

# History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Manti Utah



The Manti Utah Temple is the product of faith in Jesus Christ, devoted sacrifice and consecration of time, talents and worldly wealth to construct a house of the Lord where Latter-day Saints may be endowed with heavenly power and where families can be united for eternity. Designed by architect William Folsom and originally dedicated in 1888, the temple was constructed in 11 years during a period of poverty and persecution, manifesting the significance of sacred temple ordinances to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.<sup>1</sup>

Before the arrival of Latter-day Saints, bands of Ute, Paiute and other Numic-speaking peoples lived and hunted in the valley along the San Pitch River in the 19th century.<sup>2</sup> At the invitation of Ute Chief Wakara,<sup>3</sup> Brigham Young sent a group of 224 men, women and children to settle in the Sanpete Valley in 1849.<sup>4</sup> They first camped on the south side of the promontory where the Manti temple would eventually stand. The settlers faced harsh conditions during their first winter, but their ingenuity and help from Wakara's band kept them from a grim demise. Sadly, cultural misunderstandings and greed eventually led to bloody episodes that cost the lives of tribe members and settlers.<sup>5</sup> While most Utes relocated to the Uintah reservation in northeastern Utah, a small farming community of Ute Latter-day Saints—known as Indianola—remained in Thistle Valley until around 1900.<sup>6</sup>

By 1870, the settler population in Sanpete Valley had increased to over 6,700 residents,<sup>7</sup> and by 1890 it exceeded 13,000.<sup>8</sup> The vast majority of these settlers were Danish and other Scandinavian Latter-day Saints who were sent to the area by Brigham Young.

Brigham Young first mentioned plans to build a temple in Sanpete County at a conference in Ephraim in January 1873.<sup>9</sup> At the time, temples were already under construction in Salt Lake City and St. George. Plans to build the Logan Utah Temple would be announced three years later, in October 1876.

Returning from dedicating the St. George Utah Temple in 1877, Brigham Young stopped in Manti to dedicate the site for the temple there. He traveled with William Folsom, the architect of the St. George Tabernacle and assistant to Church architect Truman O. Angell.<sup>10</sup> During this time, Young described to Folsom the interior plan for temples in Manti and Logan, and Folsom prepared drawings.<sup>11</sup> After Brigham Young's death, his successor, John Taylor, appointed Folsom as the architect and construction superintendent for the Manti temple.<sup>12</sup>

According to Folsom, Brigham Young intended "to have the Manti and Logan Temple alike, that is the inside, or plans of convenience of performing the labours therein."<sup>13</sup> This improved interior layout allowed participants in the endowment ceremony<sup>14</sup> to move through rooms sequentially without backtracking or walking through other areas of the temple. This configuration of the floor plan was so effective that only minor changes have been made to the principal patron spaces of the Manti temple over the years.

While similar in general form to the 19th-century Logan temple, the Manti temple required significant adaptation due to its unique setting atop a prominent outcropping. Folsom proportioned the towers and the building's central mass to complement the site. He departed from conventions typical of religious buildings at the time and tastefully incorporated mansard roofs and detailed stonework that accentuate the

temple's vertical dimensions. His design achieves an exquisite balance of form and detail both inside and out, reflecting the Latter-day Saints' desire to build a structure worthy to be called the "House of the Lord."<sup>15</sup>



Site preparation required extensive blasting to level the ground before the foundation could be laid. Two years after ground was broken, John Taylor presided over the cornerstone ceremony in April 1879.<sup>16</sup> Stone was initially quarried from a site north of the temple. Master stone mason Edward Parry<sup>17</sup> oversaw both the quarry operation and the execution of Folsom's elegant design.

By 1884, the roof was completed, and interior work could begin. Most of the wood was harvested from local forests and cut and dried in local sawmills. Painted interior trim and moldings were milled onsite in a workshop powered by a small steam engine. Hardwood trim elements were imported from the eastern United States and installed onsite.

