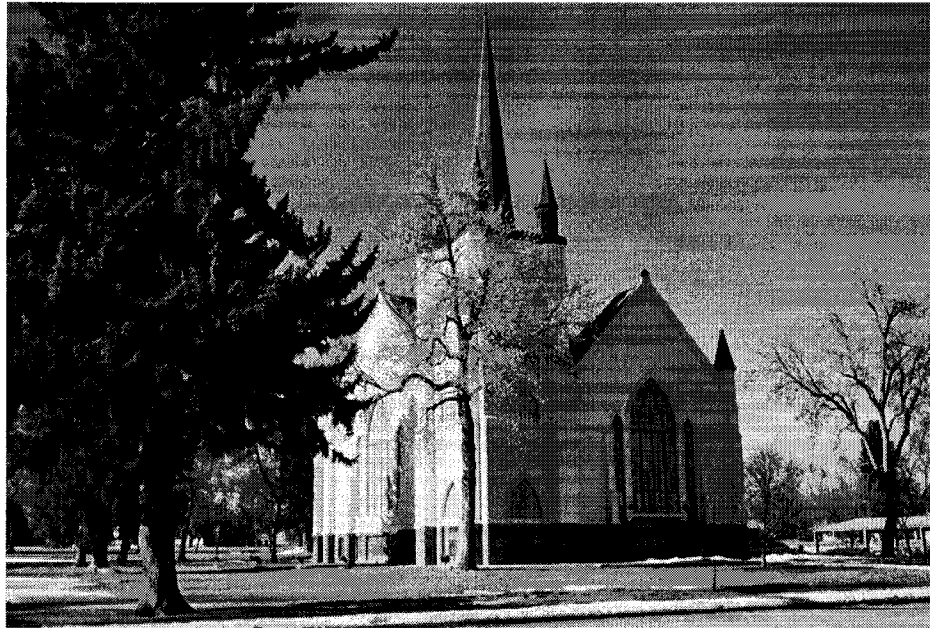


Figure 24: Wellsville, Utah Tabernacle, built in 1902. The spire is the second on the building. The first one was stuck by lightning and burned. The pews and balcony all face one corner of the building to maximize the use of internal space.

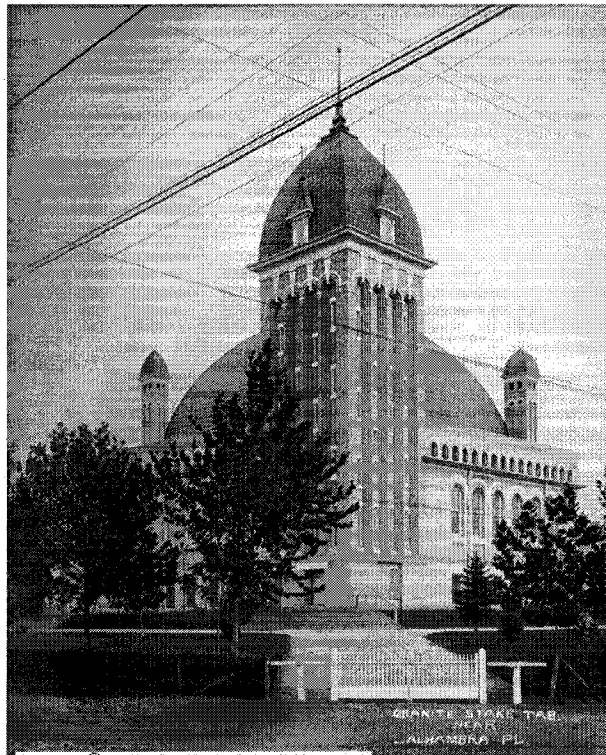


Figure 25: Salt Lake City Granite, later Grant Stake Tabernacle, built in 1903. No longer standing.



Figure 26: Benson Stake Tabernacle in Richmond, Utah, built in 1904. This photo was taken shortly before the 1962 earthquake that destroyed it.

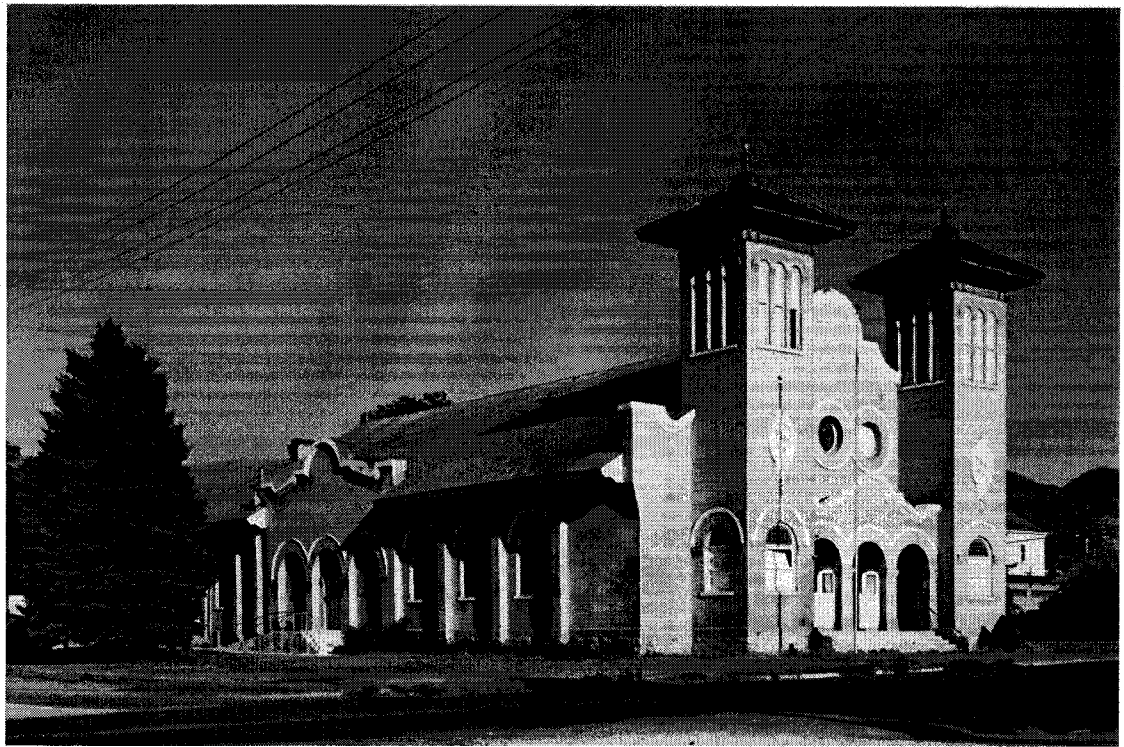


Figure 27: Nebo Stake Tabernacle, Payson, Utah, built in 1906. This building was built right next to where the old one sat that burned in 1904. This building was bulldozed in 1982.

