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The Sacred Departments for Temple Work in Nauvoo: The Assembly Room and the Council Chamber

Lisle G Brown

In the spring of 1831 "about two hundred men, women and children," all Latter-day Saints, left western New York and moved to northeastern Ohio.¹ These New York Mormons left their homes in response to Joseph Smith's revelations, in which the Lord promised them that if they moved to Ohio He would endow them with power from on high.² In 1834 another revelation called for the Ohio Saints to build a house of the Lord, "in which house," the Lord revealed, "I design to endow those whom I have chosen with power from on high."³ This irresistible promise of an endowment motivated the Saints to build the temple at Kirtland, Ohio. There Joseph Smith introduced the Church's first sacerdotal ordinances of washings and anointings. A pentecostal outpouring of the Lord's spirit accompanied the administration of these rites, which the Prophet called "an endowment indeed."⁴ In addition, temples were planned for the central gathering places of the Saints at Independence and Far West, Missouri. And so it was at Nauvoo.

In August 1840 the First Presidency called upon the Church to erect a temple at Nauvoo. The membership formally sustained this proposal during the October 1840 general conference.⁵ In its 15 January 1841 issue, the *Times and Seasons* reported that the Temple was under construction. During the same month Joseph Smith received a revelation containing the Lord's approval of the

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¹*Painsville Telegraph*, 17 May 1831.

²The Doctrine and Covenants of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1921), 37:1, 3; 38:32; hereafter cited as D&C.

³D&C 94:1-8; cf. 95:8-9.

⁴Joseph Smith, Jr., *The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 2nd ed. rev., 7 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1932-1951), 2:433; hereafter cited as HC.

⁵HC, 4:186, 205.

Saints' labors. The revelation stated that the ordinances administered in the Nauvoo Temple would surpass those of the Kirtland Temple.⁶

During the building of the Temple Joseph Smith introduced the ordinances for which the building was designed. To the Prophet's contemporaries his motives were inspired. Orson Hyde represented him as saying, "I don't know what it is, but the Lord bids me to hasten, and give you your endowments before the temple is finished."⁷ John Taylor claimed the Prophet felt that if anything happened to him he would have completed his mission only if he had conferred on others the keys he held.⁸ Parley P. Pratt said that Joseph Smith did not know why he was constrained to hasten his preparations for giving "all the ordinances," and yet an oblique statement by the Prophet indicated that he may have had a premonition of his death.⁹ In April 1842 he "spoke of delivering the keys of the Priesthood to the Church . . . [so] that the Saints whose integrity has been tried and proved faithful, might know how to ask the Lord and receive an answer; for according to his prayers God had appointed him elsewhere."¹⁰ If Joseph felt in 1842 that God had actually "appointed him elsewhere," then Joseph Smith's administration of temple ordinances outside a temple during the next two years becomes understandable.

Although on one occasion Joseph Smith stated that in the days of poverty the Saints could obtain their endowments on a mountain, there were no mountains in the vicinity of Nauvoo. Moreover, the surrounding prairie offered insufficient privacy for the administration of temple ordinances. Privacy was required because the Prophet would be revealing things which had been kept hid from before the foundation of the world.¹¹ Apparently the one place where he felt he had enough control of access to insure the

⁶D&C 124:28. The Kirtland Temple ordinances of washing and anointing became initiatory rites to ceremonies introduced by Joseph Smith in Nauvoo. These new ordinances included proxy baptisms for the dead, further washings and anointings, promises of blessings and power in the next life, the complete endowment, sealing ordinances for marriage and the family, and ceremonies confirming the fulness of the priesthood.

⁷*Times and Seasons*, 15 September 1844, p. 651.

⁸*Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: Latter Day Saints' Book Depot, 1855-1886), 25:183.

⁹*Times and Seasons*, 15 September 1844, p. 651.

¹⁰HC, 4:604.

