

Buildings on the Temple Block Preceding the Tabernacle

The First Bowery

The advance party of the Mormon pioneers entered the Valley of the Great Salt Lake on July 22, 1847, but the main body of the first company did not enter until July 24, 1847. One of the first acts on the part of Brigham Young was to select a site for a temple and tabernacle. By July 28, the site of the Temple Block had been selected, and society was sufficiently organized to hold a meeting, which is described as follows:

When the Pioneers gathered for the first time on the site where the great white stone Temple now stands they were addressed by Brigham Young, who reminded them that they had gathered in Utah according to the direction and counsel of Joseph Smith, the prophet and founder of the Latter-Day Saint faith. It was a solemn assemblage. Those who comprised it had just completed the most notable pilgrimage of modern times. . . . It was on the evening of

the 28th of July that this meeting was held. It is recorded that the hush that fell over the gathering was of the most solemn character, and that all spoke and acted as one man. . . . They had just voted upon the location and plan of the new city. . . . The Apostles were appointed a committee to lay [out] the city. A few days later the actual work of surveying was under way and in charge of Orson Pratt, one of the profoundest mathematicians of his generation, and Henry G. Sherwood. At this time the question arose as to whether 40 acres, the area first determined upon for the Temple Block, would not be too large. The matter was affirmatively decided and at a subsequent meeting, it was concluded to reduce it to ten acres, the present size and area of all the other regular sized blocks of the city.¹

On the twenty-ninth of July, a group of men who had been with the Mormon Battalion and then discharged in Santa Fe, New Mexico, entered the Salt Lake Valley. Within a few hours of their arrival, they were at the task of erecting a bowery on the southeast corner of the Temple Block.² Other members of the pioneer party joined in the efforts, and the Bowery was finished July 31, 1847.

The construction of the Bowery³ was later described by Mary Reynolds, who wrote:

On Saturday, July 31, [1847], a concerted movement was made, and a large bowery of brush and boughs was constructed on the Temple Block; this was the first structure in the nature of a habitation or place of shelter, erected for white men in the Valley, though it was only a light and temporary affair. On the following day [August 1] religious ser-



1. *Utah: The Inland Empire* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902), 56.
2. *Utah: The Inland Empire*, 56.
3. The term *bowery* is here used interchangeably with the term *tabernacle*. This will be found true in several subsequent entries.

vices were held therein, and on that day it was decided that the Pioneers, who had divided into two camps, should cooperate and labor unitedly together; that all horses, mules and cows should be tied near the camp at night, that the work of building cabins . . . should be undertaken without delay.⁴

The information contained in the above item is an interesting description of the building impulses of the Mormon community. They had just finished a long overland journey and settled in a forbidding area. Yet the first building that they constructed, built even prior to building cabins for their own shelter and comfort, was a place for holding religious services.

This bowery, which was so hastily erected, was to serve as the central meeting place for the Saints for two years and was the focal point of their religious and social life. A small stage was erected at one end, and served for the production of plays as well as for the Church rostrum.

The two years when the first Bowery was used were hard years for the Saints. The urgent necessity of providing adequate shelter, producing food supplies, and helping other Saints cross the plains kept them busy. The migration of Saints to their home in the mountains continued at a rapid pace, and the population of Salt Lake expanded. They came by railway and steamship to the nearest point and then continued migrating to Utah by covered wagon and ox team or by foot and handcart. The increased population of the Salt Lake area and the toll that wind and weather had taken on the Old Bowery forced its replacement in 1849.



4. Mary Reynolds, *Boweries on the Temple Block*, Church Archives, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, 36.

The Second Bowery

The replacement of the first Bowery was undertaken in the spring of 1849. There was little recorded concerning this action. However, it appears that the second Bowery was one hundred feet long and sixty feet wide and had one hundred posts in it.⁵ The roof was made of boughs with dirt piled on top.⁶ Author Howard Stansbury described it as “an immense shed . . . erected upon posts, . . . capable of containing three thousand persons.”⁷

The dirt roof gave better protection to the people than had the roof of boughs on the first Bowery. But the new Bowery was still open to the elements and was usable only in good weather. However inadequate it was, the second Bowery would serve the Saints as their central meeting place for approximately three years. In its confines they were to have religious experiences of unusual import and social occasion that relieved the pressure of pioneer living.

Given that the Mormons had built comfortable places of worship in the past, had erected two temples under difficult conditions, and had otherwise housed themselves comfortably, it is not to be expected that they would be satisfied with an open-air bowery for long. Thus, as soon as economic conditions permitted the construction of a suitable house of worship, the Mormons undertook the work. This building was to be the first permanent structure on the Temple Block.

The Old Tabernacle

The need for a permanent meeting place had long been felt by the Saints. The old boweries served adequately in good weather



5. Journal History, December 16, 1851.
6. Reynolds, *Boweries on the Temple Block*, 36.
7. Howard Stansbury, *Exploration and Survey of the Valley of the Great Salt Lake of Utah* (Washington DC: Robert Armstrong, 1853), 130.



Old Tabernacle, 1850s. Sometimes called the Adobe Tabernacle, it stood on the south end of Temple Square.

