

## Buildings in Kirtland, Far West, Nauvoo, and Miller's Hollow

### **The Kirtland Temple**

The history of the buildings which preceded the Salt Lake Tabernacle properly begins with the construction of the temple in Kirtland, Ohio. The Mormons settled in Kirtland in 1831, one year after their Church was organized, and there they built their first religious edifice, the Kirtland Temple, or the House of the Lord. Even though it is called the Kirtland Temple, this building is considered a forerunner of the Great Mormon Tabernacle because it was built for the same purposes as the Mormon tabernacles of the modern period. The Kirtland Temple was designed to be a meetinghouse, with a large assembly hall that could be divided into sections for study and classrooms on the upper floor. During the short time that the Mormons were permitted to remain in Kirtland, the temple's principal uses were meetings, conferences, and schools. Thus, in a strict sense, it falls more nearly into the category of the tabernacle, as the term is now used, rather than the temple. However, it was also

used for the performance of certain sacred rites and was, therefore, a forerunner of two types of buildings—the tabernacle and the temple.

It was a poor frontier society established by the Church in Kirtland. Most of the members were poor at the time they joined the Church, and others had left substantial holdings in the areas of their previous residence in order that they might migrate to the center of the Church. Although they were poor in material substance, these people were rich in vigor and reacted in a hearty and

affirmative manner when their prophet, Joseph Smith, revealed that he had been commanded to build a temple, a house of the Lord. The magnitude of the structure was such that to undertake its construction represented a large project for that small group.

The revelation that the temple was to be constructed was given December 27, 1832, and necessary preliminary planning was done during the remainder of the winter of 1832–33. The decision to begin actual construction is recorded in Joseph Smith’s journal: “June 6—A conference of High priests assembled, and chose Orson Hyde a clerk to the Presidency of the High Priesthood. This conference was more especially called to counsel the committee, who had been appointed to take the oversight of the building of the house of the Lord. The conference voted that the committee, (Reynolds



The Kirtland Temple was similar to the Tabernacle in that it served not only as a temple but also as a general meetinghouse for conferences, Sunday worship, and school classes.

*Courtesy of Church Archives*

Cahoon, Jared Carter, and Hyrum Smith), proceed immediately to commence building the house; or to obtaining materials, stone, brick, lumber, etc., for the same.”<sup>1</sup>

The first load of stone for the temple was hauled by George A. Smith. Hyrum Smith and Reynolds Cahoon broke the ground for the foundation.<sup>2</sup> The plan for the temple was as follows:

The house of the Lord for the Presidency, is eighty-seven feet long and sixty-one feet wide, and ten feet taken off of the east end for the stairway, leaves the inner court, seventy-eight feet by sixty-one, which is calculated and divided for seats in the following manner, viz: the two aisles four feet wide each; the middle block of pews are eleven feet ten inches long, and three feet wide each; and the two lines drawn through the middle are four inches apart; in which space a curtain is to drop at right angles, and divide the house into four parts if necessary. The pews of the side blocks are fourteen and a half feet long, and three feet wide. The five pews in each corner of the house, are twelve feet six inches long. The open spaces between the corner and side pews are for fire-places; those in the west are nine feet wide, and the east ones are eight feet and eight inches wide, and the chimneys carried up in the wall where they are marked with a pencil. . . .

The building to be constructed of stone and brick of the best quality. . . .

Make your house fourteen feet high between the floors. There will not be a gallery but a chamber; each story to be fourteen feet high, arched overhead with an



1. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902), 1:353–54.
2. *History of the Church*, 1:353.

elliptic arch. Let the foundation of the house be of stone.  
. . . The entire height of the house is to be twenty-eight  
feet, each story being fourteen feet.<sup>3</sup>

Following disclosure of the plan, work proceeded on the grounds, necessary excavation was completed, and the cornerstones were laid and dedicated on July 23, 1833.<sup>4</sup> No detailed description of the laying of the cornerstones appears to have been written at the time. However, “Elder George A. Smith gave from memory (in Salt Lake City, Utah, in November 1859) the names of the twenty-four Elders who officiated in Kirtland on that memorable occasion. He said that six Elders were chosen to lay each corner stone; the First Presidency laying the first one, after which each of the other three corners were laid in turn by three other sets of elders, six in each case.”<sup>5</sup>