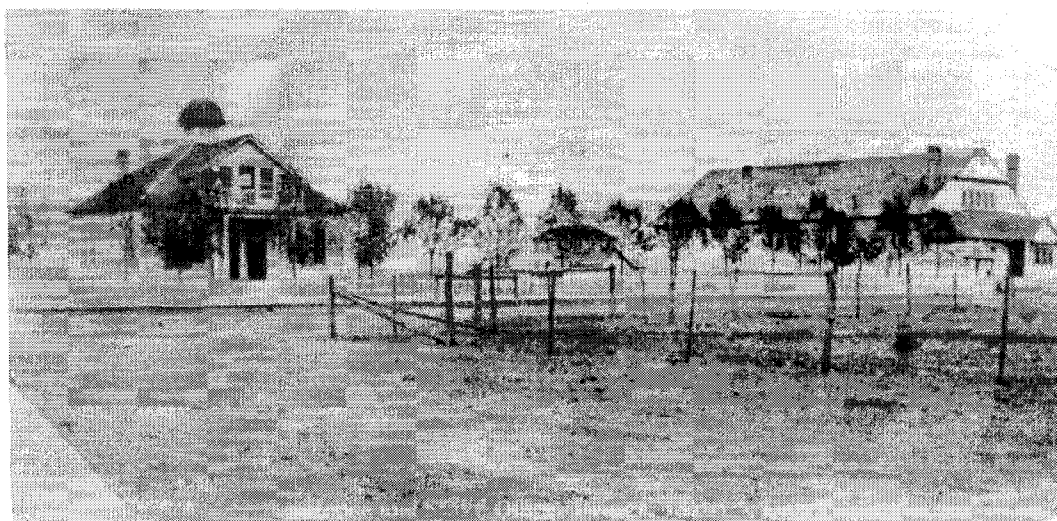


Figure 28: Teton Stake Tabernacle, Driggs, Idaho, on the right. This building, which served from 1906 to 1943, was the only tabernacle to have shingle siding.



Figure 29: Union Stake Tabernacle, La Grande, Oregon, built in 1908. This was the only tabernacle built in the Pacific Northwest. Torn down in 1982.

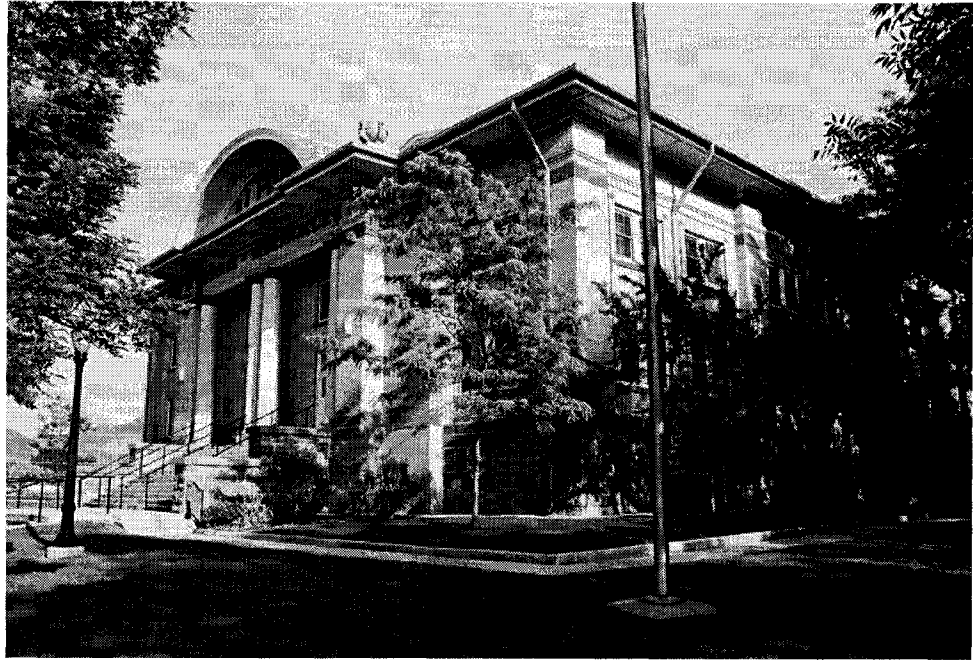


Figure 30: Alpine Stake Tabernacle, American Fork, Utah, built in 1909. The picture only shows half of the building, which is massive.