Courtesy of Church Archives

but were very restricted in their use; they did not meet the needs of the people living in Utah's climate. Furthermore, the population of the Salt Lake Valley had been increasing rapidly as the gathering of the Saints continued and accelerated.

Another factor that made the building of the Old Tabernacle desirable and possible was the improved economic conditions of the Mormons. When they entered the Valley of the Great Salt Lake, they were very poor. All of their possessions were brought in covered wagons pulled by oxen. Since much of the capacity of the wagons was taken up by food that was consumed on the way, it is evident that the Mormons' stock of worldly goods was small when they arrived in Utah. However, by 1851, their economic conditions were considerably improved. Not only had the Mormons benefited from their own productive labors, but the California gold rush brought material goods to Salt Lake City. Although very few Mormons participated in the rush to the gold fields, they all benefited indirectly. Salt Lake City was the major stopping point between the Mississippi and the West Coast, and many gold seekers, finding they had come too well equipped with clothing and too heavily laden with

tools, were most anxious to trade their extra possessions for the produce of the area. Salt Lake became a major outfitting center for the second stage of the journey to California, and the demand for oxen, horses, foodstuffs, and other supplies was tremendous. The Saints had worked diligently to improve the land, produce crops, and increase their livestock holdings; thus they benefited greatly from trade with the gold seekers.

The first positive action toward the construction of the Old Tabernacle was taken in the spring of 1851, when the people voted to build a new tabernacle. This action may have been taken at the April conference, but no official record of the vote was found in the papers of the time or in the Church records of 1851. The probability that the vote was taken in April, or prior, is substantiated by the *Journal History of the Church*: “May 18 [1851]. A meeting was held in the Council House of G. S. L. City for the purpose of getting up subscriptions for the building of a Tabernacle on the Temple Block. Subscription circulars were subsequently forwarded to the settlers in the valley and also to those in Utah and Tooele valley.”⁸ It is quite probable that the vote taken concerning the building of the Tabernacle contained the provision for the assessment of the Church membership, thus the sending of the subscription circulars as indicated in the previous entry.

The architect of the Old Tabernacle was Truman O. Angell. An interesting passage relating to his time and illustrating his nature is found in the introduction to his first journal, which is headed, “A Journal of my Time kept by my own hand, Truman O. Angell, commencing on Monday the 15 of December 1851.”⁹ The passage follows:



8. *Journal History*, May 18, 1851.
9. Minor changes have been made in spelling, punctuation, and grammar from the original manuscript.

Previous to this I have not kept a journal. Therefore I shall refer to some of the items such as occur to my mind of the past and then commence on the date above alluded to. At the time I first arrived in the valley of Great Salt Lake with my family, I resolved on having the counsel of the most high through President B Young. According, I went to him stating my determination and he put me to work inclosing his house he had bought at the arrival of his family, which was at the same time I arrived in this valley some 3 or 4 years ago. I paid strict attention to all his calls, went and came to his bidding. For this I rejoice. At length a plan was wanted for a counsel house. Brother Magor was called for or he presented a plan. Being asked how I liked it, I said it did not please me, considering the newness of the country and our material. After telling my reasons, the President asked me to make out a plan. I did so. My plan took and was adopted. This placed me then the architect of public works, which I have held from that time to the present. . . . Soon business increased. The President wished me to devote my time to making out designs and plans and see they were executed, saying I need not work further. This to some may seem easy, but I have always been since my manhood a hard working Carpenter and Joiner with my own hands, but it is a trifle to labour with one's own hands to the labour of the mind, while one tires the extremities the other wearies the man in his whole system.

The first mention the architect of the Old Tabernacle makes of his planning the building is found in the following passage from his journal. It is a continuation of the introduction, and, in addition to making mention of the Tabernacle, it gives an excellent picture of building activities in Salt Lake at the time:

Made the plan for Horace Eldrige house and it is in a prosperous finishing state and will soon be completed except

plastering. Made out plan O. M. Duel a house: It is in a forward state of completion except plastering. Plan for A Lyman: It is shingled and timbers in it for floors, the sash and doors are making. Shingled one for P P Pratt after placing in the timbers: This we have to finish as soon as we have spare men from other jobs. Made out a plan for a tabernacle and tried the strength of the bents or truss by model: Found it uncommon strong good to bear 8 or 10 tons besides the weight of roofing. This building is progressing smartly, . . . We [were] going to write all the items, as they have to occur, would make it tedious. All these jobs a doing—I give directions where and how to do and have my eyes around . . . like the care of a kind father over his household. . . . All the jobs on the public works with obvert few exceptions planned and directed by me. This calls me to dog around more than many might think. If one thing is forgotten, when I think of it away I run and have it righted. Sometimes I feel as though I could not see my room to pursue the plan of the trestle board more than two hours in a day, some days less than that. Seems all my health will stand. I find my spirit more willing than my body strong.¹⁰

The item quoted above was written when the Tabernacle was in an advanced state of construction. Therefore, to follow its progress, other references will be used.