After the laying of the cornerstones, the work on the temple progressed gradually and at great cost in labor and sacrifice of the people. The difficulties were well described by Sidney Rigdon, one of the First Presidency, during his speech at the dedication of the temple. The speech is reported by Joseph Smith: “[President Rigdon in his talk] at one time . . . was rather pathetic, and drew tears from many eyes. He was then taking a retrospective view of the toils, privations, and anxieties of those who had labored upon the walls of the house to erect them; and added, there were those who had wet them with their tears, in the silent shades of night, while they were praying to the God of heaven to protect them, and stay the unhallowed hands of ruthless spoilers, who had



3. *History of the Church*, 1:359–61.
4. Andrew Jenson, comp., *Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, July 23, 1833. This unpublished record is in loose-leaf form [also on microfilm] with at least one page set aside for each day the Church has been in existence. Historical items are found under the date of their occurrence. It is, therefore, a day-by-day journal of Church history.
5. *Journal History*, July 23, 1833.

uttered a prophecy, when the foundation was laid, that the walls would never be reared.”<sup>6</sup>

After three years of toil and privation the building neared completion. Some of the journal entries of the time are interesting. On the 4th of January, 1835, the Prophet Joseph wrote the following in his diary: “We are occupying the translating room for the use of the school, until another room can be prepared. It is the west room in the upper part of the Temple, and was consecrated this morning by prayer, offered up by Father Smith. This is the first day we have occupied it. This is a rainy time, and the roads are extremely muddy. Met this evening at the Temple, to make arrangements for a singing school.”<sup>7</sup>

The following is extracted from a letter written by W. W. Phelps in Kirtland, Ohio, Jan. 5, 1836, to his wife Sally, in Liberty, Missouri: “The Hebrew school has commenced in one of the attic school rooms of the Lord’s House. These rooms are nearly all completed. The whole work continually progresses, though somewhat slowly.”<sup>8</sup>

The Prophet wrote of the construction in his journal entry for the 8th of January 1836: “The plastering and hard-finishing on the outside of the Lord’s House was commenced on the 2nd of November, 1835, and finished this day. The job was let to Artemas Millet and Lorenzo Young, at one thousand dollars. Jacob Bump took the job of plastering the inside of the house throughout, at fifteen hundred dollars, and commenced the same on the 9th of November last. He is still continuing the work, notwithstanding the inclemency of the weather.”<sup>9</sup>



6. *History of the Church*, 2:414.
7. *Journal History*, January 4, 1836.
8. *Journal History*, January 5, 1836.
9. *Journal History*, January 8, 1836.

During the next three months, the temple was completed and was prepared for dedication. The dedicatory services were recorded by Joseph Smith in his journal:

The congregation began to assemble at the Temple, at about seven o'clock, an hour earlier than the doors were to be opened. Many brethren had come in from the regions around about, to witness the dedication of the Lord's House and share in His blessings; and such was the anxiety on this occasion that some hundreds (probably five or six) assembled before the doors were opened. The presidents entered with the doorkeepers, and stationed the latter at the inner and outer doors; also placed our stewards to receive donations from those who should feel disposed to contribute something to defray the expense of building the House of the Lord.

The doors were then opened. Presidents Rigdon, Cowdery and myself seated the congregation as they came in, and according to the best calculation we could make, we received between nine and ten hundred, which were as many as could be comfortably seated. We then informed the doorkeepers that we could receive no more, and a multitude were deprived of the benefits of the meeting on account of the house not being sufficiently capacious to receive them; and I felt to regret that any of my brethren and sisters should be deprived of the meeting, and I recommended them to repair to the schoolhouse and hold a meeting, which they did, and filled that house also, and yet many were left out. . . .

Received by contribution—nine hundred and sixty-three dollars.

At nine o'clock a.m. President Sidney Rigdon commenced the services of the day by reading the 96th and 24th Psalms. [A hymn was sung and] . . . President Rig-

don addressed the throne of grace in a devout and appropriate manner. [Another hymn was sung and President Rigdon delivered a talk based on Matthew, chapter 18, verse 20.] . . .

