



Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

Joseph F. Smith's presidency of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1845–18) produced a veritable explosion of Latter-day Saint buildings. His presidency was pivotal in the change from a pioneering, colonizing, gathering concept of Zion to a larger view allowing for the expansion to a worldwide Church. Church priorities are evident in buildings constructed during his presidency. These buildings completed Joseph Smith's plan for the City of Zion—as constructed in Nauvoo, Illinois, and extended the plan with additional structures. Temples expanded the “official” boundaries of Zion—in a major way. Period schools and meetinghouses show Church efforts to provide education at all levels after Utah education was secularized and no longer centered in ward schools. Basic design changes in temples and a redefinition of ward meetinghouses are fundamental to current Church buildings. A new system of Church aid to local building projects continued for the next seven decades. Finally, Church leaders and architects searching for a “Mormon style” of architecture raise questions about what style is appropriate for Church structures.

W. Ray Luce is an adjunct professor in the Heritage Preservation program at Georgia State University. He previously headed the State Historic Preservation Offices in Ohio and Georgia.

Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

The magnitude of the new construction is impressive. Two temples—the first two since Brigham Young, and the first outside Utah—were started in Cardston, Alberta, Canada, and in Laie, Hawaii. A major expansion took place in tabernacles, with the construction of thirty-four new buildings—almost 40 percent of all the tabernacles identified by Richard Jackson.¹ An even greater explosion of meetinghouse construction also took place. A 1915 report noted that building projects had been undertaken in 58 percent of the wards in the Church.² Not all of these projects were for new structures; some involved new furnaces or other major improvements, but both the breadth of the projects and the number of new buildings during this seventeen-year period is remarkable. The magnitude of the buildings can be seen by noting that in Provo, projects (almost all new buildings) were built in the Provo First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, and Sixth Wards—all the numbered wards. Similarly, in Ogden projects—mostly new buildings—were done in the Ogden First, Second, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Sixth, Seventh, Eighth, Ninth, Tenth, Eleventh, and Twelfth Wards. Similar projects also took place in smaller communities. New buildings or remodels were done in the American Fork First, Second, Third, and Fourth Wards; the Brigham City First, Second, Third, and Fourth Wards; and the Oakley Idaho First, Second, Third, and Fourth Wards. Salt Lake City is more difficult to evaluate because of numbered wards in individual stakes, but many wards had projects during this period, including the Twenty-First, Twenty-Second, Twenty-Third, Twenty-Fourth, Twenty-Fifth, Twenty-Sixth, Twenty-Seventh, Twenty-Eighth, Twenty-Ninth, Thirtieth, Thirty-First, and Thirty-Third Wards.³ One of the most dramatic moments in this building boom was the dedication of new buildings for all three Heber wards on the same day—December 26, 1915—with dedications by Apostles Joseph F. Smith Jr., Francis W. Lyman, and George F. Richards.⁴

Major Salt Lake buildings constructed during this period included the Hotel Utah, the Bishop's Building, the Deseret News Building, the Deseret Gymnasium, LDS Hospital, a new campus for LDS University, the Temple Square Bureau of Information, and the first seminary building.

The First Presidency of the Church included these accomplishments in their 1913 Christmas message: "More Church edifices have been erected and such property acquired than ever before in our history."⁵

This impressive building spurt reflected both pent-up demand and increased Church financial resources. New buildings were greatly needed. The

JOSEPH F. SMITH: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

Church had grown—the number of stakes, for example, more than doubled between statehood in 1896 and the end of Smith’s presidency in 1918. Most Latter-day Saint meetinghouses existing in 1901 were single room multipurpose buildings. Expanding Church programs in Sunday School, Primary, Mutual, weekday religion classes, priesthood quorums, and Relief Societies—when they did not have their own buildings—needed additional space and classrooms to effectively carry out their programs.

Two additional factors increased the need for additional ward structures. Conflicts between the United States government and the Church over polygamy culminated in the Federal Edmunds-Tucker Act of 1887, disincorporating the Church and confiscating its property. The struggle finally ended with Utah statehood in 1896 following the 1890 Manifesto ending plural marriage. The aftermath of the prolonged dispute was deep and long lasting. The Church was deeply in debt and its members out of the habit of paying tithing. The Church thus faced a growing membership with limited structures because of the conflict with Washington.

Finally, meetinghouses needed to be constructed to replace ward buildings in numerous communities now operating as school buildings owned by local governments. Local congregations or wards met, in all but the most urban areas, in one-room multipurpose buildings which served as schools as well as churches. These multipurpose buildings lost the ability to serve both functions when, as part of agreements for Utah statehood, free public schools replaced Church ward schools.⁶ Following the 1890 Free School Act in Utah, “many of these meetinghouses passed into the hands of the city and county governments.”⁷ Local wards now had to build meetinghouses or rent buildings they no longer owned. Continued use of these former structures became increasingly difficult. The Jameston Idaho Ward said they met “under many difficulties.”⁸ The Fredonia Arizona Ward could not hold Primary because there was no place in the schoolhouse to meet.⁹ The Granite Ward in Salt Lake County noted that part of the ward was outside the school district and “some ‘outsiders’ are making strong objections” to Church use of the school.¹⁰ The Garden Creek and Holden Wards reported that they could no longer use their former buildings because they had been partitioned for a graded school, making them useless for general meetings.¹¹

Similar needs existed for other buildings. During the Latter-day Saint building construction hiatus, Salt Lake City had grown and developed into a major city—perhaps not yet the “crossroads of the West,” but a thriving regional

Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

center. However, Church buildings did not reflect those changes. The Church's President's Office was still housed in the small buildings Brigham Young constructed between his two residences, the Beehive and Lion Houses. Church financial operations were still housed in the Tithing Office, a complex constructed to deal with farm produce given as tithing in kind, when the economy was now largely cash based.