¹¹HC, 4:608.

required privacy was in his own store, which stood at the intersections of Water and Granger streets.¹²

Joseph Smith built the store during 1841 and opened it for business on 5 January 1842.¹³ The building, measuring approximately forty-four feet by twenty-five feet, was a two-story, red-brick structure with a full basement. The first floor consisted of a large mercantile area with shelves and counters for the display of merchandise. Recent archaeological investigations indicate that this room was painted red throughout—floors, walls, and ceiling.¹⁴ At the rear of this red room was a door leading to a hallway which terminated at an outside rear door. On the right of the hallway was a small counting room. On the left was a stairway to the second floor. The stairway ended on a landing opposite a door which opened into Joseph Smith's small private office with its window overlooking the Mississippi River.¹⁵

The rest of the second floor consisted of one large room, probably corresponding in size to the room below. This upper room was painted white and had three large windows overlooking Water Street. At first designed for surplus stock, it soon became a special meeting hall. Various ecclesiastical functions, such as the organization of the Nauvoo Relief Society and numerous priesthood councils, were held in the room. It was also used for secular activities, including municipal meetings, school classes, theatrical presentations, debates, lectures, staff meetings of the Nauvoo Legion, and Masonic degree work.¹⁶ The room went by a variety of names, including the following: the Prophet's general business office, the Lodge Room of the Nauvoo Masons, the Council Chamber for priesthood and municipal bodies, and generally as the As-

¹²It was not uncommon during the early period of the Church for temple ordinances to be administered in places other than temples. Such places included private homes, as in Nauvoo; the Council House in Salt Lake City, Utah; tithing offices; meetinghouses; Ensign Peak north of Salt Lake City; and the Endowment House on Temple Square. On an official list of non-temple locations for temple ordinances is "O. Hyde's Office," which may refer to the so-called Endowment House in Spring City, Utah (Allen Roberts, "The 'Other' Endowment House," *Sunstone* 3 [July-August, 1978]:9-10).

¹³HC, 4:491. In later years the store fell into disrepair, and in 1890 it was razed. The bricks were used in building the Hudson Brothers Meat Market on Mulholland Street. According to T. Edgar Lyon of Nauvoo Restoration, Incorporated, some of the bricks were used in the Nauvoo Room in the Nauvoo Hotel. (Robert T. Bray, *Archaeological Investigations at the Joseph Smith Red Brick Store, Nauvoo, Illinois* [Columbia: University of Missouri, 1973], pp. 33-35.) The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints has undertaken the store's reconstruction with completion planned during 1979.

¹⁴Bray, *Red Brick Store*, pp. 72-73.

¹⁵HC, 4:491; Bray, *Red Brick Store*, pp. 73-74.

¹⁶Bray, *Red Brick Store*, pp. 8-9; David E. Miller and Della S. Miller, *Nauvoo: The City of Joseph* (Santa Barbara: Peregrine Smith, 1974), pp. 84-85.

sembly Room.¹⁷ Because of the variety of gatherings held in the room, it is perhaps most appropriate to refer to it as the Assembly Room.

On 3 May 1842 Joseph Smith began to prepare the Assembly Room for the introduction of temple ceremonies. Five or six men assisted him. Lucius N. Scovil, one of the men, later recalled that the Prophet "told us that the object he had was for us to go to work and fit up that room preparatory to giving endowments to a few Elders."¹⁸ Another man who helped the Prophet was James H. Rollins: "The Prophet told me to assist in carrying water and other commodities to the room above the store. Afterwards I found out it was to give endowments to some of the brethren."¹⁹ According to Brigham Young, the room was not well suited for the purpose, for Joseph Smith had to divide "up the room the best he could."²⁰ Although it "was arranged representing the interior of a temple as much as the circumstances would permit," the Prophet told Brigham Young that it was "not arranged right but we have done the best we could under the circumstances."²¹ The completed arrangements provided for washings and anointings to be given in the Prophet's private office and the endowment in the Assembly Room.²²

By the forenoon of 4 May the men finished the room. During the rest of the day Joseph Smith initiated a number of brethren into the ordinances. By the time of his death Joseph had given

¹⁷HC, 5:119.

¹⁸*Deseret News, Semi-Weekly*, 15 February 1884, p. 2.

¹⁹"John Henry Rollins," as quoted in Hyrum L. and Helen Mae Andrus, *They Knew the Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1974), p. 77.