The dedicatory prayer was then offered [by Joseph Smith]. . . .

President Hyrum Smith made some appropriate remarks congratulating those who had endured so many toils and privations to build the house.

President Rigdon then made a few appropriate closing remarks, and a short prayer, at the close of which we sealed the proceedings of the day by shouting hosanna, hosanna, hosanna to God and the Lamb, three times, sealing it each time with amen, amen, and amen.<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to note that this procedure of closing the dedication services with the Hosanna Shout has become accepted in the Church and has been used on all occasions of major dedicatory services since it was first employed as recorded above. Thus was completed the first religious edifice built by the Mormons. It is now classed as one of the historic churches of America.

## **Buildings in Missouri**

Even prior to the construction of the Kirtland Temple, there was much feeling against the Mormons in the Kirtland area. This feeling was increased with the completion of the temple. Thus, the Mormons were able to use their temple only a short time when they were forced by mob action to leave Kirtland.

During much of the time required for the construction of the Kirtland Temple, an area in addition to Kirtland was being settled by the Mormons. This area was Jackson County, Missouri. Jackson



10. *History of the Church*, 2:410–28.

County, according to a revelation to the Prophet Joseph Smith, was to be the center stake of the Church, and it was the mission of the Saints to settle and build it up. So when the Mormons were obliged to leave Kirtland, they joined their brothers in Missouri.

In the small town of Far West, Caldwell County, Missouri, the Mormons almost immediately undertook to build another temple, and on Monday, July 3, 1837, they broke ground for it.<sup>11</sup> This was just one year after the dedication of the Kirtland Temple. Here, then, is a good example of the building spirit of the Mormons. Forced to abandon a temple they had only recently completed and dedicated at great labor and sacrifice and also forced to leave their homes and possessions, they immediately undertook to build another and larger temple.

The author found no evidence that any attempt was made in Missouri to build a tabernacle. However, there was an effort to build a log house of worship. Elder George A. Smith, speaking in Salt Lake City on August 12, 1855, remarked: "It used to be in the days of the Prophet Joseph, a kind of common adage that Mormonism flourished best out of doors, and although we struggled hard at the time that the brethren undertook in Missouri to build a hewed log house that would cost about \$1200, yet that tried the faith of many, and was more than we accomplished before the Saints were driven from Jackson County."<sup>12</sup>

The contentions between the Mormons and their Missouri neighbors grew so bitter that in 1838 the Saints were again forced to find a new home. Thus, building in Missouri was restricted to laying the cornerstone of a great temple which has never been built and attempting to erect a log meetinghouse.



11. *Journal History*, July 3, 1837.

12. *Journal History*, August 12, 1855.



## The Nauvoo Tabernacle

After leaving Missouri, the Mormons found their new home on the banks of the Mississippi River at a place they named Nauvoo. It is in the Nauvoo period that Mormon history first indicates the complete separation of the temple and the tabernacle.

Shortly after their arrival at Nauvoo, the Mormons again undertook to build a large temple and evidently intended to locate a tabernacle on the same block. The April 1, 1845, issue of the *Times and Seasons*, in an editorial entitled "The Saints Make Nauvoo," published the following: "The work of the Temple goes on as fast as possible, and, in fact, the anxiety is so great to labor upon this great house of the Lord, that the committee frequently have to set men at other work. A trench is being excavated about six feet wide and six feet deep, around a square of about six or eight acres, which will be filled with stone, and upon which will be placed an iron fence for the security of the Temple and Tabernacle."<sup>13</sup>

Inasmuch as this book is concerned with the forerunners of the Tabernacle, no detail will be noted concerning the building of the temple at Nauvoo other than to observe that the full energies of the people were expended upon it, and no tabernacle was built while the Mormons lived in Nauvoo. Most religious services were held on the "meeting ground" in the open air, oftentimes under adverse circumstances. The minutes of the April conference of 1845 are interesting in this connection: "April 7, 1845 Ten o'clock A.M. Conference met pursuant to adjournment; after the conference was seated, in consequence of the high wind, it was thought best to remove into the valley, a little south; and the whole of this immense



13. *Times and Seasons*, April 1, 1845, 6:856. *Times and Seasons* was a weekly newspaper published by John Taylor at Nauvoo, Illinois. It was an official organ of the Church.