Utah statehood was granted in 1896, five years before Smith became Church President, symbolically marking the end to a long period of conflict. This not only removed many impediments to building, but allowed the Church to receive needed funding. Church President Wilford Woodruff completed the Salt Lake Temple after forty years of construction, and his successor, Lorenzo Snow, placed additional stress on paying tithing, both of which helped provide needed Church funds. By 1897, the effects of the Panic of 1893 were lessening and greater prosperity was returning. This combination of forces meant that needed funding was or would soon be available. Finally, building materials and expertise were increasingly available. The completion of the transcontinental railroad in 1869 made eastern building materials available at a fraction of the cost of transporting them cross-country by ox cart. Architects and contractors were also increasingly available. In 1888, only six architects were listed in the Utah territorial directory. The number of architects in the state directory increased almost tenfold during the next thirty years—increasing to fifty-seven in 1918.¹² Increased funding and available workforce were soon at work to meet the building backlog.

Buildings constructed during Joseph F. Smith's presidency show basic changes that facilitated the Church's change from a gathered Zion concept to a worldwide Zion with members living successfully in a secular world. The gathering concept envisioned a supportive community as the ideal for individual growth. Such a community would provide educational, social, and spiritual activities while limiting the outside world's temptations. Such an ideal was undermined both by the increasing secularization of Mormon communities, as shown by the switch from Church to secular schools, and was not applicable for the increasing number of Church members living outside LDS communities. Adding classrooms to ward meetinghouses and the introduction of new building types for education proved to be fundamental to this change. The first change was the development of ward meetinghouses. Specifics will be discussed later, but the decision that every ward would have an amusement hall and enough classrooms ensured that the buildings could provide

JOSEPH F. SMITH: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

social and educational instruction for all age groups. In addition, two innovations in Church education allowed similar support outside the Intermountain West. The first was the start of the seminary program and, second, the foreshadowing of the institute program, discussed in more detail later. These changes were fundamental in the transition from gathering to providing support for members living throughout the world.

Many new Salt Lake City buildings completed the plan of Zion, as established in Nauvoo, or expanded upon the Nauvoo plan to meet new opportunities. Joseph Smith formulated several plans for the City of Zion, but the plan's physical execution in Nauvoo was the most powerful model for Church leaders and members. Joseph F. Smith was the last Church President to have personally experienced that model. Several structures were new replacement buildings for earlier buildings. The Deseret News Building, home to the Church-owned newspaper and printing office, continued a long line of Church printing offices that had started in Kirtland, Ohio, as well as consolidated company operations. Two new buildings—a building for the Presiding Bishop (commonly referred to as the Bishop's Building) and the new Church Administration Building—similarly continued functions that had originally been housed in a variety of locations, including the Kirtland and Nauvoo temple attics. The Bishop's Building consolidated and oversaw Church financial operations on the same land where the Tithing Office had earlier managed these functions. The structure also provided office space for the Seventies Quorum, Church Board of Education, the Relief Society, and the other Church auxiliaries. The new Administration Building was built near the earlier Church's Presidents Office, but on the other side of the Lion House. The classical building, which might have been mistaken for a bank, projected dignity and security while housing the Church's General Authorities as well as the historical library and archive. A final group of buildings continuing the Nauvoo pattern were school structures in Salt Lake City. Five new Salt Lake buildings behind the Hotel Utah created a new campus for the LDS University. These buildings were used for many years and ultimately became the LDS Business College.

The Hotel Utah's construction was the most visible element in completing the plan of Zion. The Nauvoo House was to be a major hotel for visitors to the Illinois city; the Hotel Utah served a similar function in Salt Lake City. It is somehow fitting that Joseph F. Smith completed in Salt Lake City a building with a similar function to the uncompleted one in which, as a five-year-old, he saw his father's

Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

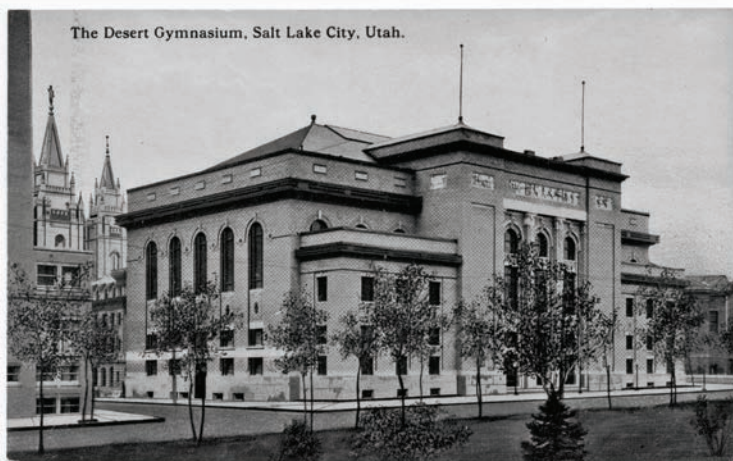


The Hotel Utah served the same function envisioned for the Nauvoo House in Nauvoo—a fine hotel for visitors. Its construction symbolized the completion of the public and Church buildings in Joseph Smith's plan for Zion—as constructed in Nauvoo, Illinois. Souvenir Novelty Company, postcard no. 720, courtesy of W. Ray Luce.

