

## UTAH'S TERRITORIAL CAPITAL AT FILLMORE

*Richard Neitzel Holzapfel*

The Latter-day Saint pioneers in the Great Basin named Utah's first territorial capital Fillmore -- in honor of United States President Millard Fillmore (who served from 1850-1852), recognizing him for his courage in appointing Brigham Young as Utah's first territorial governor. Brigham Young served from 1850 until 1857 in this capacity.

The territorial legislature's joint resolution, creating Millard County from a portion of the Pahvant Valley in Iron County, named the county seat Fillmore City and made it the seat of government for the Territory of Utah. In addition, the legislature appropriated \$20,000 (which the Federal Government gave the new territory for the construction of public buildings) to erect a territorial "state" house there.

Originally, LDS leaders planned to erect a statehouse in Union Square in Salt Lake City. However, a more centrally located seat of government was thought to be a better choice for the large territory established by the Organic Act of 9 September 1850, even though Fillmore was isolated and distant from the main pioneer settlements confined to the valleys along the western slopes of the Wasatch Mountains. Young and other LDS Church leaders envisioned an expansive Mormon Kingdom throughout much of the Intermountain west and planned to expand settlements in the area as new converts arrived in Utah. With these plans for completely colonizing the new territory, bounded on the east by the Rocky Mountains, on the west by the Sierra Nevadas, on the north by the forty-second parallel of north latitude, and on the south by the thirty-seven parallel, Fillmore seemed the perfect location.

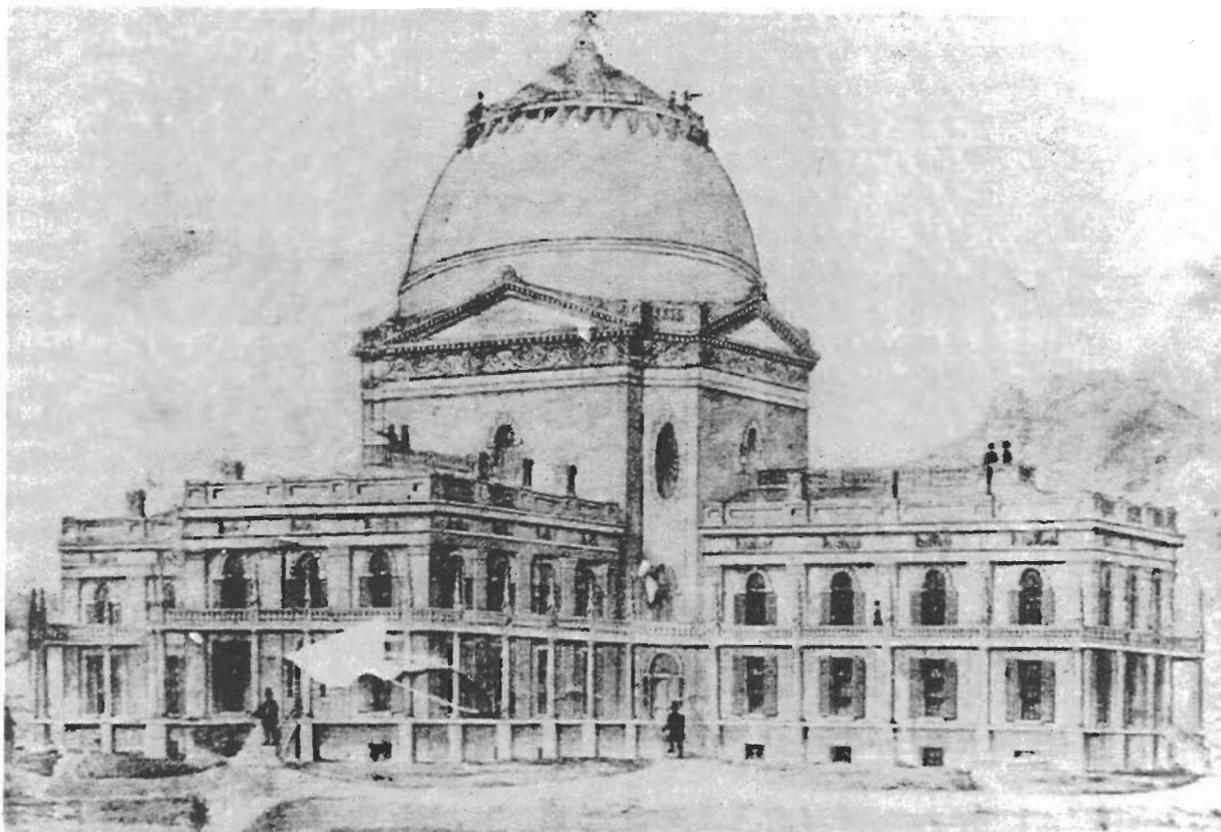
Subsequently, four men (Orson Pratt, Albert Carrington, Jesse W. Fox, and William C. Staines) were chosen by the legislature to proceed to Fillmore to locate the exact site for the construction of the new building. These men, all prominent in civil and ecclesiastical affairs in Utah, were accompanied by two large groups of people. The two companies, one led by Brigham Young and the