The Nauvoo Temple, c. 1846. The Saints originally planned to build a canvas tabernacle next to the Nauvoo Temple, on the same block, for a meeting place during conferences.

*Courtesy of Missouri State Historical Society, St. Louis, Missouri*

congregation was removed, and comfortably seated in the short space of about forty minutes.”<sup>14</sup>

This type of meeting was recalled by President Joseph F. Smith in a talk in Salt Lake City on early places of Mormon worship:



14. *Times and Seasons*, April 15, 1845, 6:869.

My earliest recollection of a place of worship was in a little grove of trees in Nauvoo close to the site of the Temple. This was the first place I remember where Latter-day Saints met together for the worship of God. In this grove I remember attending a large number of meetings, and it seemed to me then that the Sabbath day came around pretty frequently. I used to go, in company with my mother and the rest of the children to the grove, and we used to sit on benches and listen to the speeches of such men as Brigham Young, Orson Pratt, Parley P. Pratt, Orson Hyde, and others of the twelve apostles; and also the Prophet Joseph Smith, and his brother Hyrum Smith. In connection with those whom I have named, I recall having seen the bishop of that day, Brother George Miller, and other men of prominence.

A little incident that was of interest to me I recall occurred on one occasion when I attended a meeting at Nauvoo. The Prophet Joseph Smith, while holding the services, stood in a wagon, where he delivered a discourse. During its delivery the rain began to fall, and it was not long before it became a regular deluge. Those who had umbrellas climbed into the wagon and held them over the speaker, and none left the grove until the services were over.<sup>15</sup>

The type of tabernacle which was originally intended to be built on the Temple Block in Nauvoo is not known. However, by June of 1845, it was determined to take action which would provide the Church with a meeting place in a short time. On the 6th of June of that year, Heber C. Kimball recorded in his journal: "The Twelve met in council at Bishop Miller's at Nauvoo, nine of the Twelve were present, together with some of the Bishops and



15. Preston Nibley, comp., *Faith Promoting Stories* (Independence, MO: Zion's Printing and Publishing, 1943), 163–64.

the architect of the Temple and several other brethren. These brethren counselled together about building a tabernacle, constructed of canvas, in Nauvoo.”<sup>16</sup>

A subsequent entry reads: “Sunday, June 8. At 4 o’clock p.m. Pres. Brigham Young met with the Twelve and others for council and prayer in Nauvoo; they decided that Elder Orson Hyde should go East and buy canvass for a Tabernacle, and type to print the history of Joseph Smith.”<sup>17</sup>

On June 27, 1845, Brigham Young wrote a letter to Wilford Woodruff wherein he stated, “Elder Hyde started east, about ten days ago, to purchase the cloth for the tabernacle; and elder Egan is gone to St. Louis to buy about 125 dollars worth of hemp to make cords for it.”<sup>18</sup>

Before the end of June, Brigham Young reported, “The brethren are clearing the ground round the Temple, and we expect to have the Tabernacle reared, so as to be ready to meet in this fall.”<sup>19</sup>

“Elder Orson Hyde returned to Nauvoo [on the 17th of October], having purchased between four and five thousand yards of canvass for the Tabernacle”<sup>20</sup> and “made returns of money collected for the Tabernacle, \$1415.38; he paid for canvas, \$1,050.56 and other expenses \$105.80.”<sup>21</sup>

The author found no record to indicate that a canvas tabernacle was ever constructed. However, the temple was sufficiently completed by October of 1845 to hold conference therein. The



16. Journal History, June 6, 1845.

17. Journal History, June 8, 1845.

18. Journal History, June 27, 1845.

19. “Extract from President Young’s Letter,” *Millennial Star*, June 27, 1845.