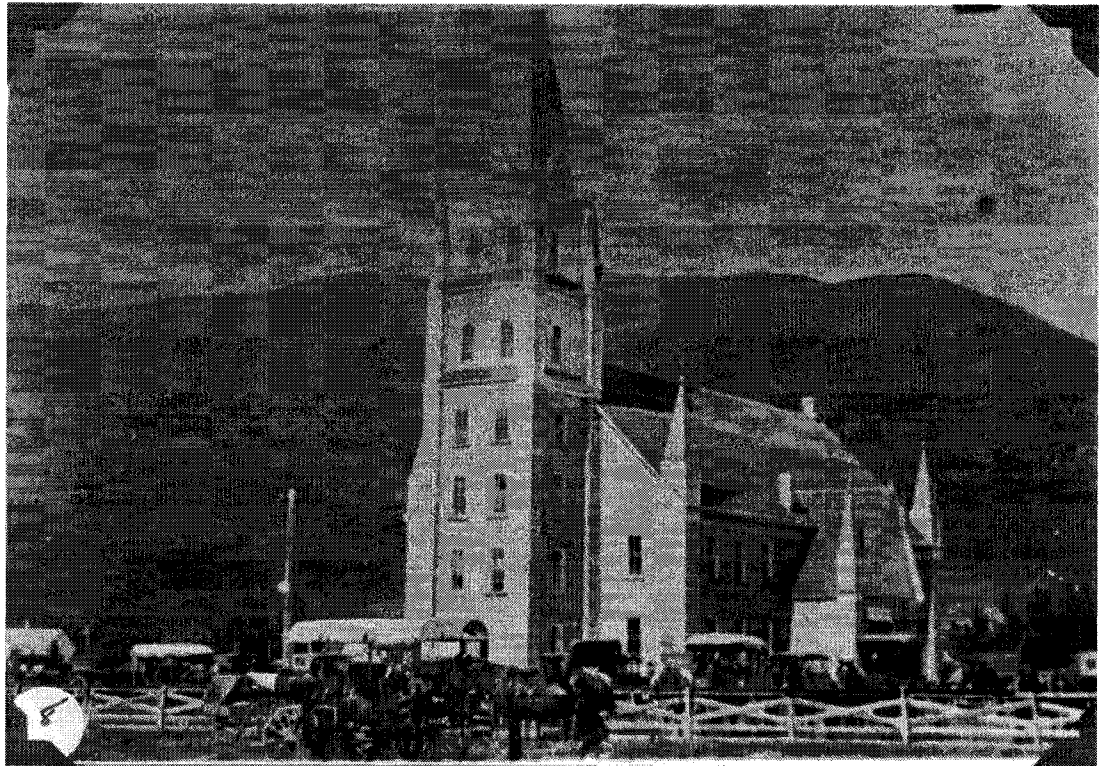


Figure 31: Star Valley Stake Tabernacle, Afton, Wyoming, built in 1909. The tabernacle had a racetrack that ran around the grounds that the next door high school would compete on.

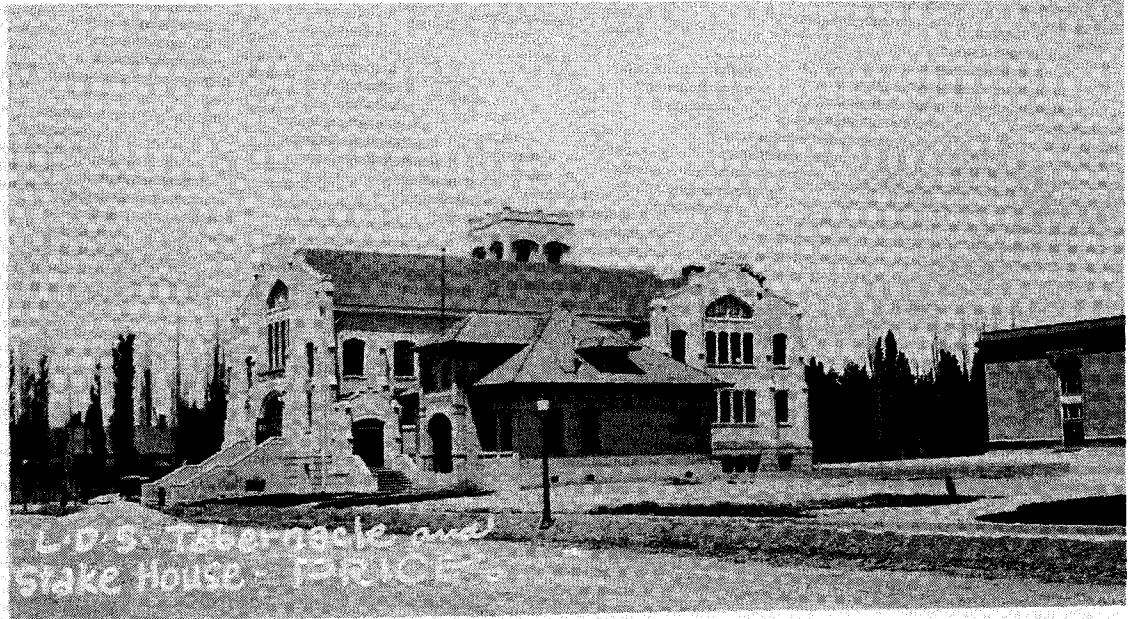


Figure 32: Carbon Stake Tabernacle, Price, Utah, built in 1911. Razed in 1981

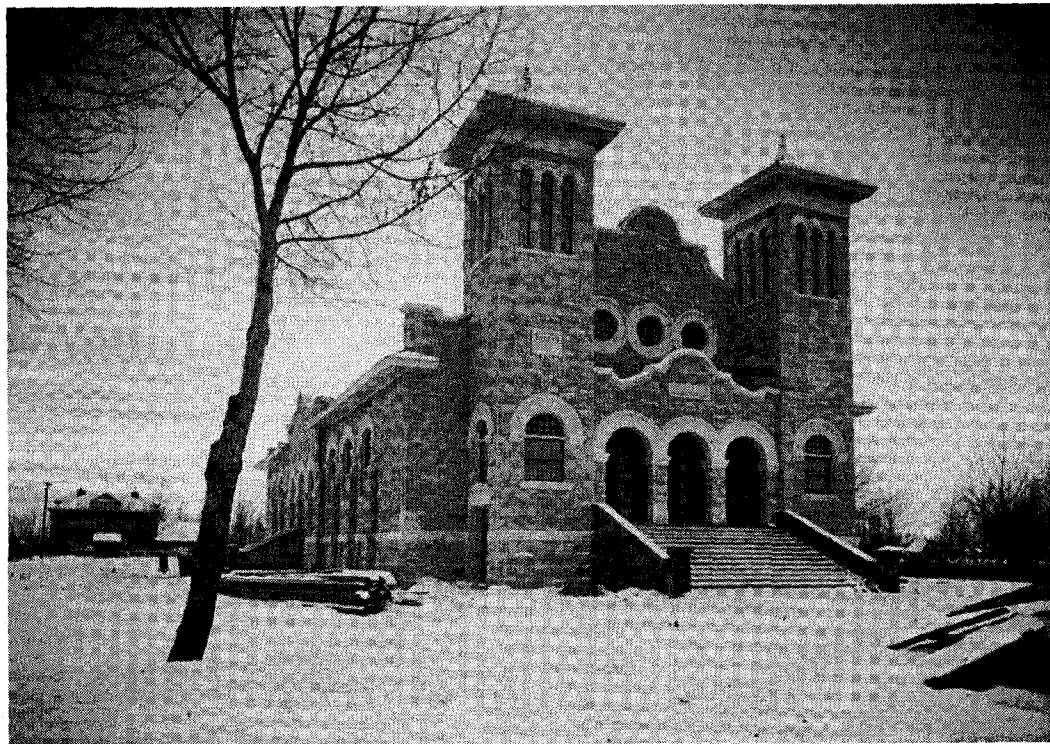


Figure 33: Fremont Stake Tabernacle, Rexburg, Idaho, built in 1911. Patterned after the New Payson Tabernacle, this building boasted a full basement, which the Payson one did not have. When the Teton Dam broke in 1976, the high water mark was mere inches from the main floor.