other by Anson Call, left Salt Lake City for the Pahvant Valley on 21 October 1851. Governor Young's company was a delegation of lawmakers and Anson Call's a group of settlers who had been called to establish a Mormon community. The two groups joined after passing the Sevier and entered the Pahvant Valley together. Proceeding south to Chalk Creek, in eastern Millard County, they chose a spot for the new capital some 150 miles south of Salt Lake City. After participating in the activities of founding the city, some of the government party began to return to Salt Lake City on 30 October 1851, leaving Surveyor Fox behind to complete his work at Fillmore City. Anson Call and company also remained and were instructed to build their fort "near state house square."

The legislature planned a monumental statehouse to house the government. The architect of the Salt Lake Temple, Truman O. Angell, was assigned the task of designing the building, which the Saints hoped would be a statehouse instead of a territorial house. Angell's plans called for a large, imposing, domed building with four radiating wings in the form of a cross. Only one wing, built between 1852 and 1855 of local red sandstone and native timber, was completed, however. Almost three years after the selection of the site, the walls still stood uncompleted. Stone and timbers had to be hand hewn, there was always a shortage of iron for nails and skilled workmen, and, finally, additional funds from Washington were not forthcoming, despite repeated requests.

Finally, by summer 1855, the roof was placed on the east wing of the capital, and the interior was being rushed to completion in readiness for the legislature. The fifth annual session of the Utah territorial legislature convened in the new building beginning on 10 December 1855. Wilford Woodruff, a member of the legislature, reported, "The Legislative Assembly met in the State House and both Houses organized and adjoined till to morrow 1 o'clock."<sup>1</sup>

Tradition has it that the building was dedicated the following day by Governor Brigham Young, who was



*Original architect's sketch of proposed territorial statehouse at Fillmore, Utah. Truman O. Angell, architect of the Salt Lake Temple, was chosen to design a building for use by the governmental officers of Utah. Courtesy of Utah State Historical Society.*

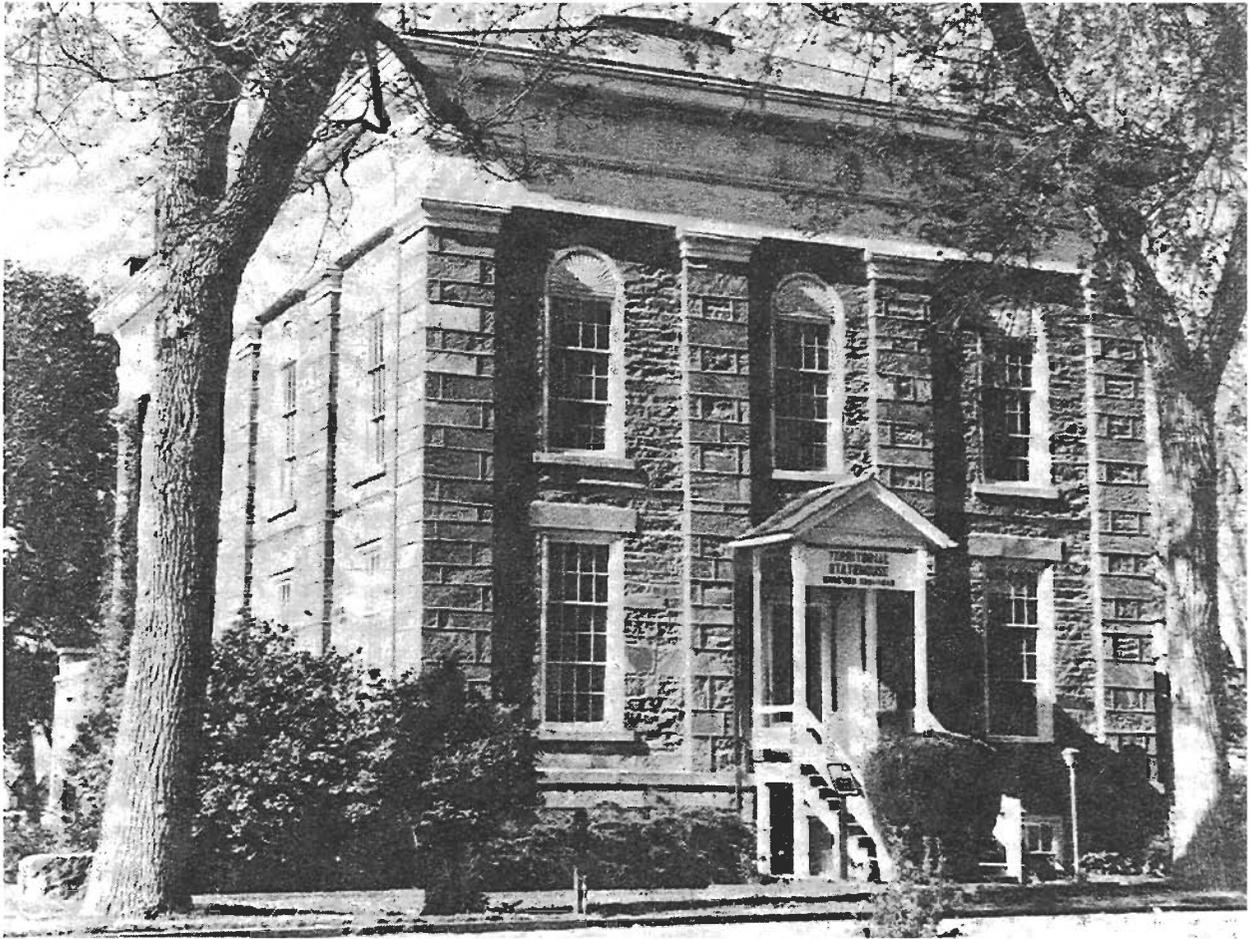
also president of the LDS Church. Woodruff continued his account of the activities of the day: "I met with the Council at 1 o'clock. At 2 o'clock we met in Joint Session. The Governor appeared and delivered his message. One thousand copies were ordered to be printed. It was resolved that one hundred copies of the minutes of each day should be printed for the benefit of the two Houses."<sup>22</sup>