On Wednesday, May 21, 1851, the work on the Old Tabernacle was commenced.¹¹ The work at that time, however, must have been restricted to surveying and clearing the site, for on June 4,



10. Truman O. Angell Journal, microfilm, Church Archives, Salt Lake City, December 15, 1851.
11. Andrew Jenson, ed., *Historical Record: Church Encyclopedia* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1889), 6:305.

1851, Thomas Bullock wrote, “Plowing for the excavation of the New Tabernacle, In G. S. L. City was commenced.”¹²

The original intention was to complete the Tabernacle in the short space of five months. Illustrating this, the *Deseret News* published the following on July 26, 1851: “Donors to the Tabernacle, whose subscriptions are due, and some have been due since the first of June, are requested to forward the same to the trustee, or the tithing office, without delay. The building is hindered for want of funds, and unless special exertion is made, and the friends are punctual from this time forward, the building cannot be completed for September conference.”¹³

In addition to securing monetary contributions, some of the labor on the Tabernacle was also donated. This is indicated in the following excerpt from an article published by the *Deseret News*: “The hands [of the public works office], at work for nothing and boarding themselves.”¹⁴

This contribution of both money and labor by the Mormons is indicative of the cooperative spirit displayed in most of their ventures. While the labor was contributed, much of it was credited as “tithing labor,” for which the individual’s tithing account was credited rather than making payment. Others received Tithing Office orders, which were redeemable at the Tithing Office and could be used to purchase goods at that office.

Despite the high hopes for an early completion of the Tabernacle, progress was slow. On August 2, 1851, “a general turnout for removing the dirt for the foundation of the new Tabernacle took place.”¹⁵ It



12. Journal History, June 4, 1851.

13. An error—conference was held in October. *Deseret News*, July 26, 1851.

14. *Deseret News*, June 12, 1851.

15. Journal History, August 2, 1851.



Grow notes, “Wherever they were cracked the timbers were wrapped with green rawhide, which contracted when dry and made a tight binding. This rawhide is still steel tight” (original thesis, 74). The builders used leather strips to strengthen timbers without adding excess weight.

Courtesy of Richard Crookston

appears, therefore, that it took approximately two and a half months to complete the foundation for the Old Tabernacle.

On Monday, September 22, the First Presidency of the Church issued the Sixth General Epistle of the First Presidency. This, like similar epistles, was a general newsletter covering Church activities throughout the world and circulated widely. Outlining the progress made in building in Salt Lake, it contained the following: “The Council House is completed. The Tithing Store House is in progress of finishing, and will be ready to be occupied the coming winter, for the several purposes designed, instead of a joiner’s shop as hitherto. The foundation of a Tabernacle, on Temple Block, one hundred and twenty-six by sixty-four feet, is nearly completed, and we expect this building will be completed this Fall.”¹⁶

Neither the hope expressed in the *Deseret News* that the Tabernacle would be completed by September, nor that of the First Presidency that it would be finished “this fall,” were realized. Perhaps the



16. Journal History, September 22, 1851.

delay was due to the tardiness of the subscriptions, or inclement weather may have slowed the construction. The original schedule set for its completion in six months called for a yeoman's effort, even by modern standards of construction. Whatever the reasons for the delay, by October hope for completion of the Tabernacle in 1851 had been abandoned. Excerpts from the minutes of the October conference of 1851 show that the conference convened in the Bowery, and after several sessions, "the conference was adjourned to April 6, 1852, to meet in the new Tabernacle."¹⁷ The length of time allotted for completion of the Tabernacle was thereby doubled.

For the remainder of 1851, the progress of the work on the Tabernacle can best be followed by excerpts taken from various personal journals and the *Deseret News*. The frequency with which the construction of the Tabernacle was mentioned in the records of the day indicated the great need for it and the extent of popular interest in its completion.

Thomas Bullock noted the following items in his journal: "Wednesday, November 19 [1851]. . . . Some of the brethren were busy tackling pole and pullies to erect the frame work of the New Tabernacle."¹⁸ "Monday, November 24. Pres. Brigham Young went down to the Tabernacle, in G. S. L. City, giving the workmen instructions."¹⁹

On the twenty-fourth of November 1851, the erection of the skeleton for the roof was started, and the first bent was raised into place. This may have been the occasion for President Young's visit to the Tabernacle as recorded by Bullock. On Tuesday, November 25, the second bent of the Tabernacle was raised, and on Friday,



17. Journal History, October 6, 1851.

18. Journal History, November 19, 1851.

19. Journal History, November 24, 1851.

November 28, the fourth bent of the Tabernacle was raised and the workmen began laying adobe bricks on the north wall.²⁰

The *Deseret News* had the following items in its issue of December 13, 1851: “The timbers of the Tabernacle are erected, excepting two bents, and if the pleasant weather lasts a week or two longer we hope the building will be enclosed.”²¹ The Journal History of the Church has the most complete story of the building’s progress:

Saturday, November 29. . . . The fifth bent of the Tabernacle was raised this morning.

Monday, December 1. Another bent was raised on the Tabernacle in G. S. L. City.

Tuesday, December 2. The 7th bent of the Tabernacle went up this morning in G. S. L. City.

