

# Dedication



*1964* Temple president appointed (January)

President McKay makes surprise visit to temple (Sunday, August 2)

Tours given to students leaving for school (Saturday, September 12)

End of construction, keys handed over to temple president (Friday, September 25)

Public open house held (October 5-31)

Temple dedicated, overflow in separate building for first time (Tuesday-Thursday, November 17-19)

Planning went forward in the summer of 1964 for the final stages of temple construction. In May, the First Presidency had announced that there would be a public viewing before the temple's dedication. Afterward, the temple would be closed for a final cleaning and preparation for the dedication ceremonies, which were scheduled for three days (November 17–19) with morning and afternoon sessions each day.<sup>1</sup>

As construction was drawing to a close, the First Presidency announced the appointment of leaders for the Oakland Temple. In January 1964, Delbert F. Wright was appointed as president. Wright was born December 29, 1901, in Ogden, Utah, and studied at Weber State College before moving to the Bay Area. During the 1930s, he was a member of the committee that helped select the temple site. He served as president of the original Oakland Stake before moving to Minnesota, where he also served as stake president. He became vice president of General Mills and was responsible for

Members of the temple building committee, together with contractors: Paul Warnick (of Berkeley, executive secretary), Price Ronnow (president of Reno Stake), Harold Burton (architect), Delbert Wright (first temple president), Leon Wheatley, Jack Wheatley (general contractors), Howard Allen, and O. Leslie Stone (committee chairman and president of Oakland-Berkeley Stake). Courtesy of Jack and Charles Wheatley.







employee relations; he worked there for thirty-six years before retiring and returning to the Bay Area to make his home in Danville, a few miles east of Oakland. For about a year, he served on the Churchwide Priesthood Home Teaching Committee. When he was named temple president, his wife, Gertrude L. Patton, became the temple's first matron.<sup>2</sup>

Wright's two counselors were named in May: Bernhard Herman Schetler and Robert E. Lee Kenner. Schetler, the first counselor, was born in Salt Lake City, studied business management at Stanford University, and then lived in San Francisco for over twenty years. After working with various corporations, he became an assistant purchaser for the city and county of San Francisco. He served as stake clerk, a member of the high council, and as a counselor in the stake presidency.

Robert E. Lee Kenner, President Wright's second counselor, was born in Manti, Utah. He served as director of the Latter-day Saint institute adjacent to the University of California, Berkeley campus, where he was pursuing his doctoral degree. He was the first bishop of the Flagstaff Ward in Arizona and served on the high council in the Oakland-Berkeley Stake. Bessie Jones Schetler and Kirnia Peterson Kenner, the two counselors' wives, became assistant matrons.<sup>3</sup>

## A Surprise Visit

Early Sunday morning, August 2, 1964, the twenty-six stake presidencies in the Oakland Temple district, together with the president of the Northern California Mission and the recently appointed temple president and one of his counselors, met at the East Bay Interstake Center to coordinate final plans for the temple's upcoming open house and dedication. Much to their delight, as stated previously, a surprise visitor, who was none other than Church President David O. McKay, unexpectedly came to make his final inspection of the temple.

President McKay was beaming as he greeted the assembled group of Northern California leaders. "I am thrilled to be here. My soul was uplifted last night as I gazed on this beautiful temple with its magnificent lighting. It bears testimony of your fine endeavors. And I say, God bless you for it." The Prophet spoke of his first visit to

Opposite: President David O. McKay.  
© Intellectual Reserve, Inc.

California fifty-five years earlier, “when there was no chapel between St. David, Arizona and Gridley, Calif.” He was grateful for the Church’s growth during the intervening years, noting that there were now “scores of chapels and two temples” in the same area. “Temple work is as broad as humanity or as life itself,” he testified. “It would be an unjust God who would not save us all, even generations past.”<sup>4</sup>

Accompanying President McKay were his First Counselor, President Hugh B. Brown; Elder Howard W. Hunter of the Council of the Twelve; Elder ElRay L. Christiansen, an Assistant to the Twelve who supervised temples Churchwide; and President McKay’s son, Dr. Llewellyn McKay. President Brown was convinced that in the light of President McKay’s visit to the Latter-day Saint pavilion at the New York World’s Fair and the Tabernacle Choir’s recent performance at the White House, “the Mormon Church was on the map.” His brief remarks concluded with an expression of appreciation for the efforts expended “in preparing the House of the Lord.”<sup>5</sup>

Elder Hunter, who had been serving as a stake president in Southern California when he was called to the Twelve five years earlier, commended “the generosity of the financial contributions raised by the participating stakes.” He anticipated that “there should be an increase in payment of tithes” and felt certain that “present in the room was the nucleus of great power for good to bring about salvation for the dead.” Elder Christiansen predicted that “the temple would bring ‘great renown’ to the Church” in the area and instructed the stake presidencies concerning the qualities of those they should recommend for temple service.<sup>6</sup>

President Stone, who was conducting the meeting, explained that the thirteen stakes in Oregon and Washington and the Northwestern States Mission would also be participating in the forthcoming dedication of the Oakland Temple, raising the total to thirty-nine stakes and two missions. He recalled that the original nineteen stakes in the Oakland Temple district had pledged \$500,000 two years earlier for temple construction. He was pleased to report that at that time a total of \$610,000 had actually been collected.<sup>7</sup> He indicated that each one of the stakes—except one—had met its pledge; because of a stake division the San Jose West Stake was \$900 short.

“There was a short intermission and when President Stone reconvened the session, Pres. Louis W. Latimer of the West San Jose Stake arose and approached the stand, to the amusement and pleasure of everyone, presented a check for \$1,000 for his stake’s obligation.” Thus all the stakes had succeeded in meeting their pledge.<sup>8</sup>

With the completion of the temple, the Greek Orthodox Church just down the hill on Lincoln Avenue (built in 1960), and Holy Names University, located since 1957 on neighboring Mountain Boulevard, people in the vicinity dubbed the area “Holy Hill.”

## Public Viewing of the Temple

Every project has some last-minute problems. Not only had the seating for the endowment rooms not arrived when expected, but the grounds were not finished. One volunteer wrote about the last-minute completion of preparations for the open house:

When I left Thursday afternoon the baptistery was still full of workmen, . . . the tile men working on the reflecting pool in the temple garden courtyard were only three-fourths done, the sidewalks were covered with gravel and sand, the fountains were surrounded with workmen. . . . I had to return again that evening. . . . As I approached the gateway to the temple courtyard I could hardly believe my eyes. The reflecting pool had been filled with water, the tile was completed, underwater flood lights were shining on the sheet of water cascading down the special wall at the head of the pool, the sidewalks were clean as could be, and everything was just beautiful. Then I became aware of another figure in the half-light. It was President Wright, just standing there gazing as I was. Our eyes met in the wonder of it and quietly he said: “It’s a miracle.”<sup>9</sup>

Even at this point, everything wasn’t fully completed. At two the following morning, sod was still being rolled into place. “So you can tell what a tight schedule we had,” President Stone later reflected. “We weren’t completely ready, but we were presentable, and the people started to line up.”<sup>10</sup>



*The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*  
CORDIALLY INVITES YOU TO ATTEND THE PRE-VIEWING OF THE

*Oakland Temple*  
4780 Lincoln Ave., Oakland, Calif.