Figure 34: Garland, Utah, Bear River Stake Tabernacle, built in 1913. The building was added onto in 1930, 1966, and 1974.

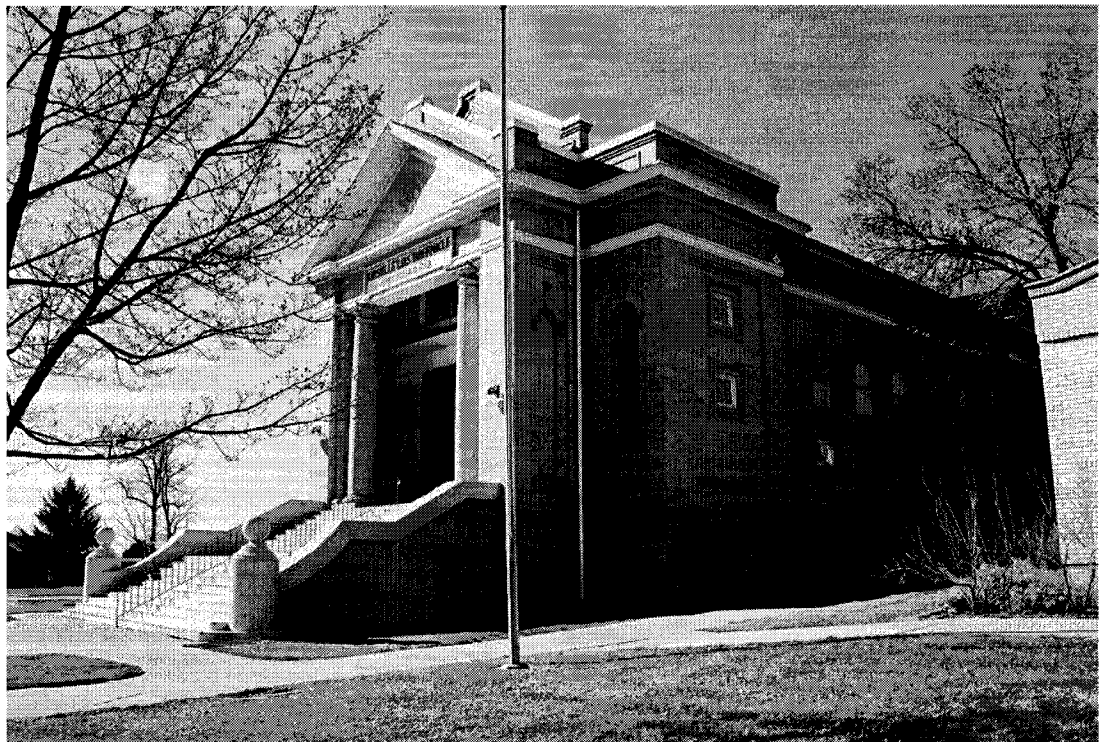


Figure 35: New Kaysville, Utah, built in 1914 with additions in 1949, 1974, and 1979.

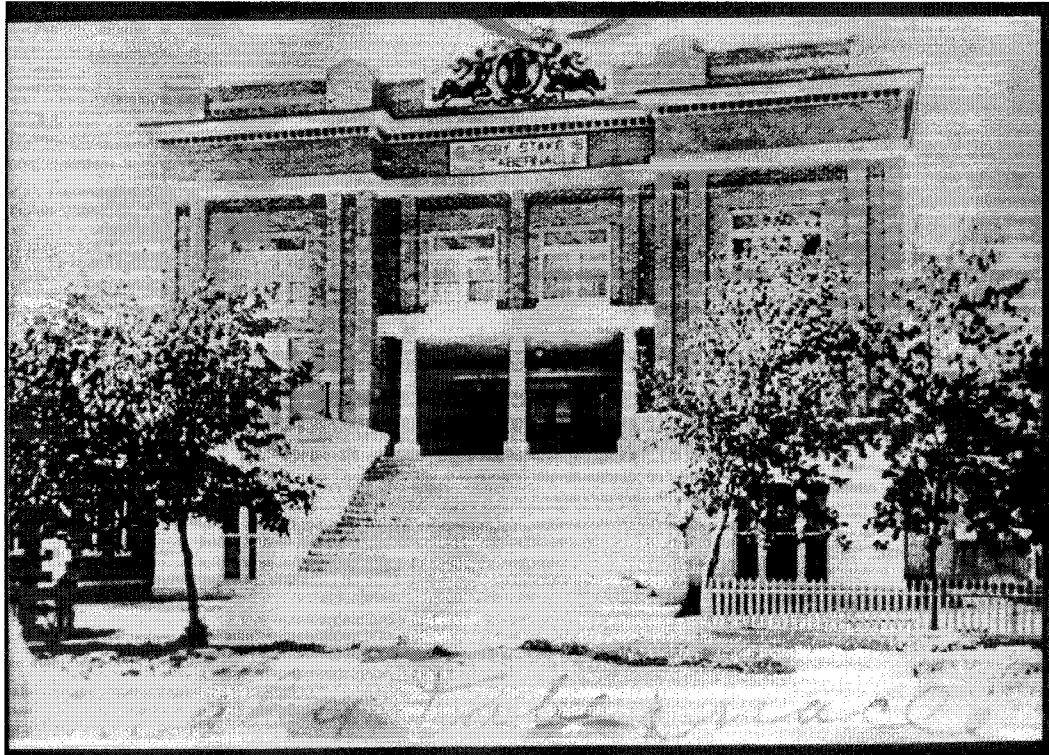


Figure 36: Rigby, Idaho Stake Tabernacle, built in 1916. No longer standing.



