



St. George Tabernacle, photograph courtesy Intellectual Reserve.

“A Shrine to the Whole Church”: The History of the St. George Tabernacle

Michael N. Landon

At least as early as 1862, Brigham Young directed Latter-day Saint leaders in St. George to construct a tabernacle, a building designed not only for church services, but which also would serve as a social and cultural center for the entire community. In a letter to Mormon Apostle Erastus Snow, Brigham Young clearly noted that the tabernacle would represent more than a place of worship:

As I have already informed you, I wish you and the brethren to build, as speedily as possible, a good substantial, commodious, well finished meeting house, one large enough to comfortably seat at least 2000 persons and that will be not only useful but also an ornament to your city and a credit to your energy and enterprise. I hereby place at your disposal, expressly to aid in building the aforesaid meeting-house, the labor, molasses, vegetable and grain tithing of Cedar City and of all places and persons south of that city. I hope you will begin the building at the earliest practicable date; and be able with the aid herein given to speedily prosecute the work to completion.¹

Brigham Young’s efforts to encourage Latter-day Saints to settle in St. George, indeed in all of southern Utah, had met with mixed results. Even George A. Smith, his longtime friend and counselor in the First Presidency, once described the area as “the most wretched, barren, God-forsaken country in the world.”² In his letter to Snow, Brigham Young implied that a substantial meeting place would give the St. George settlement a sense of permanence, emphasizing that the future tabernacle would “be not only useful but also an ornament to your city and a credit to your energy and enterprise.”³ Along with

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the St. George Temple, the St. George Tabernacle would represent the long-term commitment Brigham Young envisioned for the area.

Brigham Young did not base his efforts to make St. George a viable settlement simply on a policy of economic self-determination or because the area had strategic importance to the Church. In 1863 Brigham declared that the settling of St. George came in response to revelation:

He said that St. George is the best location between the Sevier and the Colorado. Some have asked why this place should have been located. I will tell you: it is the very place I intended the city of St. George to be built upon. When I was on my first visit to Santa Clara and Tonaquint settlements, I saw in a vision this place inhabited by a multitude of people and large domes were towering up in every direction. I shall yet see this with my natural eyes.⁴

The tabernacle undoubtedly formed part of that vision. In facing the task of constructing the tabernacle, most St. George settlers found that the harsh living conditions they endured made it virtually impossible to “speedily prosecute the work to completion” as Brigham Young desired.⁵ Even with considerable cooperative assistance provided not only by neighboring Cedar City, but by many other communities in Utah Territory, it took nearly a decade for the basic structure to be completed and longer for additional features to be added, such as the tower bell and clock.

Still, the consecration by Church members of their time and means, year after year, towards the tabernacle’s construction, made it an ornament to the city and the center of community activity for St. George, as well as many other Latter-day Saint settlements in Southern Utah and Nevada. While the St. George Temple certainly represented the most important religious structure, the construction and subsequent use of the St. George Tabernacle helped create a strong sense of community within southern Utah that continues to this day.

At what date Brigham Young first discussed the need for a tabernacle with the settlers of Southern Utah is unclear. A plat map of St. George, drawn in February 1862, noted a future tabernacle on block 16, indicating that discussions about building the structure began at least that early.⁶ The tabernacle was only one of several public works projects to be undertaken in St. George.⁷ A September 1862 *Deseret News* article noted that St. George was “intended to be the ‘local headquarters,’ . . . a miniature Salt Lake City;—the State House block being in St. George, the Public Square, Tithing office and Tabernacle respectively. . . . The city is well supplied with building stone, the hills to the north being one single sand stone, for an area of two miles by three.”⁸

In September 1862, Charles Lowell Walker noted in his journal that he attended a priesthood meeting in which, among other topics, “building our

Tabernacle up” was discussed.⁹ In his October 1862 letter to Erastus Snow, President Young confirmed that he had discussed the building’s construction with Snow by prefacing his injunction to build it with the words “As I have already informed you.”¹⁰

As they prepared to build the structure, St. George residents discussed the question of style. In November 1862, Erastus Snow sought Brigham Young’s counsel on the issue: “We would like your suggestions on the size and style of the Meeting House, as well as the material you would choose. We contemplate, if you approve, building it on the Public Square, not far from the present site of our Bowery. But we have not determined whether to adopt a flat ceiling; a full arch, like Salt Lake City Tabernacle; an arch through the center, and the building to have galleries after the old Gentile style; a circular building having a dome; or some other style.”¹¹

Although the question of the building’s design remained unresolved, at a March 1863 local church conference, St. George residents elected to begin construction no later than June. Anticipating a visit from Brigham Young before that date, perhaps they felt he could decide the issue when he arrived.¹² In a public meeting on May 10, Brigham Young brought up the subject of building the St. George Tabernacle. In his remarks, he resolved the issue regarding the basic design of the building. The Salt Lake City *Deseret News* reported that “Prest. Young thought that as the dust was blowing upon the congregation in the Bowery, it was a good time to speak about the building of a tabernacle. He did not know what arrangements had been made, but proposed that one should be built 100 ft. by 50 ft., with a spire 150 ft. high; and that one end of the building be so constructed, that when it shall be deemed necessary the house may be conveniently enlarged.”¹³

On June 1, 1863, Brigham Young’s sixty-second birthday, at least one cornerstone was laid in a ceremony attended by three Apostles, Erastus Snow, Amasa M. Lyman, and Orson Pratt. Still, doubts about design and construc-