Wednesday, December 3. . . . The 8th bent of the Tabernacle in G. S. L. City went up, and the ribs were being put on. The workmen commenced rolling the dirt off the old Bowery, previous to pulling it down.

Thursday, December 4. The 9th bent of the Tabernacle in G. S. L. City was raised.

Friday, December 5. The 10th bent of the Tabernacle in G. S. L. City was raised.

Saturday, December 6. The brethren in G. S. L. City were busy laying adobies on the north wall of the Tabernacle and pulling down the timbers of the Bowery.

Monday, December 8. The workman in G. S. L. City pulled down the last of the bents on the Bowery and were very busy building the east wall of the Tabernacle and fixing ribs for the roof boards.

Friday, December 12. The 11th or last bent of the Tabernacle in G. S. L. City was hoisted about noon. In



20. Journal History, November 24, 25, 28, 1851.

21. *Deseret News*, December 13, 1851.

the afternoon they hoisted the flag on the pole in the centre of the roof as a signal that the timbers were up.

Tuesday, December 16. The brethren in G. S. L. City put the sheeting on the new Tabernacle, which was 120 feet long and 60 feet wide. While the old one (the Bowery) was 100 feet long and 60 feet wide, and had 100 posts in it, the new building had not a single post, but had a clear auditorium and was much more convenient than the Bowery.

Wednesday, December 17. The south window frames of the Tabernacle in G. S. L. City were raised; the adobies were being laid and the sheeting was more than half on the roof; the north wall was completed.

Thursday, December 18, 1851. The south wall of the Tabernacle in G. S. L. City was going up rapidly.²²

The winter weather of December did not halt the construction, but the snow was cleared from the building and work pushed on. Illustrating this, Truman O. Angell recorded in his journal on December 22, 1851, that he “started some men on P P Pratt’s house. Had cleared the snow from Tabernacle.”²³ Mr. Bullock gives more information on the weather with his entry: “Tuesday, December 23. This was a dull, cloudy day in G. S. L. City. After the thaw the snow had pretty well disappeared in the mountains; the ground was muddy. The brethren commenced shingling the east side of the Tabernacle. They also finished laying adobies on the south side about 11 a.m.”²⁴

The work on the Tabernacle was slowed by the holiday season of 1851, and the next significant entry concerning it is in the journal of Truman O. Angell. This entry of January 7, 1852, concerns



22. Journal History, November 29, December 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 12, 16, 17, 18, 1851.

23. Angell Journal, December 22, 1851.

24. Journal History, December 23, 1851.

the building of the Tabernacle, but it also gives a clear picture of the construction activities of the time:

Attended many things, . . . met in the evening the President B Young, his two counselors Kimball & Richards, Foreman Miles Romney, N Jacobs, A. H. Rolly, and others. The President then asked what jobs were on hand not finished that we expected to have to finish this present season 1852. I reported as follows

The Tabernacle to be finished if possible for April Conference

Eldridge house to be plastered. The joiners' work is nearly complete

Bensons' house doors and windows to be made & to be put in

O M Duels' house to be finished

P. P. Pratt to be finished also

A Limon's House to be finished

T Johnson's [house] to have a hearth

E D Wolly's house to be finished

Machine shop to be completed

B Young barn to be finished

Edmond Ellsworth house to be built

Office wants secretaries

B. Young a new Office built

Church Tithing barn to be finished

Barn on the church farm to be finished & another one built

A Storehouse to be built leaving 10 feet space between it and the North end of the old storehouse

State House to be built at Pauvan Valley—the hands to be sent from here and the stone to be cut at Sanpete

10 joiners and 4 masons and common hands and teams too, & a wall to be built all around the Temple Square 5

feet high, 2½ in the earth, and 3 feet thick at the top, a cut cap to start the adobe wall on

If it is possible build a house for the historian and one for the President B. Young

A baptismal font to be built in the spring.²⁵

The list of construction jobs contained in Mr. Angell's journal entry indicates that the society in the Valley of the Great Salt Lake had become pretty well established and that although the Mormons had been in the area less than four and one-half years they had achieved an advanced state of settlement and culture.

The continued progress of the building of the Tabernacle is indicated by the following entries in the architect's journal:

[January 28, 1852.] Attended to many items regulating bills for tabernacle &c. &c. &c.

[January] 29, 30, 31. Devoted my time in arranging matters for the finish of Tabernacle.

[February] 2. Gave the foreman instructions on many items. After that attended studies in arranging the stand &c.

[February] 3 and 4. Arranged the details of the stand on trestle board. Took minutes for a plan of P. B. Young house &c. &c.²⁶

The best description of the state of completion of the Tabernacle at this time is in the *Deseret News* of February 21, 1852: "Tabernacle—February 12th, the Tabernacle is enclosed; near two thirds lathed, and one-third plastered; and should the weather remain warm, there is a good prospect of its completion against April Conference."²⁷



25. Angell Journal, January 7, 1852. The "State House to be built at Pauvan Valley" mentioned by Angell was the Territorial Statehouse built in Fillmore.