Figure 37: Montpelier, Idaho Stake Tabernacle, built in 1918. One of two tabernacles built in a half-circle design. The design is visually pleasing but makes for bad acoustics in the chapel.

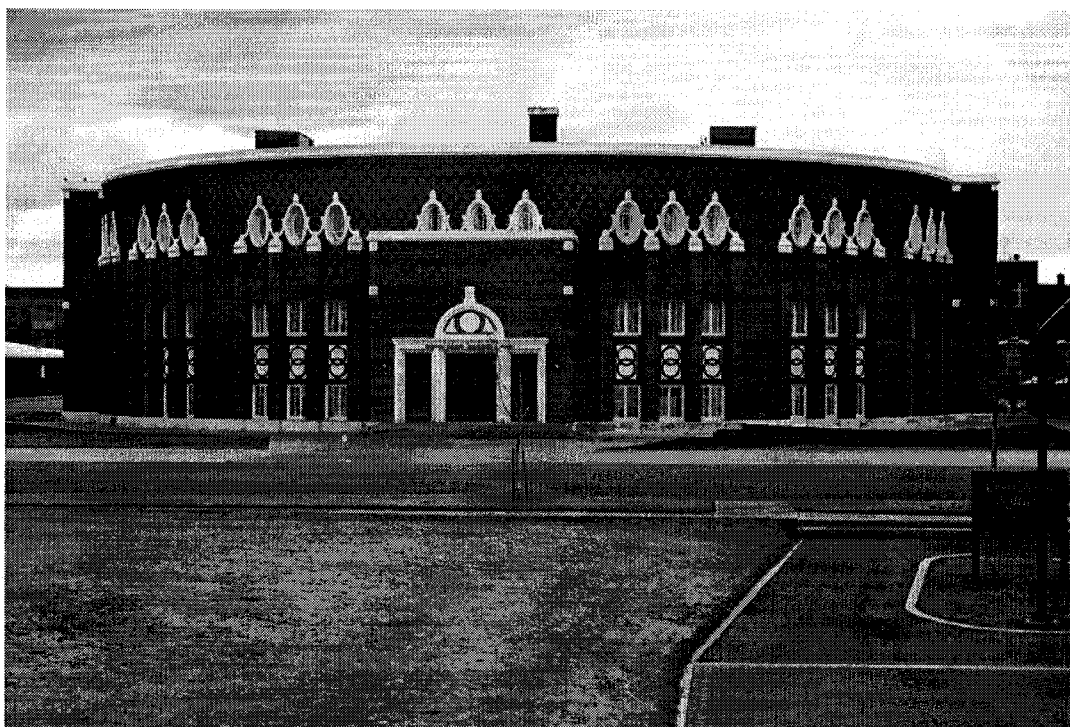


Figure 38: Blackfoot, Idaho Stake Tabernacle, built in 1920. This picture was taken as the building was in the process of being gutted and turned into a funeral home.

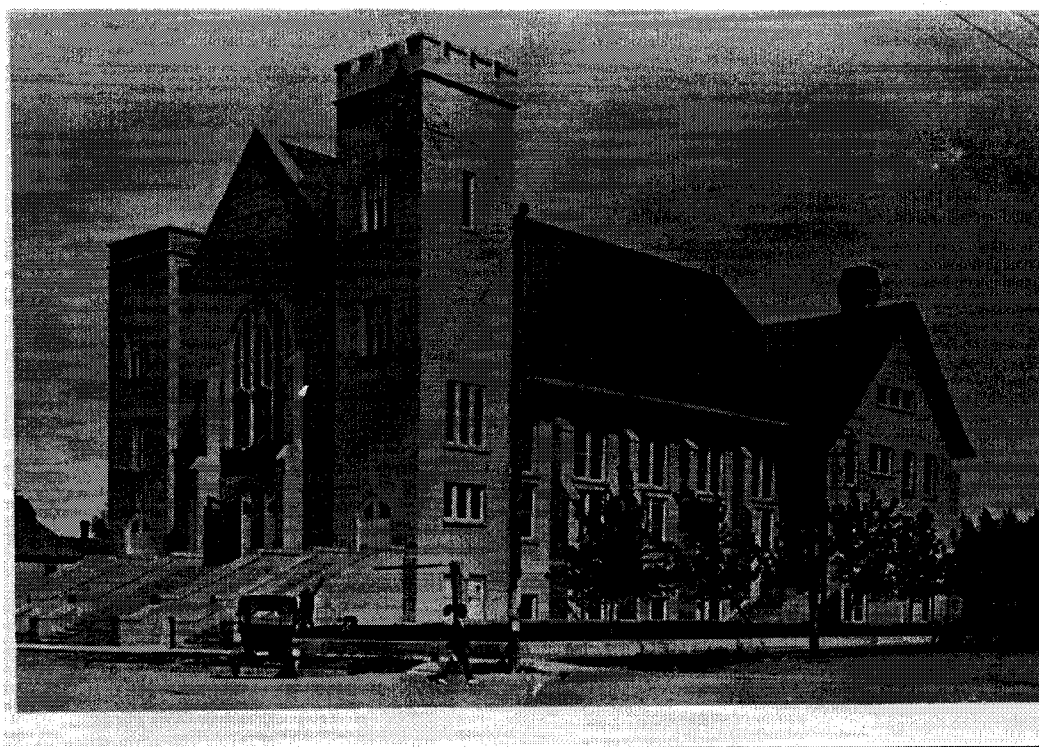


Figure 39: Yellowstone Stake Tabernacle, St. Anthony, Idaho, built in 1925. This building was torn down in 1982 to make way for a divided highway.