Erastus F. Snow, ca. 1870–1875. Snow supervised the construction of the St. George Temple and the St. George Tabernacle. Photograph courtesy L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

Erastus F. Snow Memorial adjacent to the St. George Tabernacle, 2009. Photograph courtesy Alexander L. Baugh.



tion lingered. That very day, Snow sent a detailed letter to Brigham Young discussing the event and his concerns regarding the building's construction:

This morning agreeable to previous arrangements we laid the South East corner stone of our Meeting House. We have prepared the foundation <for a building> 56 x106 feet on the outside, allowing for 3 feet walls as we understood you to name the dimensions 50 x100 feet in the clear. It is laid off East and West; the front being 50 feet from Main St, and the north side being 60 feet from First North Street, bringing the N.E. corner inside our bowery just west of the stand. We have not fully understood your views in relation to the tower; whether it should rest upon the walls of an outer court cut off from the main building, or added to it on the end; the first would lessen the length of the inner court, **building** the width of the base of the tower, the last would increase the <its> present length. We would like your suggestions in relation to this; and also, if you feel so inclined we would like you to send us a working draft. We have omitted laying more than one corner stone so as to admit of the adoption of any instructions you may send us; and shall not lay any more rock until we hear from you. We have contemplated in addition to the two front doors, one on each side about one forth or one third from the west end to facilitate the emptying of the building, and perhaps a private entrance at the west end leading to the stand. We respectfully submit these plans for your approval, modification or alteration.¹⁴

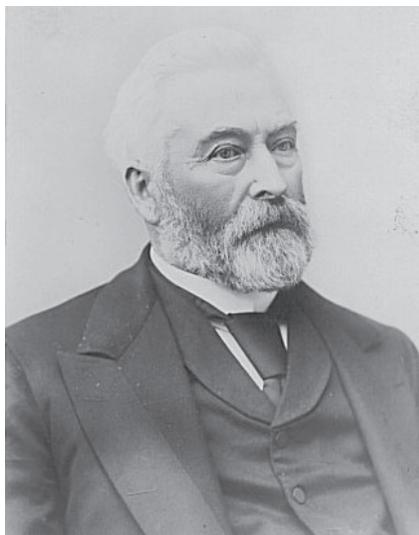
The design issues were ultimately resolved by two talented architects, William Harrison Folsom and Miles Romney.¹⁵ Since no original signed architectural drawings of the St. George Tabernacle are known to exist, which of the two men is most responsible for the overall design remains a ques-

tion. However, in a local Church conference held in St. George on November 5, 1871, Miles Romney was sustained as “asst. architect and chief carpenter of St. George Tabernacle.”¹⁶ Romney’s title as assistant architect indicates that Folsom was probably the lead architect in designing the St. George Tabernacle.

Whether the final architectural design of the building was primarily the work of Folsom or Romney, Brigham Young’s involvement in the process cannot be minimized. As mentioned, Young outlined a general design for the building in his remarks during the May 1863 conference in St. George. Based on his visits to the construction site while in St. George, the construction progress reports he received, and his desire to have the building completed before the St. George Temple construction began, Brigham Young remained involved in the St. George Tabernacle project from its initial design until it was finally dedicated.

By the third week of June 1863, a work crew was busy digging a basement and foundation for the structure.¹⁷ Yet by early October, they still had no working plans to follow. Erastus Snow had decided one question—the tabernacle would have rock and not adobe walls.¹⁸ In March 1865, almost a year and a half later, workers still labored on the basement and foundation. Snow reported what he believed to be the principal reason for the slow construction pace:

The work upon the basement of our meeting-house is substantial and progressing slowly, being laid with very large flat lime rock, considered proof against the actions of the mineral in our soil and water. . . . The chief difficulty in our pathway at present is the extreme scarcity of breadstuff, especially in St. George and Washington. We thought ourselves hard pressed last year, but it did not compare with the almost universal cry for bread that rings in my ears from early dawn till midnight, and at every corner of the streets. Beef, if possible, is scarcer than bread, for the winter has been very hard upon our stock, what little is left.



William H. Folsom, date unknown, photograph by Charles R. Savage. Photograph courtesy Council Bluffs Library Special Collections, Council Bluffs, Iowa. Folsom is considered to be the chief architect of the St. George Tabernacle, assisted by Miles Romney.

I have bought hundreds of bushels of breadstuff, and hauled it down from Beaver and Iron Counties, to feed the families of workmen upon our roads and other public works, without which there must have been much more suffering. I do not know of a man, called last fall to strengthen the southern mission, who is spending a dollar to feed the poor here, except Henry W. Lawrence, through F. B. Woolley.¹⁹

The task of keeping a labor force working at the site became increasingly difficult because of the community's straitened economic circumstances. Without community support, workers began to desert the project, apparently needing to find other means to support their families. Increasingly frustrated with the lack of progress, Erastus Snow held a meeting in November 1866, hoping to recommit the Saints to fulfill their responsibilities. The clerk recorded:

President Snow . . . called upon quarrymen and stone cutters masons and laborers to be ready to respond to a call to resume the work on St. George Tabernacle. And asked the people of the settlements, outside of St George, to be on hand to haul in their tithing produce, with which to pay those who shall work on the building.