The cast-iron basin and oxen for the baptismal font were fabricated in Salt Lake City using the same patterns as those used for the font in the St. George temple. The font pieces were transported south by rail for most of the journey and then hauled by wagon to Manti, arriving in April 1886. After 11 years of consecrated labor in a challenging, remote location, construction of the temple was completed in April 1888. The following month, on May 17, 1888, Wilford Woodruff offered the dedicatory prayer in a private session. The general dedicatory services were held May 21-23, where Apostle Lorenzo Snow read the dedicatory prayer.<sup>18</sup> George Q. Cannon, First Counselor in the First Presidency, reflected feelings expressed by many when

he said, "I have felt the influence of the presence of the Lord in this house. May the Spirit of God fill our hearts with the testimony of Jesus."<sup>19</sup>

Changes to the temple have been relatively minor over the years. William Folsom's original designs remain dominant today. The annex was enlarged in 1924 and again in 1935 to add the chapel, an improved heating system, and a dining room. In 1949, 1956 and 1958 the entrances to the annex were altered and the annex was enlarged to include dressing rooms. Additional locker rooms were added in 1964. At the same time, the arches to the east of the temple were filled in and a tunnel was added for utilities.

The most significant renovation occurred in 1982. The ordinance rooms were refurbished, and an elevator was added to the east of the celestial room. In addition, a separate baptistry entrance was added and the rooms surrounding the font were converted into sealing rooms. In sealing rooms, marriages are performed, "sealing" a husband and wife together for time and all eternity, not simply "until death do you part." Sealing rooms are the only place on earth where this sealing power is exercised. It is the same power given by Jesus Christ to His Apostles, promising that "whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven" (Matthew 16:19). Children born or adopted into eternal marriages may also be sealed to their families forever.



Much of the landscaping was unfinished when the temple was dedicated in 1888. The original plans for terraces were never fully realized and were finally abandoned when irrigation water was brought to the site in 1906. Stone retaining walls were constructed, and in 1907 a prominent staircase on the west side of the

temple was completed. After steady deterioration, it was removed and replaced with lawn in 1940.



The murals in the ordinance rooms constitute some of the most notable artwork inside the temple. Each mural illustrates a stage in God's plan of salvation for His children, helping Latter-day Saints better understand the answers to life's most basic questions: "Where did I come from?" "Why am I here?" and "Where do I go after this life?" At the center of this instruction is Jesus Christ and His Atonement. In these ordinance rooms, Latter-day Saints make promises with God to obey His commandments, to live the law of sacrifice, to live the gospel of Jesus Christ, to be faithful to their spouses and to be faithful to God. In making these promises with God, Latter-day Saints prepare themselves to return to the presence of God, symbolized by the celestial room.

The murals in the creation room were painted by C. C. A. Christensen. They are the only 19th-century murals that remain in the temple. They depict the Creation of the earth, beginning with scenes of erupting volcanoes in dark grey hues and progressing to verdant scenes replete with animals, including dinosaurs.

The original murals in the garden room, depicting the Garden of Eden, were painted directly on the temple's plaster walls by Christensen's friend Danquart Anthon Weggeland.<sup>20</sup> When the plaster delaminated in 1944,<sup>21</sup> canvas was applied and new murals commissioned. Joseph Everett began the new murals (on canvas) but died before completing them. Robert L. Shepherd completed them after Everett's death, continuing the pastel palette consistent with Everett's work.

The plaster on the walls of the world room was also replaced in 1946. Minerva Teichert was commissioned to create murals for the room. She completed the bulk of the work in April and May 1947, with minor additions later in 1947 and 1948.<sup>22</sup> Teichert began her narrative at the Tower of Babel and painted Old Testament figures and characters from European history in procession toward a Zion community. An indigenous chieftain in the center of the west wall identifies the American continent as a place for latter-day gathering.

Robert L. Shepherd added murals in the baptistry in 1946.<sup>23</sup> Additional scenes with scriptural quotations on the north and south walls were added by Wes Wright during the 1982 renovation. In the baptistry, Latter-day Saints perform proxy baptisms for their ancestors who were not previously baptized. This practice is mentioned in the New Testament.

Jesus Christ taught that "except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Many people have died without being baptized, while others were baptized without proper [authority](#). By performing proxy baptisms, Church members offer these blessings to deceased ancestors. We believe that these ancestors can then choose to accept or reject the [ordinances](#) performed on their behalf.



The Manti Utah Temple has served the Latter-day Saints of the Sanpete Valley for over 135 years. It is a testimony not just to the resourcefulness of the craftsmen who built it but to the faithfulness of generations who have patterned their lives on the gospel of Jesus Christ and performed sacred ordinances there.

Most of the current renovations have been to upgrade building systems and support spaces in the annex and to preserve the historic building. A beautiful new entrance and gathering space were added on the north side of the annex along with a bride and groom exit. The landscape was upgraded with new plants and trees throughout the site. A new waterproofing system was installed on the foundation wall of the east side of the building to resolve decades of water seepage into the temple.