and uncle's bodies after they had been retrieved from Carthage. The new Hotel Utah, designed by major California architectural firm Parkinson and Bergstrom, was located on one of the city's most prominent lots—part of the former Tithing Lot, which adjoins the Temple Block. Festive and clad in terra cotta, the building was fine enough that it was listed as one of the five unexpectedly best hotels in America in John Günter's *Inside USA*.¹³

These buildings completed the Nauvoo pattern—although additional buildings were constructed to serve additional functions for an expanding Church and community. Salt Lake hospitals were run by churches, and the Church followed suit when the LDS Hospital opened in 1905. The Salt Lake hospital expanded to include a nursing college. It became the flagship for a string of fifteen Church-owned hospitals in the Intermountain West before the Church divested them in 1975. The Deseret Gymnasium is the second building which expanded the plan of Zion. It was originally planned as part of the LDS University, but was opened to the public to provide physical activity for city dwellers that no longer had farm work to keep them in shape. It should be noted that ward amusement halls had not yet become

JOSEPH F. SMITH: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAN AND HIS TIMES



Deseret Gymnasium provided a wide range of recreational opportunities as Salt Lake City became more urbanized. The building was constructed to meet new needs; it was not just a continuation of Joseph Smith's Nauvoo plan. Souvenir Novelty Company, postcard no. 714, courtesy of W. Ray Luce.

ward gymnasiums where basketball and other sports were enthroned.¹⁴ The local halls were used primarily for dances, theatrical productions, and similar activities. While the Deseret Gymnasium's full service gymnasium with swimming pool, track, and bowling alleys did not become a model for Church buildings in other western cities, the Church did construct several large multistake free-standing gymnasiums during the 1950s—although their main focus was basketball. The Temple Square Bureau of Information was a final addition to Salt Lake City's Plan of Zion during Smith's presidency. The bureau was an opportunistic building. Two factors spurred its construction. Church leaders recognized that thousands of tourists were coming to Salt Lake City to see Temple Square and learn about the Church and its history while the Church was sending missionaries around the world. Here was an opportunity to tell their story to people who were coming to them. The second factor came as Church members heard what local tour guides were telling visitors. The stories were good and some were correct. Church leaders decided that they should tell the story, and in 1902 a small octagonal kiosk was constructed on the temple grounds. It quickly proved to be too small, and in 1904 a permanent Bureau of Information was constructed next to the south entrance

Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

to Temple Square. That building was doubled in size in 1910 and doubled again in 1915 when a second story was added to the building.¹⁵ The enterprise proved successful and the Church's First Presidency noted in their 1909 Christmas message that 300,000 tourists had passed through the Tabernacle grounds that year.¹⁶

Church buildings constructed during Smith's presidency dramatically illustrate the physical expansion of Zion. Access to temples, the Church's most sacred buildings, was perhaps the most cherished blessings of living in Zion. Temples provided earthly ordinances such as the endowment and eternal marriage. All operating temples were located in Utah—which clearly defined the limits of the gathered Zion. President Smith's most dramatic building announcement was the Cardston Alberta Temple in 1912. The building is unusual in many ways. It was the first temple planned since the presidency of Brigham Young, who had died more than thirty-five years before. Its location was not only outside Utah, but outside the United States. It clearly indicated that Zion had been dramatically expanded to include the Mormon colonies in Canada and Mexico. President Smith wanted to announce two temples at the same time—one in Canada and one in the Mormon colonies in Mexico—but Pancho Villa's raids delayed the Mexican temple for almost one hundred years.¹⁷

The second temple outside of Utah was equally innovative. Its location in Hawaii expanded the concept of Zion even further. The location bore visible record that Joseph F. Smith knew of island Saints' needs from his long association with them, and that, indeed, the members from the isles of the sea—at least the Polynesian islands—would not be asked to gather to the Great Basin to fully avail themselves of temple blessings. It was designed by the same architectural firm in the same revolutionary Prairie School style. Smith strongly hinted at additional temples in the South Pacific, saying that New Zealand Saints would use the Hawaiian temple unless they "become strong enough to require a house to be built there also"—indicating that the islands of the South Pacific, not just Hawaii, were now included in "Zion."¹⁸

The physical definition of Zion was also expanded by tabernacle and meeting-house construction in new areas outside the Mormon Corridor. Tabernacles—large assembly buildings constructed for stakes, rather than wards—were built in Cardston, Alberta, and in La Grande, Oregon. The Union Stake Tabernacle in La Grande has been described as "the best building in Eastern Oregon."¹⁹ These tabernacles defined Zion, but proved too large to be sustained in areas with

JOSEPH F. SMITH: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

relatively few Church members. Meetinghouses were constructed in Gridley, California; New Zealand; and Samoa. These buildings, unlike most earlier meetinghouses in outlying areas, were planned for use by established local wards and branches rather than missions and missionaries.