A vote being called to find if the people were willing to sustain their bishops and presiding elders in forwarding the building of the Tabernacle and whether the workmen would be energetic in prosecuting the work received a hearty affirmative response.²⁰

Significantly, Erastus Snow asked outlying communities to consecrate their means to support the workers. Equally important, Snow expected the workers to "be energetic in prosecuting the work."²¹ His efforts bore fruit. By August 1867, confident that the project would be completed, St. George Church leaders, with Erastus Snow officiating, deposited books and records in the Tabernacle cornerstone.²² In a June 1868 letter Erastus Snow was able to report to Brigham Young: "Our Tabernacle begins to make a respectable show<ing>. The basement story finished, and the main floor timbers will soon be in their places."²³

With the basement finished, interest in using the building increased. So anxious were the Saints to hold meetings in the tabernacle, they began using it even before it was completed. Charles L. Walker noted that in January 1869 the Saints "met in the new Meeting House in the Basement. Br Geo A, E Snow, Jos F Smith, Thos Taylor, Neff and A. M. Cannon spoke on the importance of cooperation among the saints and spoke of blessings of being self sustaining. The People seem'd to regret that the stay of the Bretheren was so short."²⁴

The brief visit by these Church leaders implied that this apparently was not an announced and scheduled meeting. Two months later the stake clerk reported that the "first public meeting held in the new meeting house of St. George was held in the basement of the afternoon of Saturday the 20th of

March, 1869. Pres. Geo. A. Smith at this meeting declared he was proud of being associated with the people before him. He said he felt they might be justly considered a select portion of Israel.²⁵

Perhaps to help local residents enjoy the benefits of the work they had accomplished in spite of hardship, President Young and other Church leaders felt that Church meetings should now be held regularly in the tabernacle, utilizing the completed basement. Consequently, the semi-annual conference of the Church in southern Utah was held in the basement beginning May 1, 1869.²⁶

The ability to meet in the basement of the unfinished tabernacle made it easier for local members to receive important information, instruction, and encouragement, such as that given in the May 1869 conference. Still, the unfinished state of the building sometimes limited the effectiveness of such meetings. In his diary, Lorenzo Brown described the unfavorable weather conditions experienced while attending the conference at the tabernacle in March 1870:

Sunday A M meeting in basement of new tabernacle Preaching by John Smith son of Geo A.[,] John Holman[,] Levi Steward & B Young junr meeting dismissed in a wind gale with some rain

P M meeting at 3 but such a wind & cold for the icy regions of Greenland[,] short sermons by President B Young & G A Smith[,] dismissed with blessing by Pres. Young[.]²⁷

A more detailed account of the effect the weather had on the March meetings at the tabernacle appeared in the *Deseret News*:

This morning a very large congregation assembled in the yard of the Tithing Office, and listened to addresses delivered from the verandah on the south side of that building. The wind blew, but Elders Musser, Savage and Geo. A. Smith continued speaking until twenty minutes to 12, when the wind became so severe that the congregation adjourned to meet at 1 p.m. in the basement of the new meeting house, a magnificent stone building in course of erection, the walls of which are about eighteen feet high. It is built of beautiful red sandstone, artistically cut and laid. This shelter, though insufficient to break off the wind, which was terrific, enabled us to hold the meeting for two hours. The audience was much reduced in size in consequence of the change. At 3 p.m. the wind and dust became so furious that the meeting had to be adjourned.²⁸

Still, nothing, not even weather, kept the Saints from enjoying the benefits of the unfinished tabernacle. It quickly became a focal point for the social and cultural activities of the growing community.

When Brigham Young and others arrived in December 1870, the unfinished tabernacle, now in its seventh year of construction, undoubtedly was a topic. According to the *Deseret News*, President Young “visited the red,

sandstone quarry, where workmen were quarrying rock for the meeting house, about a mile and a half distant. It is a magnificent quarry.”²⁹ The paper also noted that “little work is being done on the meeting house but it goes up slowly for people seem to have a great deal to do and . . . help is rather scarce.”³⁰

The newspaper account implied that the commitment to finish the project, manifested in the sustaining vote made in the 1866 local conference, appeared to be waning, although some workers, like Charles Lowell Walker, never wavered. Despite the slow pace, Brigham Young was always confident of the outcome. In January 1871 he made a significant announcement that created an even more compelling reason to finish the tabernacle—the Saints in the Southern Utah Territory would also need to build a temple. As Charles Smith recalled:

I would here say that President Young on Tuesday Jany. 31st called a council and layed before them that they had taken into consideration the labors of the people in this Southern country and that they had decided to build a Temple in St George as the distance was considerable to Salt Lake City and attended with Fatigue to aged people, he wish[ed] them to complete the Tabernacle this season, and have that job completed by next fall, So that they could begin the [text missing] next winter.³¹

The need to complete the tabernacle, now more pressing than ever, was plagued by the constant, never-ending problem of feeding and supplying the labor force and their families so the work could progress. In February 1871, Brigham Young’s nephew, Joseph W. Young, wrote to him in very clear and direct language, outlining problems obtaining meat for the work force.

We are putting on another set of hands on the walls of the Tabernacle, and we hope to have the roof on by fall. Bro Snow and myself have been talking about the best plan to adopt to feed the workmen, and he wishes me to lay before you the condition we are in with regard to this matter. We think we can manage to get bread but have no way of getting meat; there has been little or no tithing pork brought in, and we have no tithing beef. We have never had liberty to use any tithing stock. Year before last all the stock was turned over to Ira Hinckley and this last year everything has gone to Pipe Spring.