Please Type or Print

Name \_\_\_\_\_


Address \_\_\_\_\_  
Number Street

City State

ADMIT ONE

Please visit the Temple During  
The Week Beginning  
October 5, 1964  
OPEN 9:00 A.M. TO 8:00 P.M.  
MONDAY THRU SATURDAY  
IF MEMBER, PLEASE DESIGNATE  
WARD \_\_\_\_\_  
STAKE \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE SEE  
REVERSE SIDE



Ticket for Oakland Temple open house.  
Courtesy of Oakland Stake Archives,  
provided by Robert Larsen.

On this cool Friday morning, September 25, in what is normally the hottest month of the year, architect Harold W. Burton turned the key in the lock of the temple courtyard gates to admit visitors for public viewing. After a brief ceremony he handed over the keys to temple president Delbert F. Wright, symbolizing the temple's transition from construction to operation.<sup>11</sup>

Paul Summerhays had been selected to be the director of the Oakland Bureau of Information and was responsible for the scheduling and content of tours. Informal tours had actually begun on the grounds before the temple was completed. Arrangements had also been made so that students going away to school could have the opportunity of visiting the temple before leaving. Three hours were set aside on Saturday morning, September 12, for this special viewing. The visitors needed to bring a letter from their bishop or stake president certifying that they were students who would be away at school during the period of the temple's open house.<sup>12</sup>

Church members who would serve as volunteer guides each day were first taken on a tour of the temple in preparation. Most of the guides conducted their tours by identifying each room and its purpose in the temple. Guests with doctrinal questions were referred to the missionaries present on the grounds.<sup>13</sup>

VIP tours were scheduled for the same day that the keys were handed over to President Wright. During that day, over 15,000



“distinguished guests” visited the temple. They included civic and government officials, members of the clergy, and representatives of the press. Visitors continued to come until 8:30 p.m. “Each group was given an opportunity to ask questions. Tracts, copies of the Book of Mormon and a special ‘Improvement Era’ edition were made available.”<sup>14</sup> The first visitors to take a tour of the temple at 9:00 a.m. were a newly retired couple, Mr. and Mrs. C. S. Raymond, who were about to leave on an around-the-world cruise. “Both were visibly touched by the beauty of the Temple and described their visit as an uplifting spiritual experience which probably could not be found elsewhere in the world.”<sup>15</sup> Another special “pre-view” took place the following day for stake presidencies, bishops, other priesthood leaders, and their families from throughout the Oakland Temple district.<sup>16</sup>

The main public open house commenced on Monday, October 5. No children under eight were admitted, and women were advised to wear comfortable shoes, as there would be an extensive amount of time spent walking through the temple. They were also requested not to wear spike heels that might damage the carpet. Church officials anticipated that many would respond to the invitation to tour the very visible Mormon temple that was on the hills above Oakland. Because of the large number of anticipated visitors, those



Fine workmanship beautifies the temple's exterior. Courtesy of Hugh Harline.

coming to the open house were encouraged to carpool.<sup>17</sup> The Alameda Transit Company, which provided service in the temple area, planned to run buses every half hour—rather than just once each hour—and to run them on Saturdays, when service was not normally provided.<sup>18</sup>

Thousands came each day to visit the \$5 million temple (over \$30 million today).<sup>19</sup> President Stone reported, “I checked many times with the people who were at the head of the line and asked them how long they had been waiting.” He learned that they had been in line up to two and a half hours, “and yet they were orderly

Courtesy of Hugh Harline.



and happy.” While waiting, they were able to enjoy recorded music by the Tabernacle Choir. “People seemed to enjoy just being on the temple grounds,” Stone concluded.<sup>20</sup>

The *Church News* emphasized the diversity of the groups visiting the temple: “Visitors ranged from the very young to the more elderly guests. There have been bus loads of cub scouts and girl scouts and several buses of residents of nearby retirement villages where the only people are over sixty-five years of age. There have been two groups of deaf mutes and a group of visiting Japanese also accompanied by interpreters.” About one hundred times each day, wheelchairs and someone to push them were provided for those who needed the service.<sup>21</sup>

Visitors to the temple made many favorable comments. The opening paragraphs of an article

written by Bill Rose, religion writer for the *Oakland Tribune*, declared, “‘Fantastically beautiful, exquisite, inspiring, overwhelming and gorgeous’ were a few of the superlatives used by some of the 12,000 persons who viewed the Oakland Mormon Temple last night.” The writer then quoted glowing comments from other visitors: “It’s breath-taking. It is the most beautiful thing I’ve seen from coast to coast”; “This is the most outstanding building in the Bay Area—bar none”; “It’s fantastically beautiful. I’m overwhelmed.”<sup>22</sup> Elder Gordon B. Hinckley met a flight attendant on a transpacific flight who confided, “I have been to your temple in Oakland, and I experienced a feeling there that I have never felt before. I want to come and learn more.”<sup>23</sup>

Latter-day Saint Eunice Harmon Knecht invited her neighbors to attend the open house. Afterwards, one shared her feelings about the temple’s architecture. “The straight view of the path of water represents the straightness of the path to God. The water is symbolic of washing away the sins of the world. The stone and marble, the steadfastness and eternity of the Lord. The warmth of the colors inside, . . . the love, intelligence and purity derived from religion.”<sup>24</sup>

Mrs. Alice M. Fellingner from Berkeley shared her feelings through verse:

We visited your Temple, an inspired work of God!  
And felt that He was with us, as through the grounds we trod.  
We can’t explain the feeling, that swept from head to toe,  
With the organ softly playing, when at last we turned to go;  
But we knew that in His heaven, God has planned a wondrous sight,  
We had a glimpse of Heaven, when we visited last night!<sup>25</sup>

But the reviews were not all positive. Originally, the two fountains were illuminated by highly colorful underwater lights, prompting at least one reporter’s comment that Temple Hill looked like “Oakland’s Disneyland.” President McKay must have agreed, because when he saw them, he promptly asked that the colors be changed to white, which was quickly accomplished.<sup>26</sup>

Many of the comments focused on the friendliness of the volunteers—their “courtesy, their cheerfulness, constant smiles and willingness to help solve problems and make everyone feel welcome.”