These new facilities, which expanded Zion, contrast with a series of more traditional structures built to house missionary activities. A series of rather spectacular new mission facilities were constructed during Smith's presidency. Pope and Burton, architects for the Cardston and Hawaiian Temples, designed new mission headquarters—with Prairie School meetinghouses—for three missions: the Northwestern States Mission in Portland, the Western States Mission in Denver, and the Eastern States Mission in New York City. Two of these survive: the Brooklyn, New York, building as the Morning Star Baptist Church, and the Portland meetinghouse as a Zen Temple. Similar complexes in other architectural styles were constructed in Chicago, Illinois, for the Northern States Mission; Independence, Missouri, for the Central States Mission; later in Atlanta, Georgia, for the Southern States Mission; and Los Angeles for the California Mission. A similar complex was constructed in Christiania (now Oslo), Norway, in 1903.²⁰ This building replaced one constructed by President Anthon L. Skanchy in the late 1880s.²¹

Education was one of President Smith's highest priorities. Education had also been the primary vehicle used by many Protestant and Catholic missionaries in the nineteenth century who believed that if they educated the deluded Mormons they would see the errors of their ways. The United States government demanded that a free public education system be set up, replacing the ward schools, before Utah could be a state. The Free School Act of 1890 set up such a system, but contests for control of the local school districts occurred, especially in urban school districts. The Salt Lake City School Board quickly had a majority of nonmembers. Church officials feared that some public schools might mirror previous denominational schools in trying to question faith as well as teach the ABCs. They responded by introducing ward after-school programs in religious education for grade school and high school students. Such programs were held in the ward meetinghouses, often requiring additional classrooms. In addition, President Wilford Woodruff requested that every stake establish a stake academy or high school.²² Smith's presidency was the high point of academy construction, with buildings completed throughout the Intermountain West: Murdock Academy, Emery Academy, Dixie Academy, and Snow Academy in Utah; Oneida Academy and Ricks Academy in Idaho; Snowflake

Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

Academy and St. Joseph Academy in Arizona; Big Horn Academy in Wyoming; and San Louis Academy in Colorado.²³ Additional academies ranged as far as Colonia Juárez, Mexico, and the Maori Agricultural College in New Zealand.

The after-school program and academy construction did not prove to be viable, long-term answers to secular education. Three other initiatives during Smith's presidency did provide a long-term solution. First was the decision to provide greater Church college opportunities, exemplified by the construction of the Maeser Building, the first building on BYU's "upper campus." Second was the construction of the Granite Stake Seminary Building in 1912. Rather than providing religious education after school in ward meetinghouses, the Granite Seminary moved the building close to the school and taught religious classes throughout the day—the beginning of a now worldwide program. The seeds of a similar institute program for college students were introduced in the Logan Fifth Ward Annex. The annex was larger than the chapel, and was designed to provide greater room capacity for classes and social activities for college students at Utah State Agricultural College. Elder John A. Widtsoe wrote that "there is probably no meeting house in the Church that has more meeting rooms for the various quorums and organizations of the ward than had the Logan Fifth Ward."²⁴

Temples, tabernacles, and ward meetinghouses were all changed during Smith's presidency—temples and meetinghouses dramatically. The Cardston Temple's design is every bit as revolutionary as the design of the new small temples at the end of the twentieth century. Because there was no Church architect, a competition was held for the building's design. The selected plan was modern, unlike any temple yet constructed. In keeping with the design guidelines, the structure did not have a large assembly room or towers, features of every previous temple. It was the first temple and the second building (the Endowment House being the first) to be designed primarily around the ceremonial endowment rooms. It is the model for later temples. The leading book on Canadian churches calls the Cardston Temple "surprising" and "altogether unforgettable." The "innovative structure in Wright's idiom is hardly indebted at all to typical church structures and, rather daringly, they included Aztec and Mayan overtones in the decorative touches."²⁵ The architect's achievement is even more remarkable when it is realized that the structure was designed only five years after the completion of Frank Lloyd Wright's Unity Temple in Oak Park, Illinois—the Cardston Temple's inspiration—and one of America's greatest buildings.