It will do no good to ask the people to donate beef cattle, for they have not got them. All the beef cattle in this mission were converted into cash last fall for the purchase of the machinery in the factory.

Now what shall we do? The only Beef that I know of is at Pipe Spring. Bro Winsor has a good many there and four year old steers that are good beef. The four year olds will not increase much in value and will perhaps do as much good in the stomachs of these public hands, as they ever will in any other way.

We will use very sparingly, but it seems as though the public servants in Zion should eat a little meat, when the Lord bestows flocks and herds in abundance upon His people.

If you <feel> as though you could consent to our drawing some beef from Bro Winsor please send us authority to do so.³²

President Young readily consented to the suggestion, and the following month Joseph W. wrote again, thanking him “for the liberty extended of drawing a little beef for them from Bro Winsor.”³³

It was during this period, just as the tabernacle needed to be completed and the work on the temple commenced, that the enticement of precious metals drew away some badly needed labor. Charles Lowell Walker lamented the fact noting:

At work on the Meeting House half the day. There is at this time considerable excitement among some of the Bretheren concerning silver mines and some are foolishly neglecting there [*sic*] legitimate business and are hunting all over the hills and mountains endeavoring to find precious metals, contrary to the counsel of those over them in the Holy Priesthood. As to me, I have no time. I am at work every day on the meeting house cutting stone.³⁴

It is unclear how many engaged in working on the tabernacle became involved in mining, but because the size of the labor force had already been an issue earlier, the departure of anyone could not have been encouraging.

By May 1871, the need for additional provisions to feed the expanded work force became apparent. With Erastus Snow unwell, solving such logistical problems fell largely on Joseph W. Young. In another frank letter to his uncle, he once again described both progress and roadblocks:

Our meeting house is progressing finely the window caps being on the windows of the South side and west end. We intend to rush it along as fast as possible until the severe hot weather compels us to rest a little, but I think that unless the wheels are blocked in some way we shall have it ready for the Roof by the 1st of October. . . . I learn from Bro Snow that he has not received any instructions with regard to drawing tithing and applying the Same on this meeting house only from those wards that we have always drawn from. Now will you be kind enough to write and tell us what you want us to do. I take the liberty to write and act in these matters, because that I have been requested by yourself & Bro Snow to give this meeting house my attention as far as possible and also because we don't want Bro Snow to trouble himself with business matters; any more than is absolutely necessary until he recovers his strength.³⁵



Joseph W. Young, ca. 1860. Photograph courtesy LDS Church History Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. Young was a nephew of Brigham Young and helped supervise the construction of the St. George Tabernacle.

That same month in the local conference, the theme centered on “paying Tithing and building the Meeting house and Temple.”³⁶ In June, Brigham Young responded to the need for provisions to feed tabernacle workers, greatly expanding the geographical range of Church settlements requested to aid in the effort. On June 10 the clerk noted, “Today it was announced that the President of the Church had given authority to Pres. Erastus Snow to use the tithing of Beaver Ward and all the wards south in finishing the St. George Tabernacle, and for building the Temple in St. George.”³⁷

With the need for additional provisions hopefully resolved, work on the tabernacle continued. According to a *Deseret News* correspondent, “The work on the Tabernacle is rapidly progressing, when the excessive heat is taken into consideration. The lumber is being hauled from Beaver and Pine valley, and piled up.”³⁸

As fall approached, the work continued unabated, as all those involved in the tabernacle construction focused on the goal of finishing the walls and roof by year’s end. The complexity and size of the workforce, as well as the sheer immensity of the project, were evident in a letter Erastus Snow sent to Brigham Young in October 1871: “The quarrymen, stone-cutters, masons, tenders, carpenters, rock-haulers, lumbermen and others to the number of about fifty families engaged upon our Tabernacle have consumed most of the Tithing, as fast as it could be collected in Washington and Kane Counties and we have now to begin to haul from Beaver and Iron.”³⁹

On the last day of October, Charles Lowell Walker wrote, “Laboring on the Meeting House which is now up to the square and the carpenters are working on the roof timbers.”⁴⁰ Although only two months remained, it began to look as if the goal could be met. Finally, on December 29, 1871 a special meeting was held to celebrate the laying of the last stone



The St. George Tabernacle under construction, date unknown. Photograph courtesy Utah State Historical Society.

on the tower. With the completed walls and roof, the building was now enclosed, though not completed. Almost all the finishing work still lay ahead. Yet, in the face of remarkable hardships, the workers had reached a significant milestone. The circumstances surrounding this celebratory event, filled with powerful testimonies, a profound sense of accomplishment and satisfaction, as well as the heartfelt words of praise given to one another, offer a remarkable insight into the tabernacle's significance to those who constructed it.⁴¹ The following day, the last shingle was placed on the roof of the building.⁴²

Although construction work continued throughout 1872, it proceeded at a reduced scale and with a smaller crew. Some workers concentrated on framing unfinished sections of the tower, while others focused primarily on plastering and other finishing work.⁴³ In May 1872, the faithful Walker penned an entry in his diary summarizing his years of service in helping to construct one of the most remarkable buildings in the Church:

The mason work on the Meeting house was completed, the steps finished and things straightened up around the Building[.] I have worked on this building for over 5 year[s], from putting in the Foundation to the capstone on the tower. Many weary toilsome days have I labored on the St. George Tabernacle, lifting the heavy rocks in the wind, dust, cold, and scorching heat of this climate, yet I have felt happy and contented. I was called to labor there by the Priesthood, letting my own affairs go, to work on those walls, yet thro the hard times of scarceity and want of the nesscesaries of life I have been blessed and have only had about 3 days sicknes during that time, tho my family have gone thro considerable. Well, I feel thankfull that the Lord has preserved my life thro it all, yet many times I have had some narrow escapes of my life, and to day I feel kind of lonsome in leaving the works and bidding goodbye to the boys who have labored with me.⁴⁴

A month after Walker wrote in his diary the epilogue to his service on the Tabernacle, Erastus Snow earnestly began an attempt to procure both a clock and a bell for the rising tower.⁴⁵ Even as Snow sought to finish the structure's tower, those still engaged in finishing the tabernacle continued to be tempted by the lure of good wages offered by mining interests in the area. In a letter to Brigham Young that summer, Erastus Snow lamented that "all our settlements on this river are greatly thined out this summer[.] Our public Works entirely suspended and difficult to find help enough to take care of the crops. . . . Many people from all Southern settlements at work some way or another in the interests of the western mines."⁴⁶

A year to the day after celebrating the completion of the tabernacle walls and roof, Erastus Snow reported the challenges that remained in finishing the building. "[Erastus Snow] said that he felt grateful for the labors of the public hands upon the St George Tabernacle, but regretted that we had been unable to obtain lumber sufficient, to complete the building, as designed, owing to

the market at Pioche and elsewhere taking nearly all the lumber from our saw mills."⁴⁷

Still, by the end of the first quarter of 1873, religious conferences, a meeting introducing the United Order, a Relief Society dinner, and at least three funerals had been held in the unfinished and undedicated St. George Tabernacle. Although serious construction problems persisted, the decade-old prediction by Brigham Young that the St. George Tabernacle would be an "ornament" to the city was being realized.

In June 1873 George C. Lambert reported to the editor of the *Deseret News*:

The change noticeable in St. George since my last visit consists mainly in the growth of the trees, vines and shrubbery, though some very good buildings have been erected or completed in that time, most prominent among which is the fine new rock Tabernacle, than which there is no better in the territory. Workmen are now engaged on its interior and the finishing touches are being added to the splendid spire which adorns the building. The fine toned bell of 600 pounds weight is already in its place, and the clock about to be adjusted in it.⁴⁸

As the use of the tabernacle increased throughout 1873 and 1874, the building was quickly becoming the center point for the community's most significant events. A pattern began to emerge out of the structure's last construction years. Latter-day Saints in St. George felt such a connection to the tabernacle they used it for any and all events, to the point of disrepair. After the essential construction was complete, the building experienced constant and unrelenting use, beginning even before its dedication. This constant use, continuing for more than a century, was interspersed with periods of intense renovation or restoration, a process that also underscored the importance of the Tabernacle to the lives of those who called Southern Utah "home."

With so many meetings and so much business being conducted in the tabernacle, it seemed the Saints had forgotten that the building remained undedicated. The fact had not escaped Erastus Snow and Brigham Young. In a March 1876 letter to Brigham Young, Erastus wrote:

The Tabernacle grounds are enclosed with a plain picket fence and seats are being got ready against the time, when you deem it advisable to dedicate that building and open it for public meetings. Our local conference as usual is set for first Friday in May, and either on that occasion, or on your birthday, June 1st would seem an appropriate time for dedicating it. We laid the first cornerstone on June 1st and if you will fix upon that <or any other> time and be present to Dedicate the same we shall be very glad to work to your time.⁴⁹

Finally, on May 14, 1876, a few months shy of fourteen years from the time Brigham Young had written to Erastus Snow urging the tabernacle's con-

struction, Brigham's son, Apostle Brigham Young Jr., dedicated the building. While it took years to erect the building, given the trying circumstances of those who constructed it and the magnitude of the project, it clearly was an amazing achievement.

John Lyman Smith, in a spartan yet revealing diary entry recorded, "St Geo. Tabernacle dedicated. BY jr prayer [?] Pres B Young Spoke about the best I have ever heard him do for years about 1500 present."⁵⁰ Now a dedicated meetinghouse, the St. George Tabernacle would continue to play a vital role in the community. In addition to every category of church meeting, the building hosted dances, parties, dinners, funerals, weddings, memorials, community celebrations, lectures, educational classes, a range of civic meetings, even a Catholic mass.

The importance of some meetings held in the St. George Tabernacle had an impact that reached well beyond the community. Almost a quarter century after its dedication, LDS Church President Lorenzo Snow delivered in the tabernacle his address regarding the law of tithing, the subsequent effects of which were felt throughout the entire Church.

With such constant use, maintenance and repair efforts for the St. George Tabernacle began within fifteen years of its dedication. In January 1889 repairs were made to the steps.⁵¹ In February appropriations were made to pay for previous repairs and materials through December 1888.⁵² In December 1889 repairs to the structure's clock and organ, as well as repairs to the roof's shingles, were authorized.⁵³

As the years passed, revenues proved insufficient for needed maintenance and repairs. In September 1898, David H. Cannon "called attention to the present bad state of this tabernacle—needed repairs and the necessity of contribution to the Tabernacle Fund."⁵⁴ In November 1898, stake clerk James G. Bleak reported which wards "had paid their quota and stating that some \$500.00 is still due and is now needed to put the Tabernacle in good condition."⁵⁵

As the twentieth century dawned, needed repairs still ran behind schedule. At a stake meeting in March 1902 it was "moved that the Presdcy of the



Brigham Young Jr., date unknown. Young dedicated the St. George Tabernacle on May 14, 1876, nearly fourteen years after construction began.