20. Journal History, October 17, 1845.

21. Journal History, October 20, 1845.

report of that conference throws further light on the energy which the Mormons put into their buildings:

First Meeting in the Temple. On Sunday the 5th day of October, through the indefatigable exertions, unceasing industry, and heaven blessed labors in the midst of trials, tribulations, poverty, and worldly obstacles, solemnized, in some instances by death, about five thousand saints had the inexpressible joy and great gratification to meet for the first time in the House of the Lord in the City of Joseph. From mites and tithing, millions had risen up to the glory of God, as a Temple where the children of the last kingdom, could come together and praise the Lord.

It certainly afforded a holy satisfaction to think that since the 6th of April, 1841, when the first stone was laid, amidst the most straitened circumstances, the church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, had witnessed their 'bread cast upon the waters,' or more properly, their obedience to the commandments of the Lord, appear in the tangible form of a Temple, entirely enclosed, windows in, with temporary floors, pulpits, and seats to accommodate so many persons preparatory to a General Conference: no General Conference having been held for three years past, according to the declaration of our martyred prophet:<sup>22</sup> ". . . The Church shall not hold another general conference, until they can meet in [the House of the Lord]."<sup>23</sup>

Within five months after this first meeting in the temple, the Mormons were forced to leave Nauvoo, and in the raw February weather of 1846 they crossed the Mississippi and started their famous trek westward. That trek was made in covered wagons, and



22. Joseph Smith was assassinated June 27, 1844. He was succeeded by Brigham Young as leader of the Church.

23. *Times and Seasons*, November 1, 1845.

it is a most interesting conjecture that many of those wagons may have been covered with the canvas which was intended for the large Nauvoo Tabernacle.

### **Miller's Hollow**

The next mention of tabernacle building in Church history is found at the time the Saints had left Nauvoo and had made camp for the winter on both sides of the Missouri River in the area of Council Bluffs, Iowa, and Winter Quarters, Nebraska. The entry reads: "Sunday November 1, [1846]. Winter Quarters. . . . Pres. Brigham Young submitted a draft by Orson Pratt for a tabernacle."<sup>24</sup>

The draft mentioned in the entry above was intended for a tabernacle to be built on the Iowa side of the Missouri River, for no evidence is found that a tabernacle was built at Winter Quarters. The fact that none was built is further indicated by the remarks of President Joseph F. Smith: "The next meeting place I call to memory was on the Missouri river, at a place called Winter Quarters, about six miles above Omaha. It consisted of nothing more than a bower of twigs and leaves, and was used in the fall and winter of 1846–7 and during the summer of 1848. I understand that there was a log meeting house constructed at Council Bluffs, Iowa, but I never saw it. We held our services and worshiped God under the canopy of heaven."<sup>25</sup>

The log meetinghouse referred to in President Smith's talk was evidently the tabernacle drafted by Orson Pratt. It was erected in the Council Bluffs area, on a spot known as Miller's Hollow. The hollow derived its name from Bishop George Miller, who had located it and there set up his camp. The log tabernacle, while used only a short time, was the scene of a dramatic part in Mormon history: "Friday,



24. Journal History, November 1, 1846.

25. Nibley, *Faith Promoting Stories*, 164.



The reconstructed log tabernacle built at Miller's Hollow, today known as the Kanesville Tabernacle. Several significant events in Church history have occurred here, such as the sustaining of Brigham Young when the First Presidency was reorganized for the first time after Joseph Smith's death.

*Courtesy of Kenneth Mays*

December 24, 1847—A general conference of the Church was commenced in a log Tabernacle erected by the Saints on the east side of the Missouri river (on the present site of Council Bluffs). It lasted four days. On the last day (Dec. 27th) Brigham Young was unanimously sustained as President of the Church, with Heber C. Kimball as his first and Willard Richards as his second Counselor.”<sup>26</sup>

The action recorded in the entry above made Brigham Young the President of the Church. Previous to this time he had been President of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles and in that capacity had already led the first group of Saints across the plains and into the Valley of the Great Salt Lake. He had returned to Winter Quarters to get his family.



26. Andrew Jenson, comp., *Church Chronology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1914), 35.

The crossing of the plains from Winter Quarters to Salt Lake was done with the greatest possible haste, and no permanent places of worship were erected along the way. However, the erection of a place of worship was a matter of primary importance once the group had entered the Valley of the Great Salt Lake and determined that their home would be in the valleys of the mountains.