26. Angell Journal, January 28, 29, 30, 31, February 2, 3 and 4, 1852.

27. "Tabernacle," *Deseret News*, February 21, 1852.



Since metal nails were a rare and expensive commodity in the newly settled Great Basin, the Saints often used other means of binding timbers, such as the wooden pegs visible in this photo.

Courtesy of Richard Crookston

No further record of the progress of the building is found until the following interesting entry in the Journal History of the Church:

Wednesday, March 17. Pleasant day in G. S. L. City, spring weather. Thos. Bullock in office all day, except when Pres. B. Young took him and Daniel H. Wells in his carriage to ride out for the benefit of his health in the afternoon. Went to several places to get nails for the tabernacle. The brethren very busy laying down the floor and commenced fixing the seats and pulpit. Heber C. Kimball accompanied the president. . . . President Brigham Young received seven pounds of nails from A. Farnham for the use of the Tabernacle.²⁸



28. Journal History, March 17, 1852.

The fact that President Brigham Young made personal calls to secure nails is indicative of the interest he took in building the Tabernacle. It also emphasizes that nails were very scarce then in Utah. Most of them were handmade from old wagon tires or other scrap iron. Some were imported from the States, but the cost of importation of such a heavy item as nails was almost prohibitive. The gift from Mr. Farnham, therefore, represented a generous donation and is indicative of the manner in which much of the material for the Tabernacle was secured.

By March 24, Mr. Angell was well enough pleased with the progress of the work to note in his journal, "I have the bowery [Tabernacle] almost complete for meeting and the Presidents' Office is in progress."²⁹

Apparently the Tabernacle was completed on schedule but under considerable pressure. Mr. Angell made no further entries in his journal until April 5, the day previous to the opening of April conference, when he wrote:

This morning having a few moments leisure I set down to bring up my Journal. Since the last date my time has been employed in preparing the new bowery for conference and seeing many out jobs, &c., and in the meantime I have made out a plan for a social hall and having out the bills for the same.

Here I feel to say I never saw a station as responsible as the architect calling has to be so trampled on. He is not known among the common people. This makes him much trouble. After he has watched over his plans and seen them carried out, the committee that can't do it has all the credit for it and this kills the spirits of a man or hurts me more than all the mobbing I ever had to pass through



29. Angell Journal, March 24, 1852.

in my life. If I am foolish I don't know how to help it but I hope the Lord of hosts will strengthen me for the task but there has not been any time of my life so filled with trial. I think the architect should be sustained in conferences that he may feel their blessing. Here I cease praying, God will have the say.³⁰

Thus, the first tabernacle built by the Mormons in the newly settled area was completed and ready for dedication.

The dedicatory conference convened April 6, 1852, and adjourned April 11, 1852. The following brief minutes of the conference are copied from the *Millennial Star*:

Conference was called to order by the President, who stated, that, at the last Conference, we adjourned to meet in a new Tabernacle on the Temple Block; and we will now proceed to dedicate this hall, and take up the business of the Conference, as the spirit shall manifest it to us. He then read the 201st hymn, "Lord in the morning thou shalt hear," which was sung by the choir, under the direction of James Smithies, Chorister.

President Richards offered the . . . dedication prayer. . . .

President Young read the hymn, "The morning breaks, the shadows flee," which was sung by the choir, concluding with "Hosanna in the highest," like a choir of heavenly angels.

A hymn composed for the occasion, by W. W. Phelps, was sung by John Kay, accompanied by instruments: "In Deseret We're Free." . . .

President Young addressed the congregation in a most animating speech, after which the choir sung, "Ere long the mount of God in latter days shall rise."



30. Angell Journal, April 5, 1852.

Benediction by Patriarch John Smith.³¹

The general conference was continued in Salt Lake City. Following are the minutes:

When the doors of the Tabernacle were thrown open at 9 a.m., the people rushed in as if the flood-gates of a mighty reservoir had given way, and in a very few minutes all the seats were occupied. . . . The eight door-keepers used every exertion to seat the dense throng of anxious souls, so as to give room for all, but it was impossible; all the alleys were crowded by men standing, and many could not even be admitted at all. Several pieces of music enlivened the vast audience with their sweet strains of heavenly harmony until the President arrived, when the congregation was called to order by President Kimball. . . .

President Young remarked that this was the best hall on one floor he had ever seen in his life, as there were 2500 persons present this morning, and every one can see the face of the speaker. President Young continued to address the assembly, followed by G. A. Smith, and W. W. Phelps. Singing. Benediction by Pres. Young. . . .

[April 9th. 6 p.m. session.] The Elders and brethren assembled in the Tabernacle, which was completely crowded. After the usual introductory exercises, President Young preached several sermons on various subjects, the Holy Ghost resting on him in great power, while he revealed some of the precious things of the kingdom.³²

Some very interesting additional sidelights are thrown on the conference and the times by the account of the conference given by Brigham Young:



31. "Minutes of the General Conference," *Millennial Star*, July 24, 1852, 339.

32. "Minutes of the General Conference," *Millennial Star*, July 21, 1852, 353–56.