Images of the completed St. George Tabernacle, dates unknown. Photographs courtesy Utah State Historical Society.

Stake be and are hereby authorized to have the North Side of the Tabernacle roof re-shingled, Calciment the walls inside, and the Ceiling, Varnish the Grained Work, re-paint the posts, replace the broken Windows and make such other improvements as are necessary for the preservation of the building. Carried unanimously.”⁵⁶ Apparently nothing had been done to re-shingle the north side tabernacle roof for thirteen years, since the patch completed in 1889.

From 1900 through the depression years of the 1930s, the pattern of constant use of the tabernacle continued. Unfortunately, at a time when critical repair and renovation of the building were desperately needed, St. George, along with the rest of the nation was in the grips of the Great Depression. The stake clerk, in understated language, noted the building’s incredible deterioration:

The Tabernacle ceiling has fallen down from the north-west part of the building. It seems there may be more that will have to come down before the building can be used for meetings as usual. . . . The Stake Tabernacle has been unsafe in the main hall because of part of the ceiling falling, which has caused much inconvenience to the Stake Presidency and the St. George East Ward that uses the building for their Ward meetings, and now can only use the basement. This condition has existed for more than two months and still no repairs are being made”⁵⁷

Finally, in January 1938 a noted architect inspected the building and called for immediate restoration work, while describing the building’s significance:

Raymond J. Ashton, Salt Lake City architect, Saturday had inspected the St. George L.D.S. stake tabernacle, to recommend repairs necessary before the building can be used for meetings.

One of the historic landmarks of the state, the brick structure has been deemed unsafe for several months, after large areas of plaster separated from the walls.

“This is one of the finest structures of the L.D.S. church, architecturally speaking,” Mr. Ashton commented. “it is more than a local building. It is a shrine to the whole church, and should be preserved intact.”

Based upon Mr. Ashton’s recommendations, repair work will begin immediately.”⁵⁸

The money allocated to restore the building at a time when the country was still reeling from the effects of the depression testifies to the importance of the building felt by those in Southern Utah. Just as the tabernacle had almost been loved to destruction, the effort to save it also demonstrated the love Southern Utah Saints had for the building. An October 1939 newspaper article described the ambitious plans to bring the building back to life:

More than \$10,000 will be spent on repairs to the famous St. George Stake Tabernacle during renovations now underway, it was announced today.

Erected between 1863–1871, this building has stood as a monument to the pioneers and as a tribute to the architecture used by the founders of Utah’s Dixie.



Interior view of the St. George Tabernacle from the choir seats looking to the east. Photograph courtesy Intellectual Reserve.



Interior view of the St. George Tabernacle looking to the west. Photograph courtesy Intellectual Reserve.



Interior view of the St. George Tabernacle's spiral staircase. Photograph courtesy Intellectual Reserve.

The renovations will not include remodeling, but repairing of the exterior, plastering, straightening the tower and balcony, adjusting the windows and shingling the roof.

Up-to-date wiring will be installed and both the interior and exterior will be painted.”⁵⁹

Although much of the work was accomplished in 1940, some repair and restoration continued for at least six additional years.⁶⁰ During the restoration, workers discovered a remarkable historical artifact from the 1870s left by Charles Lowell Walker and his co-workers. The story appeared in the *Deseret News*:

While revamping the steps of the historical red sandstone St. George Tabernacle recently, workmen uncovered an engaging page of early Latter-day Saint history.

A greenish, mineral stained “Essence of Jamaica Ginger” bottle was found imbedded in the thick mortar under the top step of the south entrance to the beautiful tabernacle.

On a closely rolled six-by-nine-inch sheet of yellowed-with-age paper, a short poem was inscribed by Charles Lowell Walker, along with the names of the workmen. Thus far, search of the well written journals of Charles Lowell Walker, covering the years of building the tabernacle, fails to reveal any mention of the bottle and the incident or the date of its having been deposited. However the entries would indicate

the date as being around May 23, 1872. This would make the relic near 76 years old at this writing.

The clear penmanship could be that of James G. Bleak.

The attention of Harold S. Snow, president of the St. George Stake, was called to the find. At his suggestion, the bottle and scroll were presented to Mrs. Zaidée Walker Miles, daughter of the former Dixie poet.

With Mrs. Miles' permission, R. D. Adams photographed the items before they were presented by her to the Daughters of Utah Pioneers for their exhibit in the McQuarrie Memorial Hall.

LaVell Cottam, employed by Jennings and Jennings, contractors of St. George, was the first to find the quaint old bottle.

The little poem placed in the Jamaica Ginger bottle and buried in the mortar expresses the heavy toll of the early builders under their trying conditions, and their relief when flour was sent by the good people of Sanpete who, according to the records, shared their own supplies to help those who were in greater need and were giving their time in building houses of worship:

Full seven long years
We now have worked,
And from our task
Have never shirked;

We have oft fared short,
For many an hour,
And now are fed
On Sanpete flour.