California state senator Stan Pitman commented on the beauty of the temple and grounds, but especially on “the wonderful spiritual uplift” he received during his tour. He added, “You are contributing greatly to the moral and spiritual growth of the state of California.” A businessman from San Francisco described the tour as “thought-provoking” but was most impressed by the “atmosphere of friendliness” exuded by the volunteers.<sup>27</sup>

A landmark welcoming ships sailing through the Golden Gate. Courtesy of Brent R. Nordgren.



One afternoon the captain of a navy vessel announced, “I brought my ship through the Golden Gate early this morning and observed, in a direct line, on the foothills of East Oakland, a

new landmark I had not seen before.” Many local Saints saw this as a fulfillment of George Albert Smith’s prophecy given nearly forty years before that the temple would be “an ensign” welcoming ships sailing through the Golden Gate.<sup>28</sup>

The tours provided opportunities to clear up misconceptions. One experience was quite humorous. One of the visitors noticed an overhead pulley system used to convey laundry baskets from the clothing area to the laundry room. The visitor asked, “Are these the devices you use to convey the bodies when you baptize the dead?”<sup>29</sup>

The open house was originally scheduled to run three weeks—through Saturday, October 24—with the possibility of being extended one week if needed. There was considerable interest. The number of visitors



ranged from 10,000 to 14,000 on weekdays and climbed to 24,500 on Saturday, October 17.<sup>30</sup> Because of this success, an additional week was added. An estimated 347,000 toured the temple during this four-week open house.<sup>31</sup> This number, plus those who visited during the September previews, brought the total to an estimated 380,000.<sup>32</sup> Some 100,000 copies of the *Improvement Era* special temple issue and 4,300 copies of the Book of Mormon were sold, and 400,000 missionary tracts were handed out.<sup>33</sup>

During the four weeks of the open house, over 4,000 Oakland-area Church members served as “guides, hostesses, monitors, parking attendants, etc. They [had] been under assignment in the number of 400 each day with many of them coming from long distances to take their turn in serving the public.” Each night, twenty-five individuals, typically from the local singles ward, came to “clean up the grounds and ready things for the next day’s throngs.”<sup>34</sup> Following the extended open house, the Church closed the temple to clean up and prepare for the dedication ceremonies. This placed even more pressure on the cleaning crew, creating a second last-minute scramble. But when the time came, everything was in order for the dedication.

Henry A. Smith, editor of the *Church News* who had come from Salt Lake City to cover the temple’s dedication, wrote the following:

The beauty of the new Oakland Temple has to be seen to be believed. Our first view of it last week, seen at night with lighting effects, was really breath-taking. The temple stands on the hillside, sentinel-like in its monumental majesty. It is an impressive landmark in the daytime, but it shines forth in all its splendor at night when it can be seen from ships at sea, from almost every point of land in the bay area and from the planes coming into and out of the busy San Francisco International Airport.<sup>35</sup>

## The Temple Dedicated

The dedications of these sacred houses of the Lord have been eagerly anticipated spiritual events. When a temple is dedicated, it is specifically given to the Lord, whose house it is to be. In Old Testament

times, temple dedications were special occasions. When the tabernacle of Moses was completed, “a cloud covered the tent of the congregation, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.” These manifestations of God’s accepting presence were so powerful that even “Moses was not able to enter” (Exodus 40:34–35).

The dedication of Solomon’s Temple in the promised land was a similar spiritual occasion. Countless animals were sacrificed as the ark was taken into the temple and placed in the Holy of Holies. Once again a cloud of the Lord’s glory “filled the house of the Lord” (1 Kings 8:4–11). In his prayer of dedication, King Solomon petitioned, “The Lord our God be with us, as he was with our fathers: let him not leave us, nor forsake us: That he may incline our hearts unto him, to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and

The beauty of the temple at night.  
Courtesy of Hugh Harline.



his statutes, and his judgments, which he commanded our fathers” (8:57–58). At the conclusion of the days of dedication, the people left—as would the faithful in our own day—“joyful and glad of heart for all the goodness that the Lord had done” (8:66). The dedication of the first Latter-day Saint temple at Kirtland in 1836 similarly climaxed a season of remarkable spiritual outpourings.<sup>36</sup>

Temple dedications have been scheduled in different ways over the years. The pattern of having more than one dedicatory session was established at the outset in Kirtland; a second session was scheduled four days afterward for those who could not get into the initial dedicatory meeting. The Salt Lake Temple’s thirty-one dedicatory sessions extended over nineteen days. Proceedings of the Los Angeles Temple’s dedicatory sessions were carried by television from the large upper assembly room into several other rooms inside the temple. The Oakland Temple dedication would be the first carried to a separate building by closed-circuit television.

In Oakland, the six dedicatory sessions would extend over three days, beginning on Tuesday, November 17, 1964. Sessions would begin at 9:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. on Tuesday and Wednesday, and at 9:00 a.m. and 1:00 p.m. on Thursday so that Church officials could return to Salt Lake City that evening. Special tours of the temple were conducted each of the three evenings at 5:00 for the benefit of those who had traveled long distances, who had not been able to participate in the open house, and who had dedication recommends. During each session, 1,200 persons could be seated in the temple itself. To attend they would need to have a special dedication recommend issued by their local ecclesiastical leaders.<sup>37</sup> Another 5,000 could view the proceedings in the adjoining Interstake Center and chapel by means of closed-circuit television. Recommends were not required in these overflow areas.<sup>38</sup>

## Stakes Assigned for Each Dedication

### November 17, 1964

- *Morning session:* San Francisco, Santa Rosa, San Mateo, Redwood
- *Afternoon session:* Sacramento, Sacramento North, American River, Gridley, Redding, Tacoma, Salem

**November 18, 1964**

- *Morning session:* Palo Alto, San Jose, San Jose West, Monterey Bay, Cascade, Puget Sound, Corvallis
- *Afternoon session:* San Joaquin, Fresno, Fresno East, Napa, Klamath, Willamette

**November 19, 1964**

- *Morning session:* Walnut Creek, Concord, Reno, Reno North, Seattle, Seattle North, Seattle East
- *Afternoon session:* Hayward, Oakland-Berkeley, San Leandro, Portland, Portland West, Columbia River, Columbia River North