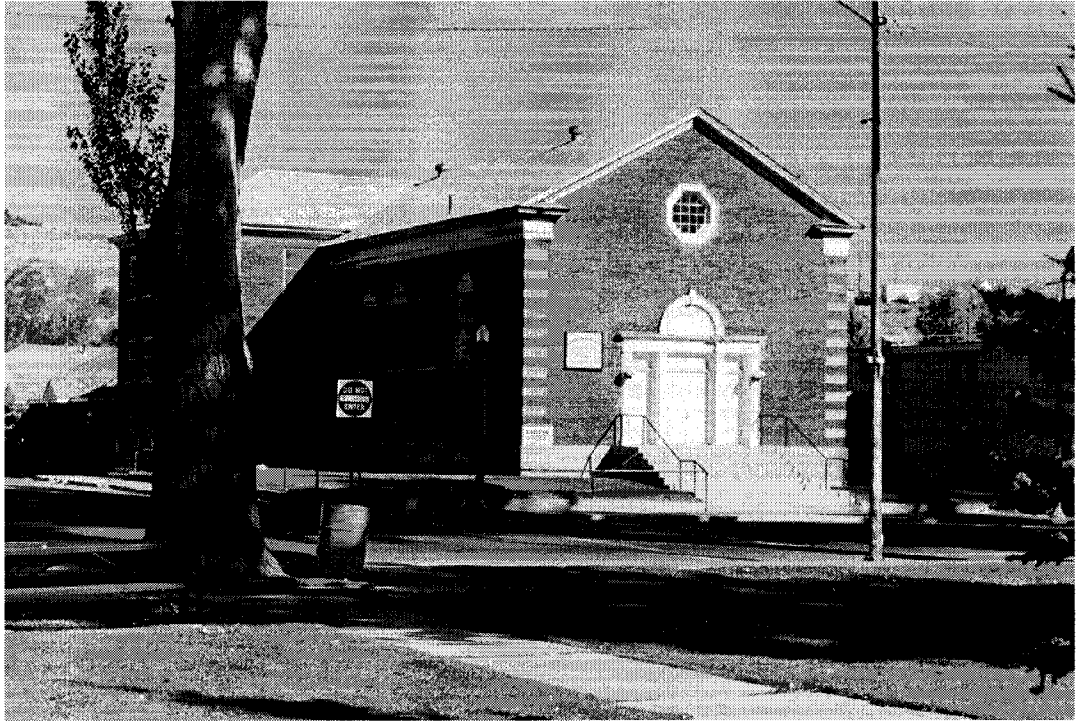


Figure 40: Nevada Stake Tabernacle, Ely, Nevada, built in 1927. Though Ely is not predominantly LDS, the building still sits around the central square with the old high school, court house, library, and hospital.

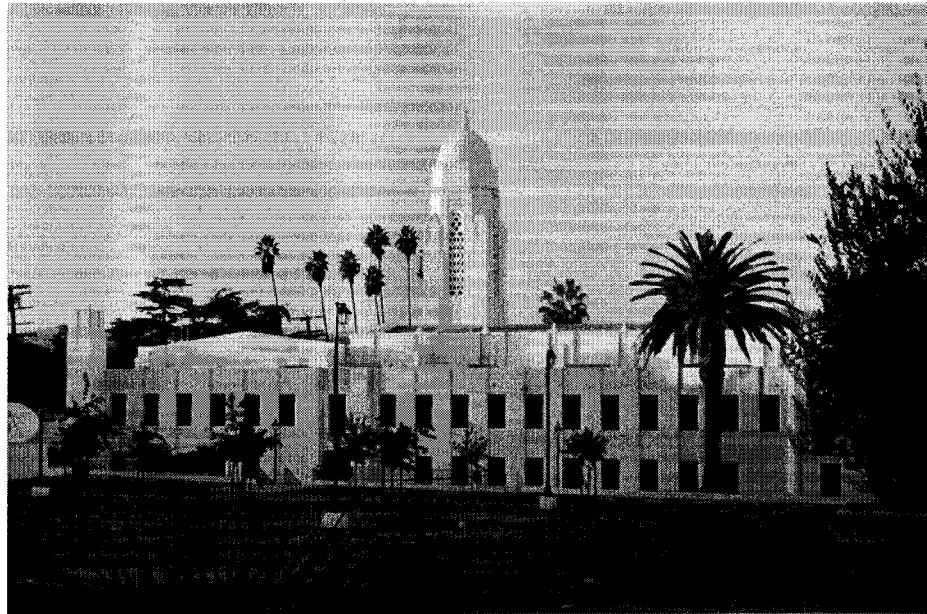


Figure 41: Hollywood Stake Tabernacle, Los Angeles, California, built in 1927.

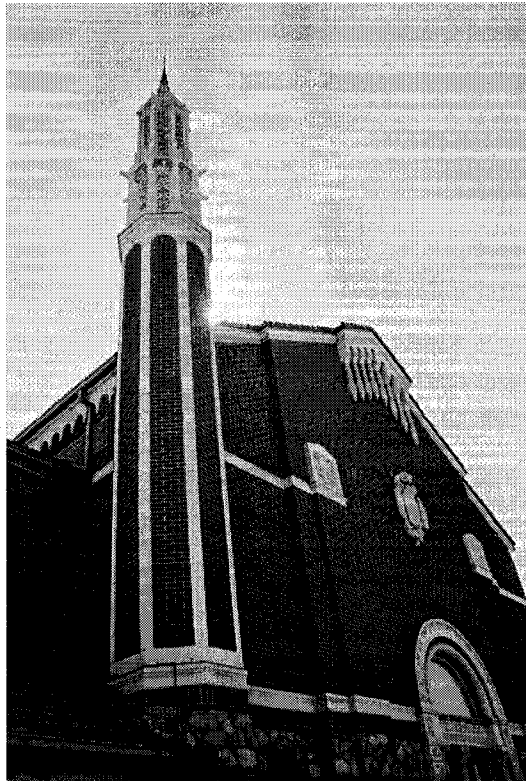


Figure 42: Granite Stake Tabernacle, Salt Lake City, built in 1929. In it, one can discern the lines of a modern stake center, though this building is much larger.