JOSEPH F. SMITH: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

Tabernacles were on a very different long-term trajectory, as the Smith years were almost the last gasp for tabernacle building. A great number were constructed, but the basic design for most tabernacles remained very similar. Their main function was to provide an assembly space large enough for stake conferences four times a year. The buildings were often also the site for civic functions because many of these Church buildings were the town's largest halls. Many tabernacles are impressive. Architecturally they range from the delicate first Granite Tabernacle, designed by Richard K. A. Kletting, who designed the Utah State Capitol and Saltair, to the Alpine Stake Tabernacle in American Fork with its understated exterior and unexpected, wonderful interior. Some were very utilitarian, like the Teton Stake Tabernacle in Driggs, Idaho, while others were on the cutting edge of American architecture. The Montpelier Idaho Tabernacle, designed by Pope and Burton, for example, is extraordinary, inspired by Louis Sullivan's landmark St. Paul's Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, that was constructed only four years earlier. During Smith's presidency an unusual phenomenon occurred as a single stake had multiple tabernacles. The Alpine Stake had tabernacles in Lehi and Pleasant Grove as well as the "official" stake tabernacle in American Fork. Similarly, the Bear Lake Stake had tabernacles in Montpelier and Paris, Idaho. The cost of construction and maintenance limited the construction of new tabernacles. In California and other outlying areas, most tabernacles constructed after Smith's presidency housed one or two wards as well as a stake. After World War II, when public address systems allowed greater flexibility, stake houses and large meetinghouses took over tabernacle functions. Those functions were further reduced when stake conferences were cut from four times a year to two and from two Sunday sessions to one.

Ward meetinghouses changed greatly during Smith's presidency. In fact, ward meetinghouses were the most numerous structures built and changed more during this period than at any other period in Church history. Changes in ward programs found a response in ward buildings. Sunday School, Primary, and weekday religious education classes were increasingly important since schools were now secular and did not include theology along with the three R's. Fast and testimony meetings were changed from Thursday morning to Sunday, and weekly priesthood meetings were instituted; a 1914 Joseph F. Smith Jr. *Improvement Era* article outlines current practices for ward buildings. These new meetinghouses were so new that there was no agreement on what to call them. Smith reported that they were called meetinghouses, chapels, or churches²⁶ and that each ward has its own meetinghouse.²⁷

Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

“Modern buildings” included both a chapel—worship space—and an amusement hall. The amusement hall was used for dances, “under proper regulation and restrictions,” as well as for production of dramas, opera, friendly debates, declarations, and musical, oratorical, and other contests. Classrooms were these structures’ third component. Smith outlined the Church’s scheduled meetings. Sunday: priesthood quorums from 9:00 to 10:30; Sunday School from 10:30 to noon; sacrament meetings in the afternoon or evening as local circumstances determine—usually determined by how many members had cows to milk before coming to evening services. School-age children had two meetings: smaller children in the Primary Association met one day a week, and other religious classes were held on the other days. As has been mentioned, these classes provided religious education no longer available in the public schools. The women’s organization, the Relief Society, also used the meetinghouse unless they had their own hall. Many Relief Societies continued to own or build their own halls until the Presiding Bishop asked them to stop in 1924, while at the same time directing ward bishops to provide well for the sisters in their meetinghouses. Smith claimed these new Church meetinghouses were “equal to the best of the kind to be found in any land.”²⁸

These new modern meetinghouses were a drastic change from the multipurpose buildings that had been built through the nineteenth century. The new buildings had many advantages: sacred space—the chapel—could be divided from the recreational use of the amusement hall. The bishop of the Franklin Ward emphasized the point in the ward’s application for funding assistance: “As our meeting house has been used for all purposes and could not be kept in fit condition for a house of worship, its sacredness being destroyed by the uses to which it was put.”²⁹ The separate chapels could now have permanent pews, a permanent stand with seats for ward leaders, the ward choir, ward clerk, and a sacrament table—often centered under the pulpit. The chapel often had a small balcony at the back to provide additional seating. Some ward buildings began incorporating baptismal fonts, including the Morgan Second Ward, whose building had a unique combination of a swimming pool and a baptismal font.³⁰ One of the most fundamental changes occurred in a few buildings, such as the Miller and Thirty-First Wards in Salt Lake City, which included a chapel with overflow capacity in the amusement hall. Additional chapel seating could be provided by opening doors between these two areas. Both buildings were constructed in 1909, but the new plan did not become dominant until much later when it became a fundamental feature of meetinghouse design.³¹ In



The Salt Lake Thirty-First Ward constructed in 1909 was among the first Church buildings built with an overflow from the chapel into the amusement hall. The doors on the right open into the chapel. Photo by W. Ray Luce.

addition to design changes, this period also saw many meetinghouses first acquire gas or electrical lighting, indoor plumbing, and steam or forced air heating.

While an increasing number of American churches had social halls, few embraced the concept of amusement halls with the same vigor as the LDS Church. These halls applied the concept of a gathered Zion to the ward. Every ward had an amusement hall to provide “wholesome recreation,” while classrooms and the chapel provided religious education. Some of the bishoprics’ most earnest pleadings in their building applications concern amusement halls. Ward leaders took very seriously their responsibility to provide their youth “proper” recreation in an increasingly threatening environment. Clearfield Ward leaders “keenly” felt “the responsibility of our calling . . . as watchmen on the tower and . . . do not wish to spare time or means to guard, advise, and protect our people against that which would lead to the downfall of our Sons and Daughters.” They said they were at a critical point as to “whether the priesthood shall control our amusements or whether we will submit to an outside element.” The outside threat, in

this case, was someone not from the ward who wanted to build a local amusement hall.³² The threat to the Burton Ward was not theoretical: “For the past six years our young people had been frequenting a Hall of Questionable character a few miles south of our ward. And we came to the conclusion that in order to hold our young people in the proper environment, it was necessary that we should build a Hall that would be under our own supervision.”³³ Similar sentiments were expressed by many wards, including St. Johns, Arizona: “We are surrounded on every side by mining camps, smelter towns etc. and our sons and daughters have formed the habit of patronizing these places for their amusement.”³⁴ The Elwood Ward bishopric described in detail their concern. Most people in the area were not members, “and last fall they erected a Dancing Hall there and close by opened [*sic*] up a Saloon. They have tried their utmost to get our young People to go there but so far have not succeeded very well.”³⁵ Clearly amusement halls were viewed as more than a nice place for ward socials.