General committee arrangements were under the chairmanship of President Stone of the Oakland-Berkeley Stake, with committee members temple president Delbert F. Wright, President Prince Ronnow of the Reno Stake, and President Dallas Tueller of the Fresno Stake, with Paul E. Warnick as executive secretary to the committee. Subcommittee chairs included President Irvan G. Derrick, San Francisco Stake, publicity and press; President Kenneth D. Jensen, Walnut Creek Stake, parking and crowd control; President Ted E. Madsen, Concord Stake, interstake and ward buildings; and President Milton P. Ream, San Leandro Stake, first aid. Elder Curtis Bybee supervised sound and closed-circuit television. Music for each session was under the direction of the participating stakes.<sup>39</sup>

Finally, the long-anticipated day arrived. It was sunny and there was a brisk breeze blowing. All the General Authorities who were not out of the country on assignment traveled to the Bay Area for the temple's dedication, as did other leaders from Church headquarters.<sup>40</sup>

On this occasion, Oakland's mayor, John C. Houlihan, "was very proud" to welcome the new temple to his community, indicating that he was "pleased that it attracted so many visitors during public viewing." The mayor emphasized that he "look[ed] forward to an increase in the growth of the Mormon Church in this area," affirming that "every Mormon I know has made a stable and material contribution to society."<sup>41</sup>



## President McKay's Health

As the date for the Oakland Temple's dedication had drawn closer, a major concern was the health of President McKay. Customarily, the President of the Church offers the dedicatory prayer and delivers a brief sermon, but this had not always been the case. The Nauvoo Temple was dedicated by others when President Brigham Young was leading the pioneers across the plains. Then later, perhaps because of poor health, Brigham Young delegated the responsibility of offering the dedicatory prayer at the St. George Temple to one of his counselors. Thus there was a precedent if President McKay was not able to officiate at the Oakland dedication. At this time, he was in his nineties and was visibly losing physical strength though maintaining mental acuity. Church members in general were aware of his decline, but most were not aware of the serious nature of his health issues.

President McKay's biographers provide the most complete account of his health prior to the dedication.<sup>42</sup> He had suffered a stroke a year before in November 1963. He did not suffer this setback without complaint. "It makes me angry I have to drag my feet," he wrote.<sup>43</sup> Then in August 1964 he suffered a second stroke, just two and a half weeks after his surprise visit to Oakland. As a result of this "mild coronary thrombosis," he was hospitalized on August 19.<sup>44</sup> He was placed on oxygen for several days while recuperating. The prophet had to watch the October 1964 general conference on television from his apartment. This was the first time he had missed a conference due to illness since becoming an Apostle in 1906 and the first time that his address was read by one of his sons.<sup>45</sup>

Because the stroke had seriously impaired his speech and mobility, President McKay's colleagues assumed he would be unable to travel to Oakland and that they would have to act in his stead to dedicate the temple. However, as the event grew nearer he made no such assignments, leaving both family and colleagues in a state of anxious uncertainty. Finally, against medical advice, he decided to go to the dedication at Oakland himself. His health had improved due to fasting and prayer and a priesthood blessing by Presidents Hugh B.



Brown, N. Eldon Tanner, and Joseph Fielding Smith, but he was still unable to talk smoothly or stand unassisted.<sup>46</sup>

President McKay flew from Salt Lake on Monday, November 16, 1964. His son Edward, had packed oxygen and medicine for the flight. The President appeared at a press conference that evening, but it was hard for him to speak, and a decision still had not been reached about whether he would address the dedication audiences the following three days.

At the first dedicatory session, President McKay was brought into the celestial room in a wheelchair. “As I entered the Celestial Room,” he later recorded in his journal, “tears welled up in my eyes as I looked around at those gathered there in the rooms on either side of the pulpit, and at the Choir members dressed in white. I knew then that our prayers had been answered, and I felt grateful that the Lord had granted me the privilege of being in attendance at the dedication of this beautiful Temple.”<sup>47</sup> He asked President Stone to conduct the service. After several speakers had participated, President Stone stunned the congregation when he announced, “We shall all now have the pleasure of hearing from President McKay.” President McKay’s son Lawrence and daughter-in-law Mildred looked at each other in disbelief as the prophet was assisted to the pulpit, which he grasped with both hands for support. As he began to speak, “His enunciation became as clear as it had been ten years before,” Lawrence observed. Mildred, with tears in her eyes, whispered, “We’re witnessing a miracle!” Members of the Twelve were also weeping.<sup>48</sup> After concluding his remarks, President McKay offered the dedicatory prayer. “I stood at the pulpit for over an hour at this time,” President McKay recorded, “and I knew that the Lord had blessed me as I stood there without any support of any kind.”<sup>49</sup> The prophet remarked later that when he began to speak, he could feel the power that strengthened his vocal cords.<sup>50</sup>

Elder ElRay L. Christiansen, one of the General Authorities attending the dedication, noted the same thing: “I’m sure that you agree with me that the prayers of the Saints have been answered with the presence and participation here of our great leader and prophet David O. McKay, when it appeared to some that he might not be able to be

Opposite: Celestial room in the Oakland Temple. Originally printed in *Improvement Era*. Courtesy of Craig Stewart.

Opposite: Access to the Temple via Freeways. Map created by Think Spatial BYU.

present. It seems to me that with each successive session he gathers strength and becomes more vigorous and more impressive than ever.”<sup>51</sup> Elder Hinckley testified, “We witnessed a miracle as the mantle of the prophet rested so unmistakably upon him who has been ordained to lead us. I am satisfied that our Father in heaven buoyed up and directed and inspired our President, our leader, and our prophet.”<sup>52</sup>

Members who attended the dedication were also impressed with what they had witnessed. Douglas and Mildred Lindley, a couple from nearby Orinda, were watching the dedication from the Interstake Center balcony. They were quite aware of President McKay’s health and were concerned that he would not have enough strength to participate: “It seemed like a miracle, the fact that he was able to give the dedicatory prayers so well.”<sup>53</sup> Also watching from the balcony, Myrth Van Vliet affirmed, “President McKay had a very strong presence at the dedication. Maybe not physically, but I definitely felt his strength and would not have guessed that he was having health problems.”<sup>54</sup> Many others had not been aware of any concerns about President McKay’s health but were simply impressed with his prophetic image.<sup>55</sup>

Eugene Hilton, who had played such a key role in obtaining the site for the temple, remembered an intimate moment with President McKay at the dedication. “Although President McKay was 92 and very feeble when he dedicated the Temple, and we were instructed not to attempt to shake hands with him he, nevertheless, beckoned me to him and held my hand in both of his.”<sup>56</sup>

## Dedication Talks

With so many top Church leaders available to speak, the temple dedication resembled sessions of general conference. The text of their talks filled the February 1965 issue of the Church’s *Improvement Era* magazine.