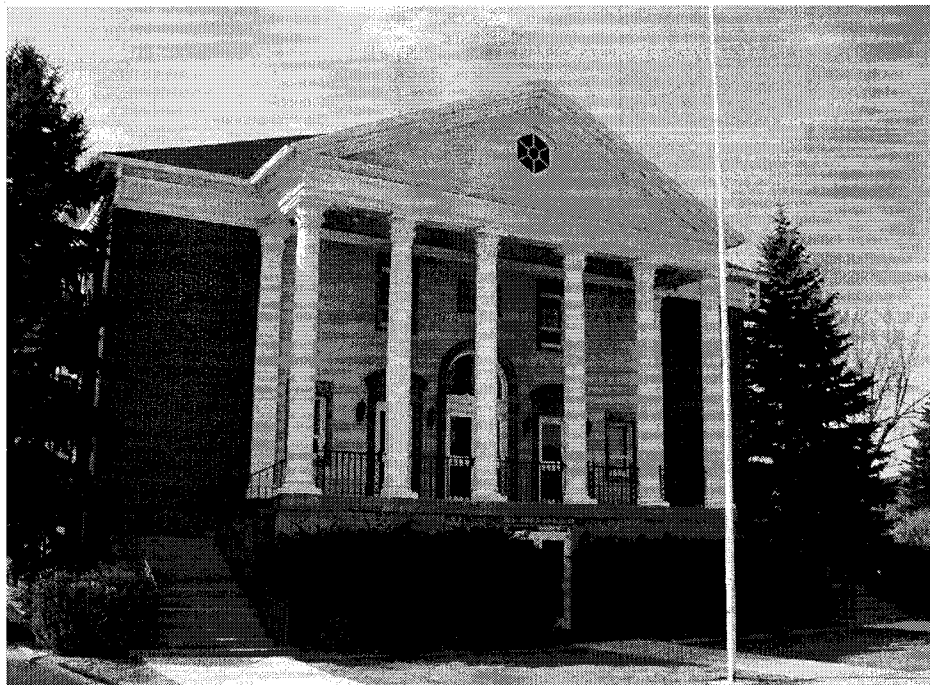


Figure 43: New Richfield, Utah Stake Tabernacle, built in 1929.

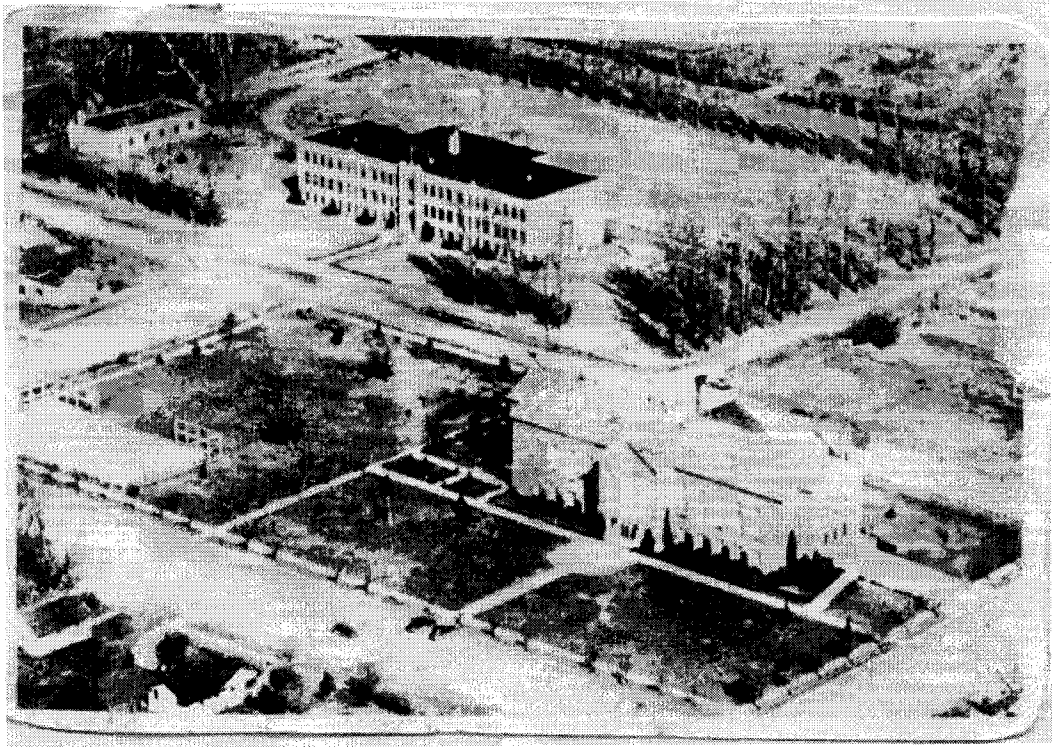


Figure 44: Shelley, Idaho Stake Tabernacle in the foreground, built in 1931. The building burned in 1975 when improperly stored rags used to refinish the interior doors spontaneously combusted in the utility room.

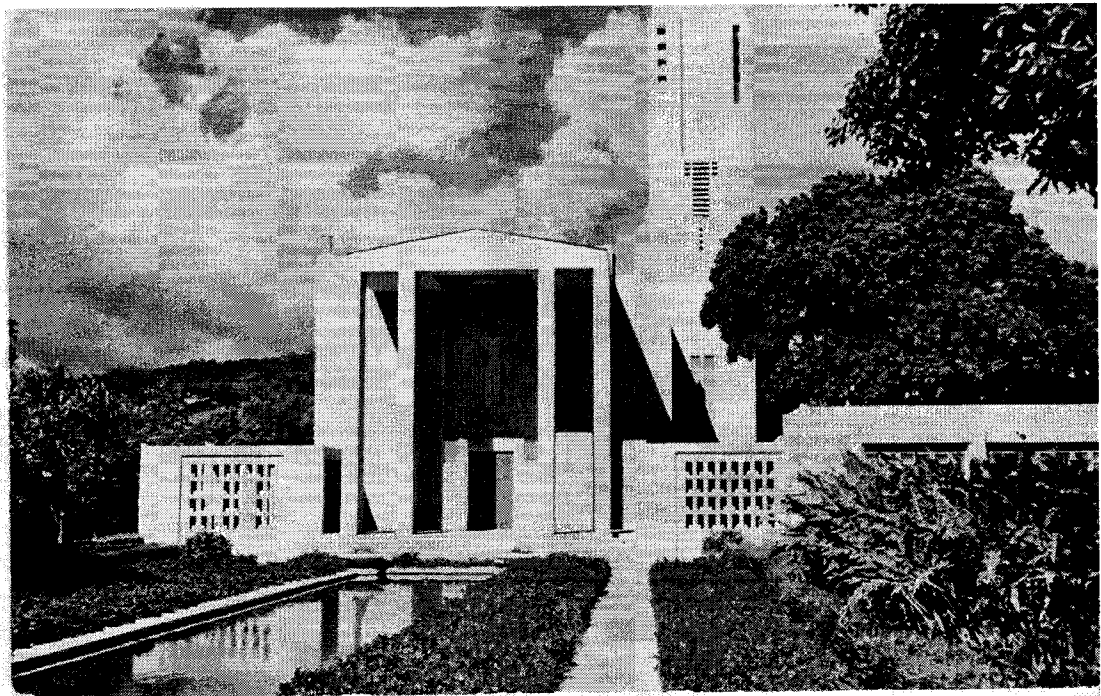


Figure 45: Oahu Stake Tabernacle, Honolulu, Hawaii, built in 1937.