The Churchwide funding process started during Smith’s presidency for constructing meetinghouses and tabernacles provided the basic outline for a process which later became standardized. Funding was overseen by the Church’s First Presidency and almost always signed personally by Smith. A ward or stake submitted an application form seeking funding. The form provided the ward bishopric space to outline their request and a section for the stake presidency to support or suggest modifications to the request. The bishopric often outlined the need for the building, the support the ward had given, and local conditions to support their request. These ranged from the impact of a bad harvest to ward members’ struggles colonizing a new area with the attendant costs for land, homes, and irrigation systems. The section was often used to provide information on ward members’ economic status or the congregation’s large number of widows. Stake presidencies commented on the request, usually fully supporting a ward’s request, but they might suggest modifications or note the needs of other wards in the stake. A series of fill-in-the-blank questions asked about the building itself, as well as the financial condition and tithing record of the ward. Building questions included size, materials, seating capacity, classrooms, the building’s designer or architect, and who held title to the land—usually the local bishop or a ward corporation. The financial section asked for the estimated cost of the building, how much had been raised, and how much expended. Questions about the ward included how many members, how many families, and the cost of the building per

JOSEPH F. SMITH: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

member and per family. A tithing section requested information on how much tithing had been paid the year before and how much cash and produce were currently on hand. These questions were important because some wards asked to use tithing on hand or tithing to be collected for their building project. Although plan submittal was not required, it is clear that many wards submitted plans, or had their architect submit plans. Several applications note that plans have been sent in, and in some cases—like that for the Holbrook Idaho Ward—they followed a suggestion to provide a basement for classrooms.³⁶ Local authorities often noted previous discussions with President Smith or other General Authorities about the building, while others suggested that any questions could be answered by a specific Apostle who had recently visited the community. In some cases these visits prompted changes in building plans. The Hyrum First Ward's building site was moved after the foundation excavation had already started in response to Apostle Teasdale's recommendations.³⁷ Apostle Hyrum M. Smith suggested that the Farr West Ward building be improved and used for a few more years rather than be replaced. The ward complied and requested a lesser amount.³⁸

Applications were reviewed personally by Joseph F. Smith, who balanced individual merit with money available. Some projects were already under way, while others were finished and needed money to complete the building or pay off debts. Smith signed each application personally as the Church's Trustee-in-Trust and wrote the amount allowed and any conditions. Awards ranged from a few hundred dollars to four or five thousand dollars. Although there were not rigid regulations, certain guidelines were usually used. First, the ward could expect no more than one-third of the money needed for the building—although on rare occasions, that amount might rise to almost one-half. Local units were almost always admonished to avoid debt, and money was usually given with the stipulation that it would be received only after the ward raised any required match without going into debt. Many buildings were the subject of more than one funding request because the building cost had been underestimated, or because of hard times or additional costs. The Hyrum Third Ward, for example, claimed that the architect misled them about the building's real cost.³⁹

Ward leaders oversaw the construction process, including fund-raising, selection of the architect and contractor, and oversight of construction. Constructing a new meetinghouse could be a daunting task, especially in a rural area where ward members did much of the work. The Rockville Ward worked on their building

Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

for twelve to fifteen years, and it was still not finished.⁴⁰ Similarly, the Goshen Second Ward met in their building's basement for four years before they submitted an application for Church funds to continue construction.⁴¹ The Circleville Ward met for a time in the Relief Society hall, and the Enterprise Ward was forced to hold Primary outdoors.⁴² Several wards purchased other buildings and remodeled them for Church use. The Center Ward, Wasatch Stake, bought the Heber Methodist Church building and moved it, while the Corinne Ward bought the local opera hall for a meetinghouse.⁴³ Several wards purchased schools and remodeled them either as chapels or amusement halls.

The system initiated by President Smith, served the Church for many years after system modifications were made. Wards continued to apply for a percentage of building costs after meeting requirements for size and contributions. Changes to the system were modifications rather than wholesale replacement. The Church first supplied plans at no cost, hoping wards would select them, and later oversaw design for all Church buildings; buildings were owned by the Corporation of the President after it was established in 1923 rather than ward bishops or ward corporations.