President Stone, who conducted the first dedicatory session, was also invited to speak. He expressed appreciation to those who had played roles in bringing the dream of a temple to reality. He recalled how when the Interstake Center was built, there were no adequate roads into the area, but that since that time new freeways had made access much more convenient. “If we had built the city around the



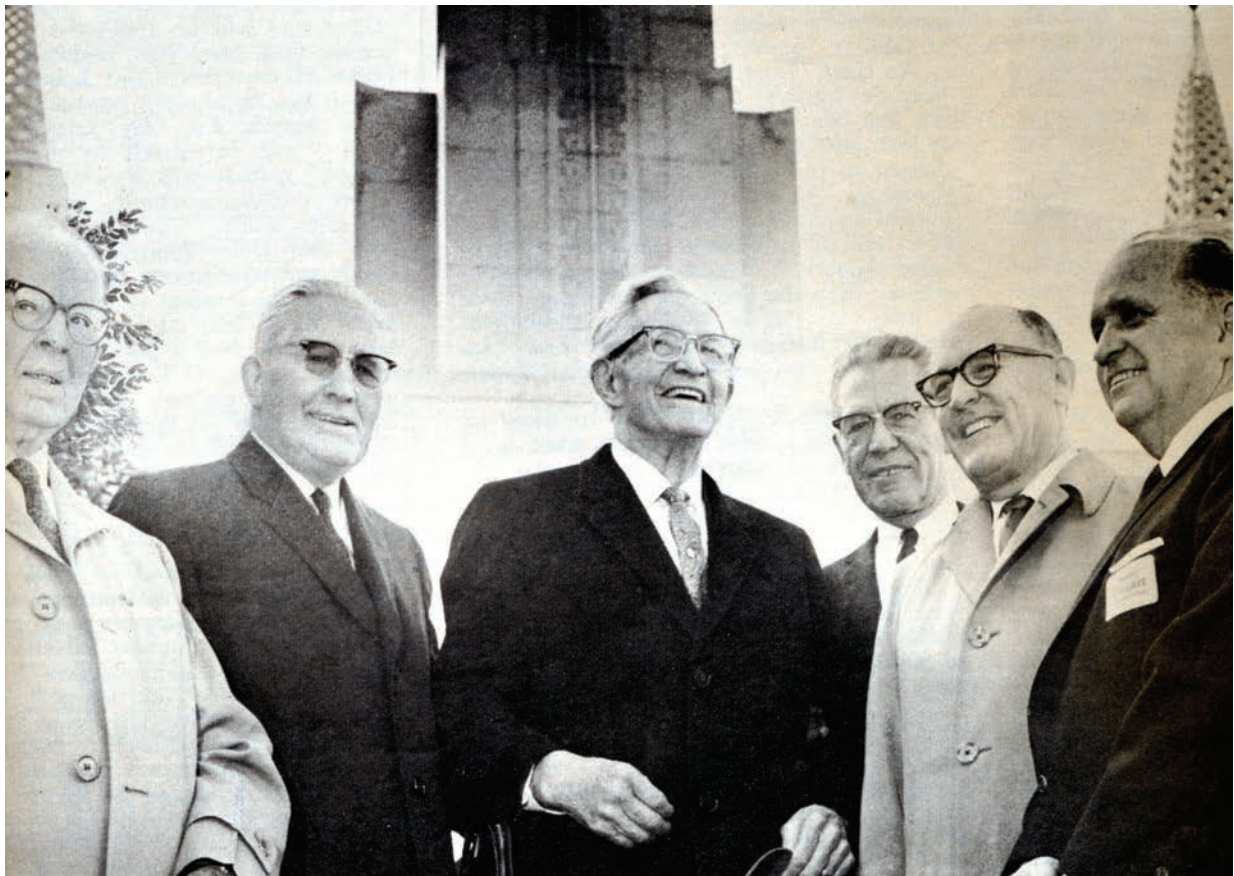
## Access to the Temple via Freeways



center, acquired it when Oakland was first started, and then gradually built the city in the area, we couldn't have done a better job," he concluded. "We are sure that our Heavenly Father has been instrumental in all of this."<sup>57</sup> He praised architect Harold W. Burton: "It is through his vision, his wonderful ability, and his tenacity that we have the most beautiful site in all the world. . . . He held out for only the best when some of the rest of us wanted to settle for a little less." He recalled that Arthur Price, though in his nineties, "was from the bottom to the top of this temple every day during the time it was being constructed to inspect everything that went into this building." Stone described contractor Jack Wheatley as "a loyal, faithful Latter-day Saint with a strong testimony of the gospel."<sup>58</sup>

Delbert F. Wright, the recently appointed president of the new temple, also expressed appreciation for those who had built it. "With the completion of this building, a new dimension has come into the moral and spiritual lives of the people in this area," he insisted.

Joseph Fielding Smith, Hugh B. Brown, President McKay, N. Eldon Tanner, O. Leslie Stone, and Delbert F. Wright at the temple dedication. Courtesy of *Church News*.



“I know because I have talked to many of them.” He testified that those who visited the temple with honest hearts left with a positive feeling. Then, speaking more especially about the Saints themselves, he asserted that “one must be free of sin to have a real, burning testimony, and this is what the new dimension begins to let these [visitors] glimpse.” He then shared a poem that had been written by Virginia Brown of Oakland, entitled, “A Temple Is Built”:

A Temple does not rise alone;  
 Human hands must lay the stone.  
 Human hands must touch the soil,  
 And labor with unceasing toil.  
 Gradually the stones rise high  
 And golden spires reach toward the sky.  
 The workers finally stand aside  
 And gaze upon their work with pride.  
 What once mere rock and stone concealed,  
 A place of beauty stands revealed.  
 The stones are laid, the work is done.  
 Within, God’s work has just begun.<sup>59</sup>

Elder Thomas S. Monson of the Quorum of the Twelve compared the Oakland Temple on the Pacific Coast to the Statue of Liberty, which stands at the entrance to the New York harbor:

The world will refer to this imposing edifice as the Oakland Temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. People will marvel at the beauty of this stately building, the well-manicured lawns and shrubs which adorn the grounds, and the lofty spires thrusting upward to the heavens. But to those assembled here today, who know and appreciate the true purpose of the temple, we could say to the world, “That famous Statue of Liberty which marks the entrance to America’s Atlantic port may depict and symbolize the opportunities and blessings of this life, whereas this holy house brings the hope of eternal opportunities, eternal blessings, and eternal life.”<sup>60</sup>