We have labored long
For many a year,
This noble structure
For to rear;

And thus we've often
Lacked for bread,
"You've nobly worked";
By all was said.

Four hundred miles
We haul our flour,
To feed us in this trying hour;

The Saints back north
Have freely given,
Thus laying treasures
Up in heaven.

So now kind friends
We say farewell,
This house and steps
Our works do tell,

God will preserve
And bless his own
With life eternal
And a crown.

C. L. W., Poet

The article concludes with this editorial line: “Charles L. Walker’s writings express the feelings of most of the pioneers who regarded each call to service worthy of their response and best efforts.”⁶¹

Just as Walker and his co-workers had built the tabernacle in the 1860s and 1870s, St. George residents and the Church had saved the building from destruction in the 1930s and 1940s. While religious services and many other events still took place in the tabernacle, construction of additional meeting-houses, allowed the building some respite from overuse.

By 1970, this grand edifice received recognition as a site “of great historical significance.”⁶² The following year, the St. George Tabernacle was listed on the National Register of Historic Places.⁶³ Now operated as a Church Historic Site, the Church carefully preserves this amazing structure that has served and continues to serve Southern Utah to this day. The saga of its construction, use, and preservation that has been unfolding since the early 1860s is truly a remarkable story. If any building stands as a symbolic representation of vision, consecration, commitment, cooperation, and community, it is clearly the St. George Tabernacle.

Notes

1. Brigham Young to Erastus Snow, October 1, 1862, transcribed in St. George Stake Manuscript History, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah (hereafter cited as Church History Library).

2. George A. Smith, in *Journal of Discourses* (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855–1886), 9:116, September 10, 1861.

3. Brigham Young to Erastus Snow, October 1, 1862.

4. “Minutes of a Meeting held at St. George, Washington county, on the 9th and 10th of May, 1863,” *Deseret News*, June 3, 1863. A reference in the Journal History also lends credence to the notion that Brigham may have given specific direction about where he wanted the city to be located: “He wished a city to be located on the slope north of the junction of the Santa Clara with the Rio Virgen and said it should be named St. George.” Journal History of the Church, October 8, 1861, 9, Church History Library.

5. Brigham Young to Erastus Snow, October 1, 1862.

6. Maps and drawings [ca. 1956–1982], Church History Library.

7. Public works projects included the construction of buildings for Church or civic purposes. For many Mormon communities such projects provided employment to a fair

percentage of the local population. Projects were often, but not always, Church related. From the early 1860s to the mid-1870s the St. George hall, tabernacle, temple, cotton factory, and courthouse were constructed. The same labor force of Church members constructing the St. George Tabernacle “also built the courthouse.” However, the courthouse was not built with Church funds, but by a Washington County mill tax. “In an election on 5 August 1867, the mill levy was approved by a large majority.” Douglas D. Alder and Karl F. Brooks, *A History of Washington County: From Isolation to Destination* (Salt Lake City, UT: Utah State Historical Society, 1996), 68–69.

8. “Notes and Incidents of an Excursion in Washington County,” *Deseret News*, September 17, 1862.

9. A. Karl Larson and Katharine Miles Larson, eds., *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 2 vols. (Logan, UT: Utah State University Press, 1980), 1:268.

10. Brigham Young to Erastus Snow, October 1, 1862.

11. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, November 10, 1862, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

12. “Pursuant to notice given at the close of last March Conference, the corner-stones of St. George Tabernacle were laid this day.” St. George Stake Manuscript History, June 1, 1863, Church History Library.

13. “Minutes, of a Meeting held at St. George, Washington county, on the 9th and 10th of May, 1863,” *Deseret News*, June 3, 1863.

14. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, June 1, 1863, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

15. Hazel B. Bradshaw claimed that “Brother [William H.] Folsom was Church architect at this time and lent considerable aid in planning and designing the building.” Similarly, architect Richard W. Jackson wrote, “Though Miles Romney, the builder-architect, is credited with its design and construction, it appears that he was aided some in the work by architect William H. Folsom, who was Church architect from October 1861 to April 1867 and assistant Church architect after that.” Bradshaw did not provide a source for her conclusions about the work of Romney and Folsom in designing the St. George Tabernacle. Jackson’s source was an article by historian Paul Anderson that cited a biography of William H. Folsom. In the biography, author Nina F. Moss noted that in a letter she received from Bradshaw, Bradshaw claimed the information about Folsom’s role “was given to her by Miles Romney.” There is one seemingly insurmountable problem with Bradshaw’s claim—Miles Romney died in 1877 and Hazel Bradshaw was born in 1891. Perhaps Bradshaw received the information from Miles Park Romney, Miles Romney’s son. Even that is very unlikely, since Miles Park Romney died in 1904 when Hazel would have been only thirteen years old. Still, Miles Romney undoubtedly knew William Folsom, since Folsom was a business partner with Miles Romney’s brother, George, in Salt Lake City. Based on Folsom’s close association to the Romney family, it is not unreasonable to assume that Miles Romney consulted Folsom regarding the design and construction of the St. George Tabernacle. Definitive evidence that William H. Folsom designed or assisted Romney in designing the tabernacle was found in a St. George Stake Tithing Office daybook. An entry for January 8, 1867, noted a payment of \$150.00 under the “Meeting House” account to the General Tithing Office in Salt Lake City for “Musser’s bill rendered for Folsom’s Services as Architect.” See Hazel B. Bradshaw, “Our Early Meeting House,” *Heart Throbs of the West*, 12 vols., Kate B. Carter, comp. (Salt Lake City, UT: Daughters of Utah Pioneers, 1941), 3:63; Richard W. Jackson, *Places of Worship: 150 Years of Latter-day Saint Architecture* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), 88; Paul L. Anderson, “William Harrison Folsom: Pioneer Architect,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 43, no. 3 (Summer 1975), 249, n18; Nina F. Moss, *A History of William Harrison Folsom*,

March 25, 1815 to March 19, 1901 (Salt Lake City, UT: William Harrison Folsom Family Organization, 1973), 37.