On the following day, 12 December, the legislature met together and conducted a large amount of business. It appointed the chairmen for three important committees and made plans for roads and ferries, a library, and revenues. Business continued on Thursday, 13 December, but adjourned early to give the "committees time to bring in business and the carpenters time to finish the room."<sup>23</sup> Meetings continued through the new year when the "officers of the Territory were elected, the Judges, and Notary Public of the Counties, the Commissioners, Treasurers, Auditors, Marshals, surveyors and Attorneys Gen-

eral, the Chancellors and Regency of the University of Deseret."<sup>24</sup>

Finally, the annual session concluded its business on 18 January 1856. Woodruff noted: "The Legislature met this morning at the statehouse at 5 o'clock and adjourned till the 2nd Monday in December 1856. After adjournment the Governor and all the northern members and judges started for home. It was a vary cold morning."<sup>25</sup>

Nearly a year later, the sixth legislative session began in Fillmore. While in session on 18 December 1856, however, the legislature passed a resolution moving the territorial capital to Salt Lake City. The lawmakers left the statehouse and readjourned in Salt Lake City a few days later. Apparently, the slow development of southern Utah and inadequate accommodations in Fillmore for the lawmakers contributed to the move to Salt Lake. The capital building was never completed as envisioned by Truman Angell.



*Some 22,000 tourists visit the Territorial State Park, Fillmore, Utah, each year. The state house was completely renovated as a museum with two floors and a basement full of well-displayed and well-cataloged pictures and memorabilia from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.  
Courtesy of Utah State Historical Society.*

The building served several purposes during the nineteenth century, including as a newspaper printing plant, civic center, church, school, jail, and theater. Eventually, the building was abandoned and fell into disuse. The Daughters of Utah Pioneers saved the building from neglect in 1930 when it obtained ownership and began restoring the handsome red, stone-structure. The Utah State Division of Parks and Recreation purchased the building from the DUP in 1957 and now operates it as a state museum. The Territorial Statehouse building is the oldest governmental structure in Utah and is located 150 miles south of Salt Lake City on Interstate 15. It is opened to the public all year long, except Thanksgiving, Christmas, and New Year's Day, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Memorial Day and Labor Day from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m.).

#### NOTES

1. Wilford Woodruff Journal, 10 December 1855, Archive Division, Historical Department of the The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah.
2. *Ibid.*, 11 December 1855.
3. *Ibid.*, 13 December 1855.
4. *Ibid.*, 2 January 1856.
5. *Ibid.*, 18 January 1856.