These new meetinghouses were much more concerned with style than earlier ones. In fact, the majority of the earlier structures were vernacular buildings without pretense of a style. Many applications for funding mentioned that the new building would be a credit to the Church. This concern came from a desire for credible Church buildings, but in a few applications there are hints of competition with other denominations. Rigby Ward leaders, for example, said they were "confronted" with "the building of a church by our Presbyterian friends. This building is nearing completion, and it is their boast that when finished our children will be enticed to their services; this we do not desire, and we believe that if our own building can be nicely finished, that this difficulty can be overcome."⁴⁴ The bishop of the Harrisville Ward wrote that their meetinghouse would be worthy of the Church. He continued that one reason it was so expensive was that they were completely surrounded by "the People of the World," adding that "the best was none too good for the Saints."⁴⁵

New Latter-day Saint meetinghouses utilized many architectural styles, but Gothic Revival was the most used style, and Prairie School the most unexpected. During the first two decades of the twentieth century, Gothic Revival was the most popular style for American churches, including Latter-day Saint meetinghouses.

JOSEPH F. SMITH: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAN AND HIS TIMES



Top: The Malad Idaho Second Ward is a good example of the many Gothic Revival meetinghouses built during Joseph F. Smith's presidency. Photo by W. Ray Luce. Bottom: Malad Second Ward interior. The stand has an oval enclosure to help project a speaker's voice. Note that the sacrament table is in the center—just below the pulpit—to emphasize the importance of the sacrament. Photo by W. Ray Luce.



Stained glass window, Salt Lake Second Ward meetinghouse. Joseph Smith's First Vision was a favorite subject for stained glass windows constructed during Smith's presidency. Photo by W. Ray Luce.

Some claimed Gothic Revival was the “only Proper style.”⁴⁶ Gothic Revival originated in Gothic cathedrals, and Gothic structures looked like churches. Many well-designed Gothic buildings graced towns throughout the Mormon Corridor. They were well designed, if not always fully accessible, and contain some of the Church's best stained glass windows. Several Gothic Revival structures survive, including the buildings for the Salt Lake Second Ward, the Salt Lake Tenth Ward's new chapel, the Liberty Ward, the Brigham City Third, and the Malad Second Wards. Unfortunately, some of the best buildings constructed during this period have been sold or demolished, including that of the Salt Lake Seventeenth Ward.

Prairie School-style Church buildings are unusual and unprecedented. Prairie-style architecture was developed in Chicago, Illinois, principally by Frank Lloyd Wright. It was primarily used for houses, but religious, governmental, and commercial structures also would use the design. The style emphasized horizontal lines and geometric patterns, while creating new, nontraditional,



The Blackfoot Idaho Tabernacle is one of several Church buildings designed by Pope and Burton, architects in the Prairie School style. The building, constructed just after Smith's presidency, is now a funeral home. Photo by W. Ray Luce.

decorative motifs for capitals and cornices. While there are a few other American Prairie School church buildings, the style was embraced by the Church as by no other denomination. The Cardston and Hawaiian Temples obviously spurred the movement, but at least sixty other Mormon Prairie School buildings were constructed.⁴⁷ The Salt Lake First Ward's building (built in 1913 and demolished in 1978), was one of the finest Prairie-style meetinghouses. This building was not only architecturally important as one of the Church's finest Prairie School-style buildings, but it was historically significant as well; in fact, former Church President Gordon B. Hinckley and his wife grew up in the ward, and President Hinckley's father served in the Liberty Stake as stake president.⁴⁸ The style was prevalent enough to be called "Mormon Style."⁴⁹ Today only a handful of these buildings are left, including the Parowan Third Ward building and the Ogden Deaf Branch building. It is interesting to speculate on the apparent strong symbolic relationship between Prairie School, this new American architectural style that had never existed anywhere before, and a religion restored in America. Perhaps Gothic Revival, the prevailing Church style, represented traditional Christianity better than it did the new, restored gospel.

Joseph F. Smith's presidency produced an amazing legacy in the number of buildings, their styles, and plans. Understanding this building heritage can help us understand the transformation of the Church from an isolated organization

Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

in the western United States to a modern organization expanding into the world. Only a few of these buildings remain, and we need to understand and cherish them so that they can tell their story to future generations of Church members.