The thirty-second annual conference of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints commenced at the new tabernacle, south west corner of the temple block, G. S. L. City, on the 6th. Pres. Willard Richards offered up the opening prayer in which the tabernacle was dedicated to the Lord. I addressed the conference and was followed by Elders Orson Pratt and Orson Spencer. On the 7th, the tabernacle was crowded and although all the aisles were filled, many could not gain admittance. The authorities of the church were unanimously sustained, except Benjamin L. Clapp, of the Seventies, whose case was laid over.

I observed that this was one of the best halls on one floor, I had ever seen in my life, and there were about twenty-five hundred persons present, and every one could see the face of the speaker. Elder Geo. A. Smith, Wm. W. Phelps and I preached.

I laid before the conference the amount of tithing received and disbursed; the items of which were read over by William Clayton. . . .

On the 8th Chancellor Spencer delivered an address on education and was followed by Associate Justice Zerubabel Snow, Elder Wm. W. Phelps, and myself. Pres. Heber C. Kimball pleaded in behalf of the saints who were coming over the plains, . . . when ninety three persons volunteered to go out with their teams to carry provisions and render those on the road assistance.

I followed on the same subject when those who had volunteered to go voted to donate their services. . . .

On the 10th the brethren commenced assembling outside the Tabernacle by 7 a.m. When the doors were opened at nine, the house was crowded in a few minutes. . . . Elders Daniel H. Wells, Wm. I. Appleby, Geo. D. Watt, Wm. Clayton, and Pres. Heber C. Kimball occupied the afternoon. In the evening Elders Geo. A. Smith, Seth M.



Over the years, the wooden pegs and leather strips in the Great Tabernacle have been combined with metal bolts and reinforcers to further buttress the architecture.

Courtesy of Richard Crookston

Blair, Richard Cook, Edward Hunter and David Fullmer preached to the Elders who covenanted they would not have another law suit with each other.

On the 11th . . . Truman O. Angell was sustained as the architect of public works. . . . In the afternoon, assisted by Presidents Kimball and Richards and Bishop Hunter, I administered the Sacrament, during which many persons bore testimony to the truth, spake in tongues and prophesied; a collection was taken up to buy a Sacramental service for the Tabernacle.

I appointed meetings for the Saints at two p.m. on Thursdays, and at ten a.m. on the first Thursday of each month for the purpose of fasting and prayers, and asked the Saints to observe that day.

Appropriate hymns were composed for the conference by Elder Wm. W. Phelps and Miss Eliza R. Snow.

Elder John Barker was appointed to a mission to England. After some announcements were made and benediction

offered by Elder Orson Pratt, and Saints shouted “Hosana to God and the Lamb, Amen and Amen,” thrice.

I then blessed the Saints in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth and by virtue of the Holy Priesthood, in their health, in their families, their flocks, herds, houses, farms and all that pertained to them from henceforth and for ever.³³

The dedication of this Tabernacle was a happy day for the Mormon pioneers of Utah. They now had a building in which they could meet both summer and winter and where the elements would not disturb their services.

The completion of the Old Tabernacle in Salt Lake City brings out a fundamental difference in the method of operation of the two great Mormon leaders of early days, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young. During the leadership of Joseph Smith, the first object, wherever the Saints settled, was to construct a temple. This was true in Kirtland, Far West, and Nauvoo. In none of these places were there adequate meeting facilities for the Saints. However, under the leadership of Brigham Young, the Mormons built a substantial place for their regular worship before even dedicating the cornerstones of their temple.

Truman O. Angell made an interesting comment in his diary following his being sustained as an architect of public works: “Monday, April 12th, 1852. To my joy & satisfaction my place has been set apart by the president of the church as also by the conference and all I now have to say is I pray that the God of our fathers Abraham, Isaac & Jacob will give me strength to my calling & my joy will be full. I have been attending the conference since the 5th and the Lord was with the brethren to their joy.”³⁴



33. Journal History, April 16, 1852.

34. Angell Journal, April 12, 1852.

The comment of Brigham Young on the collection for the sacramental service is augmented by the following:

The collection for the Sacramental service resulted in \$149 in silver coin, and several pounds of watch cases, spoons, rings and other silver ornaments. At the close of the meeting, during which much important business was done, the Saints shouted, “Hosanna to God and the Lamb, amen and amen!” three times. . . . What became of some of the silver contributed may be seen by the subjoined bill of Sacramental cups, the same that are now in use at the Tabernacle: 12 cups, viz., with each weight: 1 cup, 12.5 oz; 1 cup, 13.6 oz; 1 cup, 12.15 oz; 1 cup, 13.5 oz; 1 cup, 12.6 oz; 1 cup, 12.8 oz; 1 cup, 12.10 oz; 1 cup, 13.5 oz; 1 cup, 13.9 oz; 1 cup, 12.18 oz; 1 cup, 12.7 oz; total, 153 oz, 19 pwt.

“Received of I. M. Barlow, twelve cups delivered, of the above weight, manufactured at his shop.

[signed] EDWARD HUNTER
Great Salt Lake City,
July 16, 1853.”³⁵

The sacramental service referred to above was in use in both the Old and New Tabernacles for many years.