Most interior improvements were completed in support areas of the temple. These included a new marriage waiting room, additional lockers in dressing areas and refreshed carpet, paint and furniture in selected areas of the temple. Other interior changes included updated mechanical and plumbing systems and laundry equipment.

Highly skilled art conservators meticulously restored historic murals throughout the temple. They removed varnish that was damaging C. C. A. Christensen's creation room mural. They repaired cracks in the mural by Robert

Shepherd in the garden room and cleaned the mural by Minerva Teichert in the world room. They repaired damaged canvas and plaster in the baptistry.

Construction teams also installed video projectors in instruction rooms to present the endowment ceremony through video rather than live narration. These enhancements to the Manti Utah Temple ensure that God's children will continue to receive sacred ordinances in this house of the Lord, enabling them to live with Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ and their families forever.

The newly renovated temple will be open to visitors from Thursday, March 14, through Friday, April 5, 2024. Appointments are recommended and can be made at <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/featured/manti-utah-open-house>. The upper floors of the temple are accessible only by stairways. Those with mobility concerns are welcome but will be able to view the main floor of the temple only. The temple will be rededicated on Sunday, April 21, 2024.

1. Church History Topics, "[Temple Building](#)," Gospel Library.
2. Albert C. T. Antrei and Allen D. Roberts, *A History of Sanpete County* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1999), 20–22.
3. Antrei and Roberts, *A History of Sanpete County*, 24.
4. Antrei and Roberts, *A History of Sanpete County*, 25.
5. See Howard A. Christy, "The Walker War: Defense and Conciliation as Strategy," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, vol. 47, no. 4 (Fall 1979), 404; [Saints: The Story of the Church of Jesus Christ in the Latter Days](#), vol. 2, *No Unhallowed Hand* (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2020), 191-93; Church History Topics, "[American Indians](#)," Gospel Library; John Alton Peterson, *Utah's Black Hawk War* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1998); Richard N. Holzapfel, *A History of Utah County* (Salt Lake City: Utah State Historical Society, 1999), 39-46.
6. See Indianola Ward History and Historical Reports, 1860-1925, 1936, CHL LR 4089 2, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
7. U.S. Department of the Interior, *Statistics of the Population of the United States, compiled from the Original Returns of the Ninth Census (June 1, 1870)* (Census Office, Washington, D.C., 1870), 276.
8. U.S. Department of the Interior, *Population of the United States at the Eleventh Census: 1890* (Census Office, Washington, D.C., 1870), 42.
9. Moses Franklin Farnsworth, "The History of Manti: The Manti Temple," *Sanpete Democrat* (Manti, Utah), 1900, 62.
10. See Church History Biographical Database, "[William Harrison Folsom](#)," [history.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://history.ChurchofJesusChrist.org).
11. William H. Folsom to John Taylor, May 24, 1878, CR 1 180, box 1, folder 32, Church History Library, Salt Lake City; capitalization standardized.
12. Glen R. Stubbs, "A History of the Manti Temple" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960), 27.
13. Folsom to John Taylor, May 24 1878.
14. Church History Topics, "[Temple Endowment](#)," Gospel Library.
15. Laurel Brana Blank Andrew, "The Nineteenth-century Temple Architecture of the Latter-day Saints" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 1973), 33, 256-57. See also Paul L. Anderson, "William Harrison Folsom: Pioneer Architect," *Utah Historical Quarterly*, vol. 43, no. 3 (Autumn 1975), 252-53.
16. "Manti Temple Laying the Corner Stones," *Deseret Evening News*, April 14, 1879, 3.
17. See Church History Biographical Database, "[Edward Lloyd Parry](#)," [history.ChurchofJesusChrist.org](http://history.ChurchofJesusChrist.org)
18. Church History Topics, "[Temple Dedications and Dedicatory Prayers](#)," Gospel Library.
19. "Dedication," *Manti Home Sentinel*, May 30, 1888.
20. William Folsom to John Taylor, April 6, 1886, CR 1 180, box 15, folder 24, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.
21. Dorris R. Dant, "Minerva Teichert's Manti Temple Murals," *BYU Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3 (1999), 8.
22. Dant, "Minerva Teichert's Manti Temple Murals," 15-16.
23. Victor J. Rasmussen, *The Manti Temple* (Manti, Utah: Manti Temple Centennial Committee, 1988), 70.