Notes

1. Richard W. Jackson, *Places of Worship: 150 Years of Latter-day Saint Architecture* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2003), appendix 5. Thirty-four of the ninety-two buildings he identified as tabernacles were constructed during Smith's presidency (38 percent).
2. Specifically, 465 wards out of 797. See *Improvement Era*, May 1916, 653.
3. See Joseph F. Smith local unit appropriation files in Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, for the noted buildings.
4. *Deseret Evening News*, December 28, 1915, quoted in Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Church History Library, December 26, 1915.
5. "A Christmas Salutation from the First Presidency," *Deseret News*, December 20, 1915.
6. For information on the school changes, see Frederick S. Buchanan, *Culture Clash and Accommodation: Public Schooling in Salt Lake City, 1890–1994* (San Francisco: Smith Research Association in association with Signature Books, 1996).
7. Joseph F. Smith Jr., "Uses and Maintenance of the Churches by the Latter-day Saints," *Improvement Era*, June 1914, 727.
8. Smith Local Appropriations, Jameston Idaho Ward.
9. Smith Local Appropriations, Fredonia Arizona Ward.
10. Smith Local Appropriations, Granite Ward.
11. Smith Local Appropriations, Garden Creek and Holden Wards.
12. *Utah Gazetteer and Directory of Salt Lake, Ogden, Provo and Logan Cities for 1888* (Salt Lake City, 1888), 45, 90, 115, 327; *Utah State Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1918–1919* (Salt Lake City: R. L. Polk & Co., 1918), 618.
13. John Gunther, *Inside U.S.A.* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1947), 910. He added that the Hotel Utah "is to Salt Lake City what the Waldorf is to New York" (190).
14. See discussion of gymnasium uses of amusement halls in *Improvement Era*, April 1908, 477–79.
15. Joseph S. Peery, "The Bureau of Information," *Improvement Era*, June 1914, 688–94.
16. "Greetings from the First Presidency, Review of Year's History of the Church," *Deseret Evening News*, December 18, 1909, 7.
17. Joseph F. Smith, "Editors' Table," *Improvement Era*, November 1915, 79.
18. Smith, "Editor's Table," 79.
19. Richard Oman, interview by the author, July 2000.
20. A. B. Larsen, "The Christiania Conference House," *Improvement Era*, July 1909, 734–36.
21. See "Anthon L. Skanchy: A Brief Autobiographical Sketch of the Missionary Labors of a Valiant Soldier for Christ," *Improvement Era*, December 1914, 119–26; January 1915, 236–42; February 1915, 326–31; March 1915, 417–24; April 1915, 500–506; May 1915, 593–96.
22. See Scott C. Esplin, "Wilford Woodruff: A Founding Father of the Mormon Academies," in *Banner of the Gospel: Wilford Woodruff*, ed. Alexander L. Baugh and Susan Easton Black

JOSEPH F. SMITH: REFLECTIONS ON THE MAN AND HIS TIMES

- (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2010), 205–32.
23. There may have been additional buildings constructed as well. For general background on the Church stake academies, see Horace H. Cummings, “The Church Schools,” *Improvement Era*, July 1913, 929–40; William E. Berrett, *A Miracle in Weekday Religious Education* (Salt Lake City: Salt Lake Printing Center, 1988), 33–39; Harold R. Laycock, “Academies,” *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 11–13.
 24. John A. Widtsoe quoted in Joel E. Ricks, “Logan Fifth Ward History,” *1950 Utah State University Special Collections and Archives*; http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/joel_ricks/4. Widtsoe was in a good position to know. He had been president of the Utah State Agricultural College before being ordained an Apostle in 1921.
 25. Peter Richardson and Douglas Richardson, *Canadian Churches: An Architectural History* (Richmond Hill, Ontario: Firefly Books, 2007), 340–42.
 26. This same uncertainty about what to call these buildings is found in the signs on the structures. Church buildings from the period are identified as “meeting house,” “chapel,” “house of worship,” and “assembly hall.” This paper will use the term *meetinghouse* to refer to ward buildings and chapel for the worship space or sanctuary. Smith was still using the name Joseph F. Smith Jr., rather than Joseph Fielding Smith, which he used later.
 27. This practice continued until after World War II.
 28. Smith, “Uses and Maintenance of the Churches by the Latter-day Saints,” 727.
 29. Smith Local Appropriations, Franklin Ward.
 30. Lewis T. Cannon, “Architecture of Church Buildings,” *Improvement Era*, June 1914, 800. Previously, most baptisms took place in streams or lakes or in temple baptismal fonts. The scarcity of baptismal fonts is shown by the fact that Gordon B. Hinckley was the first President of the Church baptized in a baptismal font. See Michael D. Taylor, “The Baptisms of Latter-day Prophets,” *Religious Educator* 3, no. 3 (2002): 61–64.
 31. In 1923, for example, Bishop LeGrand Richards wanted the plans for the Sugarhouse Ward in Salt Lake City to allow overflow seating, but the Church Architects Office under Willard and Don Carlos Young successfully pushed a plan which separated the chapel and the amusement hall. Lucile C. Tate, *LeGrand Richards: Beloved Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982): 117.
 32. Smith Local Appropriations, Clearfield Ward.
 33. Smith Local Appropriations, Burton Ward.
 34. Smith Local Appropriations, St. Johns Arizona Ward.
 35. Smith Local Appropriations, Elwood Ward.
 36. Smith Local Appropriations, Holbrook Idaho Ward.
 37. Smith Local Appropriations, Hyrum First Ward.
 38. Smith Local Appropriations, Farr West Ward.
 39. Smith Local Appropriations, Hyrum Third Ward.
 40. Smith Local Appropriations, Rockville Ward.
 41. Smith Local Appropriations, Goshen Second Ward.
 42. Smith Local Appropriations, Circleville and Enterprise Wards.
 43. Smith Local Appropriations, Center and Corinne Wards.
 44. Smith Local Appropriations, Rigby Ward.
 45. Smith Local Appropriations, Harrisville Ward.

Joseph F. Smith and the Great Mormon Building Boom

46. See Calder Loth and Julius Trousdale Sadler, *The Only Proper Style: Gothic Architecture in America* (New York: New York Graphic Society, 1975).
47. See Jackson, *Places of Worship*, app. 4.
48. See Sheri L. Dew, *Go Forward with Faith: The Biography of Gordon B. Hinckley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 33, 41.
49. "New \$10,000 L.D.S. Mission Home; William E. Barr House," *Deseret News*, December 19, 1914, 22.