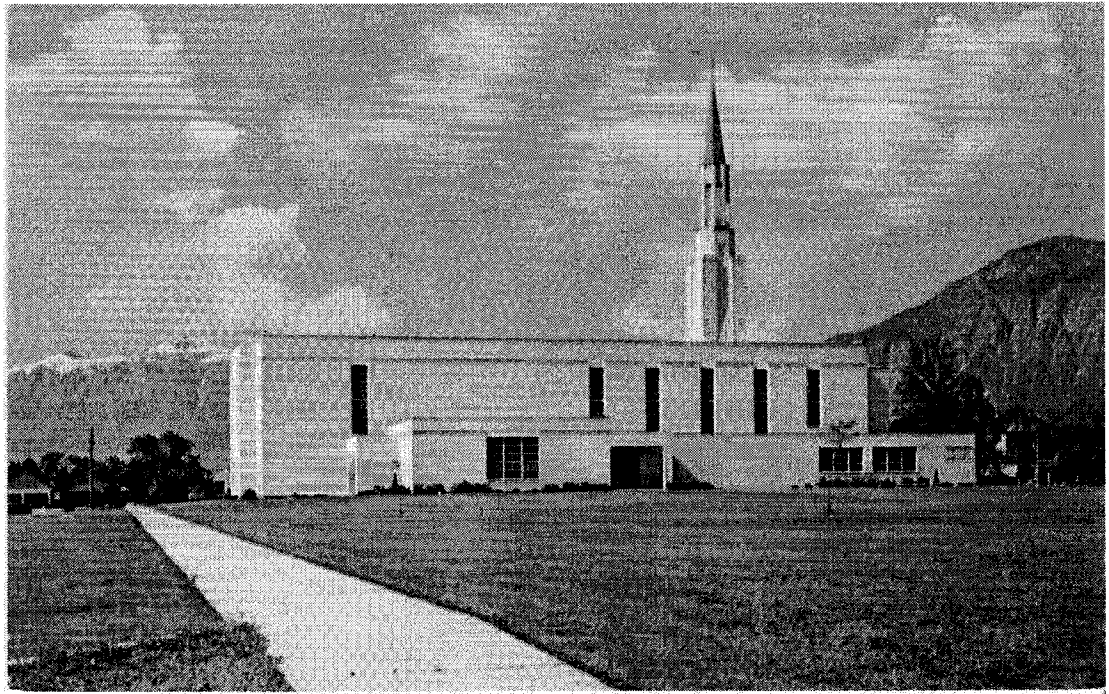


Figure 46: New Ogden Tabernacle, built in 1953. This was the last tabernacle to be built.

PHOTO ESSAY CITATION

1. www.traveliowa.org/photos/sw-kanesville01.html
2. Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah, Harold B. Lee Library Special Collections.
3. Photo from the George and Walter G. Taylor Collection in N. La Verl Christensen, *Provo's Two Tabernacles and the People Who Built Them* (Provo, UT: Provo Utah East Stake, 1983), ii.
4. Postcard published by the Ogden News Company. Original in possession of the author.
5. Ma McArthur, 2003.
6. Alice P. McCune, *History of Juab County: A History Prepared for the Centennial of the Coming of the Pioneers to Utah, 1847-1947* (Springville, UT: Art City Publishing Company for the Juab County Company of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, 1947), 104.
7. Aaron McArthur, 2004.
8. C.R.Savage, between 1883 and 1890. Denver Public Library, Denver, Colorado, Call #A7523
9. Ma McArthur, 2002.
10. Sanpete County Commission, Albert C. T. Antrei and Ruth D. Scow, eds., *The Other Forty-Niners: A Topical History of Sanpete County Utah 1849-1983* (Salt Lake City: Western Epics, 1982), 46.
11. Ma McArthur, 2003.
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23. Oakley Pioneer Museum, Oakley, Idaho.
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25. Utah State Historical Society.
26. http://www.seis.utah.edu/lqthreat/nehrrp_html/1962cach/p1962caj.gif
27. Central Bank and Trust, Payson, Utah. Post card in possession of the author.
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33. F. Lewis, 1911. Brigham Young University -Idaho Special Collections, Rexburg, Idaho.
34. Ma McArthur, 2003.
35. Ma McArthur, 2003.
36. Philo T. Farnsworth Birthplace of Television Museum, Rigby, Idaho.

37. Ma McArthur, 2002.
38. Ma McArthur, 2003.
39. Upper Snake River Historical Society, Rexburg, Idaho, Call#826
40. Ma McArthur, 2003.
41. Ma McArthur, 2003.
42. Ma McArthur, 2003.
43. www.untraveledroad.com
44. Shelly Public Library vertical files, Shelley, Idaho.
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Not Pictured: Springville, Utah (between 1852 and 1856), Old Kaysville, Utah (1862), Parowan, Utah (1862), Franklin, Idaho (1865), Old Payson, Utah (1870), Snowflake, Arizona (1878), Moroni, Utah (1878), Coalville, Utah (1879), Panguitch, Utah (1881), Old Richfield, Utah (1882), Willard, Utah (1886), Mesa, Arizona (1888), Malad, Idaho (1888), Old Price, Utah (1893), Lehi, Utah (1900), Preston, Idaho (1904), Pleasant Grove, Utah (1906), Loa, Utah (1906), Grace, Idaho (1910), Idaho Falls, Idaho (1915), Blanding, Utah (1915), Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada (1916), Burley, Idaho (1919), Thatcher, Arizona (c1920), Oakland, California (1923), Jacksonville, Florida (1924), Boise, Idaho (1924), Atlanta, Georgia (1926), Huntington Park, California (1929), Twin Falls, Idaho (1932), Rupert, Idaho (1936), and New Preston, Idaho (1949).

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