Hugh B. Brown, First Counselor in the First Presidency, affirmed: “Whenever the Lord has had a people on the earth, temples and temple ordinances have been the crowning feature of their worship. His people are always commanded to build temples for the glory, honor, and endowment of the Saints.” Because temples are substantial and beautiful structures, President Brown continued, in them “we shall have the opportunity under the most favorable physical and spiritual surroundings to reappraise our concepts, to re-examine the basis of our faith, and to rededicate our lives to the work of establishing the kingdom of God.”<sup>61</sup> Elder Hinckley expressed a similar feeling: “I want to say that this temple is not only a thing of beauty and a joy to those who see it. It is a living expression of a testimony” that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, that His gospel has been restored, and “that life is eternal, that love is eternal, that the family may be eternal; that we are our Father’s children to whom he has offered that which he would have us have for our blessing, our happiness, our salvation, and our exaltation.”<sup>62</sup>

President Brown provided an interesting perspective on the place of mortality: “Here [in the temple] we are reminded that this life is but preparative to continuing life—in a spiritual sense it is a prenatal existence preparatory to birth into a celestialized realm of eternally becoming, unfolding, progressing into something ever more about to be.” The scriptures teach that these blessings come through obedience to the laws that govern the celestial kingdom (see D&C 88:22).<sup>63</sup>

Elder Christiansen, an Assistant to the Twelve who supervised the work done in temples, referred to the Lord’s assertion that obedience to the celestial law is also required for establishing Zion in preparation for the Lord’s Second Coming (see D&C 105:5). He then added:

That to me is a highly significant truth. We cannot prepare the kingdom for the coming of the Lord unless we have learned to live here according to the laws that operate in the celestial kingdom. And where are these laws taught? In no other place but in what I call the ‘university of the Lord,’ where the higher ordinances of the priesthood, the ordinances that pertain to celestial life are expounded and are received, and I hope are lived by those who come to the temple.<sup>64</sup>



Several speakers spoke about the importance of the family. Specifically, Elder Monson testified, “An appreciation for the temple endowment and the sealing ordinances will bring the members of our families closer together, and there will be quickened within each family member a desire to make available these same blessings to our loved ones who have gone beyond.”<sup>65</sup>

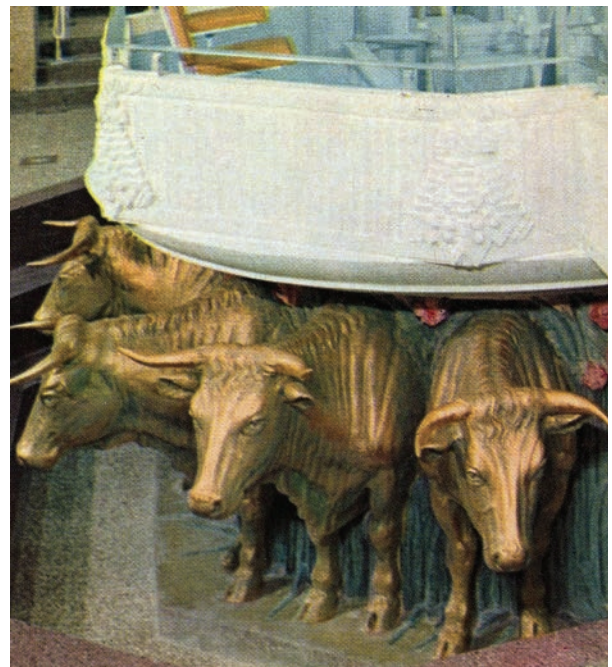
Also emphasizing the key role of the family, Elder Harold B. Lee of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles wondered:

Can you believe that when parents have passed beyond the veil that then is the only time when parents should have their hearts turned to their children and children to their parents? As I sat here thinking about the remarks of the brethren, I’d have you consider seriously whether or not that binding with your family will be secure if you have waited until you’ve passed beyond the veil before your hearts then yearn for your children whom you have neglected to help along the way. Maybe it is time for us to think of turning the hearts of parents to children now while living in order that, after they are gone to the beyond, there might be that bond between parents and children which will last beyond death. I think it is a very real principle, and we should consider it.<sup>66</sup>

Elder Lee also addressed a frequently asked question when he explained that temple ordinances are sacred and not “secret, for anyone may come here if he is properly recommended. The whole world may come if they will accept the gospel and live according to its precepts; every soul may come into this house if he becomes a worthy church member.”<sup>67</sup>

Those attending the temple dedication received several challenges. President N. Eldon Tanner, Second Counselor in the First Presidency, pleaded, “I appeal to you, my brothers and sisters to accept this responsibility and this great privilege [of temple service] and enjoy the blessings that are sure to come. May I ask you today to covenant with the Lord that you will attend the temple at least once a month, if you are in an area where this is possible.”

Baptismal font in the Oakland Temple; used for baptisms for the dead. Originally printed in *Improvement Era*. Courtesy of Craig Stewart.



But he insisted that “to go to the temple and do the endowment work is not sufficient. Now, if you are so far away that you cannot attend the temple regularly, be active in seeking out all the genealogy of your progenitors so that the work may be done for them.”<sup>68</sup> Elder Howard W. Hunter indicated that he was “greatly impressed” and concurred with the challenges given by President Tanner, and then he concluded, “We are blessed by attending the temple service, but the whole blessing comes from our own research coupled with it.”<sup>69</sup>

Elder Marion G. Romney of the Twelve also built on President Tanner’s challenge: “God grant that we may be worthy to stand in his presence when we come here. To come unworthily into this temple and receive our endowments will not prove to be a blessing to us. Every soul when he comes here should be at peace in his own heart; his feelings should be at peace toward every other person in the world; he should have no hard feelings toward anyone.”<sup>70</sup> Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, President of the Quorum of the Twelve, agreed: “No unclean thing should be permitted to enter into this building; and when we can move through the doors, we should come in the spirit of faith, humility, and determination, not only to benefit ourselves, but also to bless and present the blessings of exaltation to our loved ones who have gone on before.”<sup>71</sup>

Elder Tanner issued yet another challenge: “My brethren and sisters, I was pleased with what Brother Lee said about drawing the heart of the fathers to the children and the children to the fathers, and I would like to go on with what he said there. It is your privilege and your responsibility, and it would be a great blessing to your children, if you would start today to let them know why the temples are built and that they are built under the direction of God and for a certain purpose, and that no unclean thing can enter these walls.”<sup>72</sup>

## The Dedicatory Prayer

In contrast to prayers generally offered in Latter-day Saint meetings, which tend to be brief, dedicatory prayers for temples are usually long. They may express gratitude, often refer to matters of current general concern or unique local circumstances, and typically include

petitions for specific blessings. The dedicatory prayer of the Kirtland Temple was given by a revelation now in the Church's Doctrine and Covenants (see D&C 109). The Prophet Joseph Smith prayed "that thy glory may rest down upon thy people, and upon this thy house, which we now dedicate to thee, that it may be sanctified and consecrated to be holy, and that thy holy presence may be continually in this house" (D&C 109:12). Subsequent temple dedicatory prayers have included ideas similar to those revealed by the Lord at Kirtland. They are written ahead of time and then read, perhaps so the wording can be the same in each dedicatory session.