The Old Tabernacle Bowery

The reports at the time of the dedication of the Old Tabernacle indicate that the building was too small even before it was completed. It is to be expected that at such an occasion as the dedication of the Tabernacle, a huge crowd would be on hand. However, the same overcrowded condition continued to exist in the regular meetings of the time. The gathering of the Saints was



35. “Chronicles of Utah,” *Contributor*, August, 1881; brackets in original.

progressing rapidly with a consequent increase in the number of Mormons in the area served by the Old Tabernacle. Frequent references were found in the papers of the time showing the inadequacy of the Old Tabernacle.

By the spring of 1854, the crowds were so large that the meetings had to be held outside. Brigham Young records on April 8, 1854: "I preached on the subject of consecration and tithing. The Tabernacle not being large enough to accommodate those who congregated in the afternoon, I invited the congregation to the north side of the Tabernacle, where seats had been prepared for about 7000; the seats and alleys were soon filled."³⁶

The Eleventh General Epistle from the First Presidency included the following:

As will be perceived by the accompanying minutes, the annual conference, after a four days' session, adjourned on Sunday evening, the 9th instant, to meet again on the 27th day of June next, although at the commencement the weather was rather cold and stormy, yet the large and commodious Tabernacle was not capacious enough to contain all of the congregation.

On Saturday afternoon and Sunday they became so numerous, and the weather becoming milder, the meeting convened on the outside, within the wall of the Temple block, immediately on the north end of the Tabernacle.³⁷

The outdoor meetings, once again started at this time, were so successful and the need for additional seating space so acute that it was determined a bowery should be erected over the outdoor space already in use. The first mention of it is found in the Journal History of the Church: "July 26 [1854] Pres. Brigham



36. Journal History, April 8, 1854.

37. First Presidency, "Eleventh General Epistle," *Deseret News*, April 13, 1854.

Young, Heber C. Kimball and Geo. A. Smith went to the Temple Block, G. S. L. City and measured 154 x 138 feet of ground for a new Tabernacle.”³⁸

In the above item, the word *tabernacle* is again used interchangeably with the term *bowery*. That the above measurements were taken for the Bowery is indicated by the fact that the Bowery when completed was 156 by 138 feet. There is no evidence to show that a tabernacle of the size mentioned was ever planned.

The work on the Bowery got under way quickly, and on August 15, 1854, the First Presidency issued the following in the *Deseret News*:

The Bowery.

Bill of Lumber for the Bowery at the
North end of the Tabernacle:

190 scantlings	14 feet long,	5 by 5 inches square.
18 poles	18 "	6 inches thro' at top.
14 "	15 "	6 du
265 plank	13 "	1½ by 8 inches.
150 posts	4 "	3 by 3 inches
470 eave and ridge plank	11½ feet long,	1½ by 8 in.
24000 feet of inch boards,	14 feet long.	
12000 "	half inch boards,	14 feet long and 4 in. wide.

The Bill of Lumber for seating the Bowery will be given in due time.

T. O. ANGELL, Architect.

The Bishops of the different wards in this city, and within a reasonable distance thereof, and all other Bishops who feel disposed to aid in erecting the above named Bowery, are now called upon to assist in filling the above Bill for Lumber, and material, as speedily as consistent with other more pressing duties, that the Bowery may



38. Journal History, July 26, 1854.



The Old (Adobe) Tabernacle (left) and the Third Bowery (right) on Temple Square, c. 1861–64. Before large enclosures were built that could hold all the Saints, they constructed large canopies of tree limbs called “boweries.” Various boweries were built and relocated in different spots on Temple Square over the decades. While they provided temporary shelter, they still made it difficult for large crowds to hear the speaker, hence necessitating the more permanent tabernacle buildings.

Courtesy of Church Archives

be finished in time for the Conference this fall; or at the latest, in season for the next spring’s Conference. All who assist shall be credited on their labor Tithing.

BRIGHAM YOUNG,
HEBER C. KIMBALL,
JEDEDIAH M. GRANT,
First Presidency.

Great Salt Lake City, Aug. 15th, 1854.³⁹

The building of the Bowery on the north end of the Old Tabernacle proved of great benefit and, at least during the warm weather, provided adequate space for meetings. An excerpt from a speech by Elder George A. Smith given at the Bowery on August 12, 1855, is indicative: “We on the present occasion have the pleasure of sitting out of doors and of listening to the counsel and instruction of the servants of God without being crowded, from the fact that we



39. First Presidency, “The Bowery,” *Deseret News*, August 17, 1854.

have father's big kitchen to meet in, and in this capacious Bowery we can enjoy a great deal of comfort instead of being jammed into our large Tabernacle, those of us who could get in, and the balance being obliged to go home."⁴⁰

Although the Old Tabernacle was too small and the Bowery was usable only in good weather, they were the scenes of some of the most dramatic moments in Mormon history.

