

Salt Lake Tabernacle Rededication

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I am grateful this magnificent building has been strengthened and renewed so it can continue to be used to instruct and edify the children of God.



It is a great honor and privilege to be part of the rededication service of this great edifice, the Salt Lake Tabernacle, which stands west of the Salt Lake Temple. We acknowledge any and all who have had anything to do with the great work that has been done in this building. We especially thank the Presiding Bishopric—Bishop H. David Burton, Bishop Richard C. Edgley, and Bishop Keith B. McMullin—for their excellent leadership in directing the work of updating

and restoring the Salt Lake Tabernacle.

I have fond memories as a boy coming to this Tabernacle. I was baptized here. When I became a deacon, my father brought me here to attend general priesthood meeting. We came 15 minutes early and were easily able to get a seat in the balcony.

In the early days of the Church, the only two buildings built specifically for worship were the temples in Kirtland and Nauvoo. Both were built according to revelation. The first recorded Church-constructed building designated as a meetinghouse was also intended to be used as a schoolhouse. It was built of logs in Missouri in 1831.¹

By the time the Kirtland Temple was dedicated in 1836, it was already too small to hold all the Saints who wanted to attend the dedication. The Prophet Joseph Smith regretfully recorded that the building would not accommodate more.² However, as violence against the Saints and their leaders escalated in Kirtland, the main body of the Church moved to Missouri in 1838, leaving this precious building behind.

The Nauvoo Temple followed essentially the same pattern as the Kirtland Temple with respect to the assembly rooms on the first and second floors. However, before the Nauvoo Temple was completed in 1846 the Saints would meet outside, often near the temple, to hear Joseph and the other Church leaders speak. Sometimes thousands attended those meetings.

As George A. Smith observed in his humorous way, “In the days of the Prophet Joseph . . . Mormonism flourished best out of doors.” This was because “we failed to erect a building big enough to hold the Saints previous to the death of the Prophet.”³

Occasionally bad weather would interrupt those outdoor services, and both the speakers and congregation were uncomfortable. President Joseph F. Smith, who remembered well the discomfort of those outdoor meetings held near the temple in Nauvoo, said:

“My first recollection of a place of worship was in Nauvoo. It was in a little grove of trees near the site of the temple. In company with my mother I listened here to such men as Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, Orson Hyde, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Pratt, the Prophet Joseph and the Patriarch Hyrum. I remember quite well attending one meeting in this grove, that a wagon had been drawn up in front of the audience and the Prophet Joseph stood in the box speaking, when it began to rain. Some one or two persons got up and held umbrellas over him, to shield him from the wet. Many of the people had no umbrellas, and it was very annoying and disagreeable to sit there, but I remember very well, though but a little boy, that there was no one went away from the ground while he spoke.”⁴

Before his death, the Prophet Joseph directed that a canvas tabernacle be built to shelter the Saints during



large meetings. In 1845, as the temple was nearing completion, Elder Orson Hyde of the Quorum of the Twelve was sent back East to raise funds and to buy “about four thousand yards” of canvas to build what Brigham Young referred to as “the Tabernacle of the congregation in Zion.”⁵

Brother Orson Pratt outlined the proposed location and design of the canvas tabernacle in a letter written on August 30, 1845:

“It is intended to erect a tabernacle of canvass in front of, and joining the Temple on the west. The form of this tabernacle will be that of an ellipse. . . . The area of its base will be sufficient to contain eight or ten thousand persons; its seats will gradually rise one above another in the form of an amphitheatre.”⁶

The brethren the next day began to clear the ground for the construction of the canvas tabernacle. However, because of the intense persecution from their enemies, the Saints had to leave Nauvoo, so the canvas tabernacle was never built. Orson Hyde “loaded the canvas into wagons in 1846 and headed west with it.”⁷ Some have speculated that “the

canvas was put to good use for such things as tents, tent ends and wagon covers” for the Saints in the exodus to the Salt Lake Valley.⁸

The finished Tabernacle on Temple Square in Salt Lake City has dimensions roughly similar to the canvas tabernacle contemplated for Nauvoo, and like the proposed Nauvoo tabernacle it also was situated just west of the temple. As with other matters, such as the great migration to the West, Joseph Smith envisioned a great tabernacle, and Brigham Young made it a reality.

So the tabernacle contemplated for Nauvoo, although never built, was a prototype for this historic building. When I was a boy, we listened to general conference on the radio; now with the use of satellites and modern electronic equipment, we broadcast from Salt Lake City to whole countries worldwide at one time—as we’re doing now—using downlinks to buildings all over the world. This came about because of the inspiration that came to the Brethren to meet the needs of the people in our day and time. This is a good example of how the Lord makes it possible to

meet the needs of the members of the Church. I testify that the Lord will continue to reveal through His prophet, Gordon B. Hinckley, the ways and means to meet the needs of all members in an ever-growing Church.

I am grateful this magnificent building has been strengthened and renewed so it can continue to be used to instruct and edify the children of God. In the name of Jesus Christ, amen. ■

NOTES

1. See Richard W. Jackson, *Places of Worship: 150 Years of Latter-day Saint Architecture* (2003), 16.
2. See *History of the Church*, 2:410–11.
3. *Deseret News*, Aug. 29, 1855, 194.
4. “The Spirit of Worship,” *Improvement Era*, June 1910, 749–50.
5. Brigham Young to the Saints Abroad, June 17, 1845, in *New York Messenger*, Aug. 16, 1845; see also *History of the Church*, 7:427; Elden J. Watson, “The Nauvoo Tabernacle,” *Brigham Young University Studies*, spring 1979, 416.
6. Orson Pratt to Reuben Hedlock, Aug. 20, 1845, in *New York Messenger*, Aug. 30, 1845, 67; see also *Brigham Young University Studies*, spring 1979, 420.
7. Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo: A Place of Peace, a People of Promise* (2002), 479–80.
8. *Brigham Young University Studies*, spring 1979, 421; see also William Smith claim in Glen M. Leonard, *Nauvoo*, 754 note 86.