16. St. George Stake Manuscript History, November 5, 1871, Church History Library.

17. Larson and Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 1:242.

18. Erastus Snow to Franklin B. Woolley, October 4, 1863, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

19. Erastus Snow to George A. Smith, March 20, 1865, in “Correspondence,” *Deseret News*, April 5, 1865.

20. St. George Stake Manuscript History, November 4, 1866, Church History Library.

21. St. George Stake Manuscript History, November 4, 1866, Church History Library.

22. Samuel Miles, *Autobiography*, 23, Church History Library.

23. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, June 29, 1868, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878; also transcribed in St. George Stake Manuscript History, Church History Library.

24. Larson and Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 1:292.

25. St. George Stake Manuscript History, March 20–21, 1869, Church History Library.

26. Larson and Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 1:293.

27. Lorenzo Brown, *Diary*, March 27, 1870, 250, Church History Library.

28. George A. Smith to Editor, March 13, 1870, in “Correspondence,” *Deseret News*, March 30, 1870.

29. George A. Smith to *Deseret News*, December 13, 1870, in “News from the South,” *Deseret News*, December 21, 1870.

30. Brigham Young to Prest. D. H. Wells, December 13, 1870, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

31. Charles Smith, *Reminiscences and diary*, March 1842–June 1905, 184, Church History Library.

32. Joseph W. Young to Brigham Young, February 24, 1871, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

33. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, March 29, 1871, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

34. Larson and Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 1:330.

35. Joseph W. Young to Brigham Young, May 1, 1871, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

36. Larson and Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 1:330.

37. St. George Stake Manuscript History, June 10, 1871, Church History Library.

38. “Local and Other Matters,” *Deseret News*, August 23, 1871.

39. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, October 4, 1871, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

40. Larson and Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 1:333.

41. St. George Stake, *Clerk’s Records*, 1864–1904, Church History Library.

42. St. George Stake Manuscript History, December 29–30, 1871, Church History Library.

43. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, February 5, 1872, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

44. Larson and Larson, *Diary of Charles Lowell Walker*, 1:344–45.

45. Transcripts of correspondence written by clerk Alexander F. MacDonald in behalf

of Snow, St. George Stake, Clerk's Records, 1864–1904, Church History Library.

46. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, August 4, 1872, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

47. The expanding mining operations in Pioche and other nearby settlements undoubtedly were a constant concern for Snow, because those operations often affected the labor supply as well as available resources to finish the tabernacle. See Erastus Snow, Remarks, December 29, 1872, in Henry Eyring, Minutes of meetings held in the upper room of St. George tabernacle, December 28–29, 1872, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

48. George C. Lambert to Editor, June 14, 1873, in "Correspondence," *Deseret News*, July 2, 1873.

49. Erastus Snow to Brigham Young, March 26, 1876, Brigham Young, Office files, 1832–1878, Church History Library.

50. John Lyman Smith, Diary, May 14, 1876, Church History Library.

51. "St George Stake Tabernacle Committee Dr to George Brooks & Wm G Miles for repairing St George Tabernacle Steps \$30.00 \$27.00 Tith. Pay & \$3.00 Cash as per agreement." St. George Stake, Clerk's Records, 1864–1904, Church History Library.

52. Minutes, Church Association of the St. George Stake of Zion, February 1, 1889, 32, in St. George Stake General Minutes, Church History Library.

53. Minutes, Church Association of the St. George Stake of Zion, December 17, 1889, 36–37, in St. George Stake General Minutes, Church History Library; also St. George Stake, Clerk's Records, 1864–1904, Church History Library.

54. St. George Stake General Minutes, September 11, 1898, Church History Library.

55. St. George Stake General Minutes, November 11, 1898, Church History Library.

56. Minutes, Church Association of the St. George Stake of Zion, March 7, 1902, 115, in St. George Stake General Minutes, Church History Library.

57. St. George Stake Reports, September 30, 1938, quoted in St. George Manuscript History, Church History Library.

58. "St. George Building Gets Inspection," *Salt Lake Tribune*, January 8, 1939.

59. "St. George Repairs Edifice," *Deseret News*, October 27, 1939.

60. St. George Stake reports, June 30, 1940, quoted in St. George Manuscript History, Church History Library.

61. "A Story from the Past," *Deseret News*, June 8, 1948. Author A. Karl Larson also noted: "In the process of getting the brittle paper out, a corner was destroyed, so that only surname "Pymm" was left for John Pymm, one of the original St. George pioneers." Andrew Karl Larson, *I Was Called to Dixie* (Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret News Press, 1961), 571–72.

62. St. George Stake General Minutes, July 19, 1970, Church History Library.

63. "Rampton Gives Plaques to Honor 9 Historic Sites," *Deseret News*, June 30, 1971.