In the Old Tabernacle, the first public avowal of plural marriage was made in 1852. Although many of the Church members had been practicing polygamy for years with Church sanction, the doctrine of plural marriage had never been publicly preached. Elder Orson F. Whitney records the event as follows:

It was during a special conference of the Church, held at Salt Lake City on the 28th and 29th of August, [1852,] that the public avowal of plural marriage was made. The conference convened in the building which afterwards became known as the "Old Tabernacle," though it was then quite new, having been completed for dedication on the 8th of the preceding April. It stood upon the south-west corner of Temple Block, on the site now occupied by the handsome and stately Assembly Hall. It was built chiefly of adobes. Its dimensions were 126 by 64 feet, the interior being arched without a pillar. It was capable of seating between two and three thousand people. The "Old Bowery" was now no more, having been unroofed and taken apart and much of its material used in constructing the new place of worship.

There on the 29th of August, 1852, the revelation on Celestial Marriage, first recorded from the lips of the Prophet Joseph Smith on July 12th, 1843, was read to the assembled Saints and sustained by the uplifted hands of the large con-



40. John V. Long, "Remarks by Elder George A. Smith, Bowery, G. S. L. City, Sunday Morning, August 12 1855," *Deseret News*, August 29, 1855.

gregation as a doctrine of their faith and a revelation from the Almighty. The same day Apostle Orson Pratt preached to the conference at the first authorized public discourse on the subject of plural marriage. Thousands of copies of the revelation were published and circulated throughout the Union and carried by missionaries to various parts of the world. One of these is preserved in the Deseret Museum.⁴¹

This practice and preaching of polygamy would bring to the Mormons some of their severest trials and would become one of the major identifying marks of the Mormon religion to most persons who had heard only a little about it.

It was in the Tabernacle, too, that the ceremony for the dedication of the cornerstones of the Salt Lake Temple was begun. This significant event occurred April 6, 1853. The temple was not completed for nearly forty years thereafter. It was reported that the throng on the Temple Block was so great on that day of dedication that the ingress and egress of twenty-five hundred persons at the Tabernacle was scarcely noticed by the multitude without. After a brief ceremony in the Tabernacle,

the procession [to the temple site] then formed at the vestry door in the following order:

- 1st. Martial music, Colors,
- 2nd. Nauvoo Brass Band,
- 3rd. Ballo's Band,
- 4th. Capt. Pettegrew, with relief guards.
- 5th. Singers.
- 6th. First President and Counsellors, and aged Patriarch.
- 7th. The Twelve Apostles, First Presidency of the Seventies, and President and Counsellors of the Elder's quorum.



41. Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah* (Salt Lake City: Cannon and Sons, 1892), 1:493.

8th. President of the High Priests' quorum and Counsellors, in connection with the President of the Stake, and the High Council.

9th. Presiding Bishop with his Council, and the Presidents of the lesser Priesthood and their Council.

10th. Architects and workmen selected for the day, with banner, representing "*Zions Workmen.*"

11th. Capt. Merrill with relief guard in uniform.

The procession then marched through the line of guards to the south east corner of the Temple ground, the singers taking their positions in the centre, the Nauvoo Brass Band on the east bank, Capt. Ballo's Band on the west bank, and the Martial Band on the mound-south west. Capts. Pettegrew, Hardy, and Merrill, with their commands, occupying the front of the bank (which was sixteen feet deep,) and moving from corner to corner with the laying of the several stones prevented an undue rush of the people which might, by an excavation, have endangered the lives of many, when Presidents Young, Kimball, and Richards, with Patriarch John Smith, proceeded to lay the south east Corner Stone.⁴²

After the dedicatory prayer, President Young delivered an oration. The procedure was followed at each of the other cornerstones, with other officials participating and the choir providing suitable music for each service. At the conclusion, "Prest. Young then ascended the North East Corner Stone, and gave his benediction as follows: Brethren and sisters, I bless you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, and pray my Father in Heaven to encircle you in the arms of his love and mercy; protect us until we have finished this



42. "Minutes of the General Conference," *Deseret News*, April 16, 1853. "Ballo's Band" mentioned in the citation was a local performing group organized by Sicilian-born convert Domenico Ballo.

Temple; receive the fulness of our endowments therein, and then build many more; and I pray, also, that we may live to see the great Temple in Jackson County, Missouri. You are now dismissed with the blessings of the Lord Jesus Christ upon your heads; Amen.”⁴³ The procession then returned to the Tabernacle.

At that same conference there was exhibited “the Block of Stone designed by the Deseret Legislature for the Washington Monument. . . . The device is a Beehive in full operation, in the centre encircled by the convolvulus [a plant related to the morning glory] &c., with the inscription ‘Holiness to the Lord. Deseret.’”⁴⁴ The stone may still be seen in the interior of the Washington Monument if one will take the time to use the stairs rather than riding the elevator.

Many other significant events took place during the more than seventeen years that the Old Tabernacle served as the central meeting place of the Saints. In spite of the many memories it carried with it, the Mormons needed larger quarters, and the Old Tabernacle was replaced in 1867 with the Great Mormon Tabernacle.



43. Journal History, April 6, 1853.

44. First Presidency, “Ninth General Epistle,” *Deseret News*, April 13, 1853.