President McKay introduced the dedicatory prayer for the Oakland Temple by saying, "It is now my privilege to represent you, and all the Church in the giving of your efforts, in giving what you have produced to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ for the glory of his works."

After addressing our Heavenly Father, President McKay petitioned, "Help us to free our minds from idle thoughts, and our souls from selfish and envious feelings . . . grant unto us thy guidance and thy Spirit . . . may we know that the channel of communication between thee and us is now open."

The prophet then expressed gratitude for the role of Jesus Christ as the Savior of the world and that the fullness of His gospel has been returned to the earth in these latter days, beginning with the appearance of the Father and the Son to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Speaking of the Restored Church, he continued, "We are grateful beyond expression for its influence through the world today. Extend this influence, O Father, that peace may soon be established upon the earth."

"We are grateful for this land of America," the prophet continued. "The freedom vouchsafed by the Constitution of the United States" made the Restoration of the gospel possible. Therefore the prophet pleaded, "O Father, may the American people not forget thee!"

The prophet then turned to the events that had led up to building the Oakland Temple, beginning with Brigham Young's prophecy that "in the process of time, the shores of the Pacific may yet be overlooked from the Temple of the Lord." He also recalled Elder George Albert Smith's prophecy that one day "a Temple would surmount the East Bay hills, one that would be visible as a beacon to ships as they

Next page: View of the Oakland Temple overlooking the bay. Courtesy of Matt Granz.









entered the Golden Gate from the far flung nations of the earth.” He acknowledged that the faithful men appointed to select the temple site “were inspired of thee to choose this glorious site upon which this temple now stands. We are grateful that through thy divine intervention the site was made available.”

President McKay acknowledged that while the Savior’s body lay in the tomb, He “preached to the spirits in prison, . . . evidencing that those who have passed beyond the veil must also hear the word of God and obey the eternal principles of life and salvation.” He therefore petitioned that we may all realize “that only by obedience to eternal principles and ordinances of the gospel of Jesus Christ may loved ones who died without baptism be permitted the glorious privilege of entrance into thy kingdom.”

President McKay then dedicated the Oakland Temple “for the sacred purposes for which it has been erected.” He dedicated it “as a house of prayer, a house of praise, a house of worship, a house of inspiration and communion with thee.” He asked the Lord to accept the temple and to “protect it from earthquakes, hurricanes, tempestuous storms or other devastating holocausts. May the baptismal font, the ordinance rooms, and especially the sealing rooms be kept holy, that thy Spirit may be ever present to comfort and to inspire.” He petitioned blessings on all the components of the building and upon those who would be assigned to care for them. He prayed that the grounds might be beautiful and that “thy Spirit dwell in the midst thereof, that this plot of ground may be a place of rest and peace for holy meditation and inspired thought.” Because the Lord’s Spirit “will not dwell in unclean tabernacles,” the prophet prayed, “Let no unclean person or thing ever enter herein.” He continued by praying that “even people who pass the grounds, or view the temple from afar, may lift their eyes from groveling things of sordid life and look up to thee and thy providence.

“Now, O God, our Heavenly Eternal Father,” the prayer concluded, “the faithful membership of thy Church through love for thee and thy children, have erected to thee by tithes and offerings this holy house in which shall be performed ordinances and ceremonies essential to the happiness, salvation, and exaltation of thy children

living in mortality and in the spirit world. Accept of our offering, hallow it by thy Holy Spirit, and protect and guard it by thy power.”

As the Saints were dedicating the temple, President McKay noted that they should rededicate their own lives to living the gospel and serving others.<sup>73</sup>

## The Sacred Hosanna Shout

Temple dedicatory prayers are followed by the sacred “Hosanna Shout.” It is an expression of joyous praise. The word “hosanna” literally means “save, we pray.” In ancient times, this shout was usually given out of doors and included the waving of leafy tree branches. On the occasion of the Savior’s triumphal entry into Jerusalem, for example, the faithful waved palm fronds as they shouted “Hosanna” in praise to Him (see John 12:13). In modern times, white handkerchiefs have been substituted for tree branches, as the Hosanna Shout typically is given indoors. It has been a regular part of every temple dedication and has been rendered on a few other occasions—including the 1892 placing of the Salt Lake Temple capstone; the 1930 centennial general conference; and the 2000 dedication of the Conference Center, which is adjacent to Temple Square in Salt Lake City.

While waving the handkerchiefs high above their heads, the congregation shouts in unison, “Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna, to God and the Lamb. Amen, amen, and amen” (see D&C 109:79–80). These words are reflected in the chorus of “The Spirit of God,” a hymn which is regularly sung immediately following the shout at temple dedications.

This shout was an important part of the dedicatory proceedings at Oakland. Doug and Mildred Lindley remembered, “They told us to bring white handkerchiefs to participate in the services. They had been used in the dedicatory service in the Kirtland and Nauvoo Temples.” Seeing hundreds of white handkerchiefs waved in unison as the participants repeated, “Hosanna, hosanna, hosanna, to God and the Lamb” was a “very moving experience” for them.<sup>74</sup>

## A Special Occasion

The dedication of the Oakland Temple was one that many would not soon forget. President McKay welcomed an “unseen, but . . . real, audience.” He told the assembled group that all the former prophets were present in the room. President McKay spoke slowly and named each one individually. Because the assembled group also included those who would become Presidents of the Church in the future, the dedication was witnessed by all the prophets of the latter days (at least up through President Thomas S. Monson).<sup>75</sup>

As Claude and Myrth Van Vliet sat in the balcony of the Interstake Center watching the dedication by television, they remembered their earlier visits to Temple Hill. Myrth notes, “We went out to the land the temple was going to be built on with some friends. It was very windswept. I could not even imagine there was going to be anything on the property, let alone a temple.” They and thousands other Northern California Saints were grateful that their dreams of a temple were now realized. A new chapter in their spiritual lives was about to begin as the temple went into operation.

## Notes

1. “Dedication Date Set for Oakland Temple,” *Church News*, May 23, 1964, 3.
2. “Leader Named for Oakland Temple,” *Church News*, January 4, 1964, 7.
3. Nell Smith, “Counselors Named for Oakland Temple,” *Church News*, May 30, 1964, 4.
4. Nell Smith, “Pres. McKay Pays Surprise Visit to Oakland,” *Church News*, August 8, 1964, 3.
5. Smith, “Surprise Visit,” 3.
6. Smith, “Surprise Visit,” 3.
7. Smith, “Surprise Visit,” 3.
8. Henry A. Smith, “As We See It . . . From the Church Editor’s Desk: Obligation Paid,” *Church News*, August 8, 1964, 5.
9. Grace Hopkins of Richmond Ward, quoted in Evelyn Candland, *An Ensign to the Nations*, 67.



10. O. Leslie Stone, "The Oakland Temple in the Making," *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 110.
11. *Messenger*, November 1964, 6.
12. O. Leslie Stone, Memorandum #64-#15 to all Stake Presidents. August 26, 1964, copy in possession of Richard Cowan; see also "News Notes at Home and Abroad: Temple Open for Students," *Church News*, September 5, 1964, 2.
13. Lou and Barbara Helvey, interview by Robert G. Larson, n.d., in possession of interviewer.
14. "Local Leaders View Oakland Temple," *Church News*, September 26, 1964, 3; see also "Dedication Date Set for Oakland Temple," *Church News*, May 23, 1964, 3.
15. Nell Smith, "Temple Gate Opens to Civic Leaders," *Church News*, October 3, 1964, 12.
16. "Local Leaders," *Church News*, September 26, 1964, 3; see also "Dedication Date Set for Oakland Temple," *Church News*, May 23, 1964, 3.
17. "New Temple Opened to Public View," *Church News*, September 19, 1964, 3.
18. Nell Smith, "Civic Leaders," *Church News*, October 3, 1964, 12.
19. Church Information Service News Release, November 1964; this official source stated the temple's cost as five million dollars, but many newspaper articles at the time used the figure of seven million dollars.
20. Stone, "Oakland Temple in the Making," 110.
21. Nell Smith, "Oakland Temple To Be Open To Public For An Extra Week," *Church News*, October 24, 1964, 3.
22. Smith, "Oakland Temple To Be Open To Public," 3. See also Bill Rose, "Throngs Awed by New Temple," *Oakland Tribune*, October 15, 1964, 13.
23. Gordon B. Hinckley, "The Dawning of a Brighter Day," *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 114.
24. Mary Jane Johnson, note to Eunice Knecht, October 10, 1964, copy in possession of the author.
25. Henry A. Smith, "As We See It . . . From the Church Editor's Desk," *Church News*, October 24, 1964, 5.
26. Eunice Knecht, statement to Richard O. Cowan, December 8, 2013.
27. "Comments of Visitors," *Church News*, November 14, 1964, 5.
28. Delbert Wright manuscript, 67-68.
29. Reed H. Chase, *Think on These Things* (Orem, UT: Noble, 1983), front pages biographic sketch by Dolores Chase Ritchie.

30. Nell Smith, "Oakland Temple To Be Open To Public," 3.
31. "347,000 Visitors Shown Through Oakland Temple," *Church News*, November 7, 1964, 3.
32. Delbert F. Wright, "Building the Oakland Temple," 1979, draft booklet, Oakland Stake Archives, 66.
33. Stone, "Oakland Temple in the Making," 110.
34. Smith, "Oakland Temple To Be Open To Public," 4.
35. Henry A. Smith, "As We See It . . . From the Church Editor's Desk," *Church News*, November 28, 1964, 5.
36. See Chapter 2.
37. Henry A. Smith, "President McKay to Dedicate Oakland Temple," *Church News*, November 14, 1964, 3.
38. Smith, "Surprise Visit," *Church News*, August 8, 1964, 3.
39. *Messenger*, October 1964, 2
40. Henry A. Smith, "Impressive Rites Dedicate Oakland Temple," *Deseret News*, November 21, 1964, 3.
41. Bill Rose, "Mormons Flock to City For Temple Dedication," *Oakland Tribune*, November 17, 1964.
42. Gregory A. Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 385–89.
43. Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 386.
44. "News Notes at Home and Abroad: Pres. McKay Goes Home," *Church News*, September 5, 1964, 2.
45. Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 387.
46. Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 388.
47. Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 389.
48. David L. McKay, "Remembering Father and Mother, President David O. McKay and Sister Emma Ray Riggs McKay," *Ensign*, August 1984, 40.
49. Prince and Wright, *David O. McKay*, 389.
50. Marba C. Josephson, "Oakland Temple Dedication," *Improvement Era*, January 1965, 18
51. ElRay L. Christiansen, "That My People May Be Taught More Perfectly," *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 130.
52. Hinckley, "The Dawning of a Brighter Day," 114.

53. Douglas and Mildred Lindley, interview by Robert G. Larsen, May 18, 2011, in possession of interviewer.
54. Claude and Myrth Van Vliet, interview by Robert G. Larsen, March 29, 2011, in possession of interviewer.
55. Julius “Lou” Helvey and Barbara Ellis Helvey, interview by Robert G. Larsen, January 11, 2011, in possession of the interviewer.
56. Eugene Hilton, “My Second Estate: The Life of a Mormon” (Oakland, CA: Hilton Family, 1968), 233.
57. Stone, “Oakland Temple in the Making,” 109.
58. Stone, “Oakland Temple in the Making,” 110.
59. Delbert F. Wright, “Appreciation,” *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 108.
60. Thomas S. Monson, “In This Holy House,” *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 136.
61. Hugh B. Brown, “The Second Coming,” *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 115.
62. Hinckley, “The Dawning of a Brighter Day,” 114.
63. Brown, “The Second Coming,” 115.
64. Christiansen, “That My People May Be Taught More Perfectly,” 131.
65. Thomas S. Monson, “In This Holy House,” 137.
66. Harold B. Lee, “Preparing to Meet the Lord,” *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 124.
67. Lee, “Preparing to Meet the Lord,” 123.
68. N. Eldon Tanner, “Seek Out Your Dead,” *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 127.
69. Howard W. Hunter, “The Oakland Temple—Culmination of History,” *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 142.
70. Marion G. Romney, “The House of the Lord,” *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 120.
71. Joseph Fielding Smith, “Saviors on Mount Zion,” *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 112.
72. Tanner, “Seek Out Your Dead,” 127.
73. Marba C. Josephson, “Oakland Temple Dedication,” *Improvement Era*, January 1965, 18–21. For the full text, see appendix G.
74. Douglas and Mildred Lindley, interview by Robert G. Larsen, May 18, 2011, in possession of interviewer.
75. David O. McKay, “In the Process of Time . . .,” *Improvement Era*, February 1965, 107; Bruce Smith to Robert Larsen, March 10, 2011, copy in possession of Richard O. Cowan.