²⁰L. John Nuttall 1876-1877 Diary, 7 February 1877, 2:18, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

²¹*Deseret News, Semi-Weekly*, 15 February 1884, p. 2; Nuttall 1876-1877 Diary, 7 February 1877. The Assembly Room in the Prophet's store was the best place to perform the ordinances. The Lord had revealed to Joseph Smith that such sacred ordinances must be performed in an upper room, and the Assembly Room in the red brick store was the only such place in Nauvoo at that time where a congregation could assemble in privacy. (HC, 7:364; Miscellaneous Minutes Collection, Minutes of 26 January Meeting, holograph copy, Church Archives, Historical Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Hereafter cited as Church Archives.)

²²The departments refer to the various ordinance rooms (Creation Room, Garden Room, World Room, etc.) in which temple ordinances are administered. For a detailed description of such rooms, see James E. Talmage, *The House of the Lord* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1968), pp. 152-68, 200-15.

There is an interesting, albeit speculative, relationship between the prepared Assembly Room and later Mormon temples. John C. Bennett published a description of the Assembly Room as he purported it was prepared for temple work: "The lodge room is carefully prepared and consecrated; and from twelve to twenty-four sprigs of cassia, or olive branches, cedar boughs, or other evergreens are tastefully arranged about it." (*The History of the Saints; or, an Expose of Joe Smith and Mormonism* [Boston: Leland & Whiting, 1842], p. 275.) This account may not be completely reliable, but it is interesting that the pastoral nature of Bennett's description resembles the Garden Room of later temples, particularly the Nauvoo and Salt Lake temples, both of which had a "conservatory of living plants" (Talmage, *House of the Lord*, p. 157). Moreover, there is also archaeological evidence of a

endowments to over sixty individuals, both men and women.²³ During this period the Prophet also used other places than the Assembly Room for the administration of temple ordinances, including the Homestead (his first residence in Nauvoo) and the second floor room in the southeast corner of the Mansion House. A number of ordinances were also given in the home of Brigham Young.²⁴

Between the death of Joseph Smith in June 1844 and the opening of the Nauvoo Temple for ordinances in December 1845, about fifteen persons received their endowments at the hands of the Twelve.²⁵ During the months after the Martyrdom, those who had been endowed ceased using the Assembly Room, probably at the request of Emma Smith, whose estrangement from the Twelve most likely resulted in her disassociation from the group.²⁶ Instead, these post-Martyrdom temple ordinances were given in the homes or business establishments of endowed members such as Brigham Young, John Taylor, Parley P. Pratt, Willard Richards, John Smith, and Joseph B. Noble.²⁷

As pressure from their non-Mormon neighbors increased for the Saints to leave Nauvoo, Brigham Young rushed the completion of the Temple so that the members of the Church could receive their endowments before they abandoned the city and its temple. Apparently he considered several areas of the Temple for the administration of the endowment. On 14 January 1845, he announced in a general epistle to the Church that "as soon as a suitable number of . . . rooms in the temple are completed, we shall commence the endowment." These rooms, he indicated, were on the mezzanine located "in the recesses, on each side of the [ceiling] arch" between the first and second floors, "and were lighted

mural which was once located in the northwest corner of the Assembly Room (Bray, *Red Brick Store*, pp. 73-74). Fragmentary pieces of the mural suggest that it was pastoral in nature. Whether the mural was connected with the ceremonies administered in the room probably may never be determined. But, it might be more than coincidence that a mural, perhaps similar to the more elaborate murals in later Mormon temples and endowment houses, existed in the very room where the ordinances of the temple were introduced initially.

²³D. Michael Quinn, "Latter-day Saint Prayer Circles," *Brigham Young University Studies* 19 (Fall 1978):85-86. This select group was often referred to as the Holy Order. Other names used by the group include the Quorum, the Anointed Quorum, and Holy Order of the Holy Priesthood.

²⁴HC, 6:35, 39, 61, 71, 185; Elden J. Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801-1844* (Salt Lake City: Smith Secretarial Service, 1968), p. 159; Joseph Smith 1843-1844 Diary, 29 October, 1, 12 November 1843, Church Archives.

²⁵Quinn, "Prayer Circles," p. 92.

²⁶For a discussion of this estrangement, see Robert B. Flanders, *Nauvoo: Kingdom on the Mississippi* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965), pp. 319-20.

²⁷Heber C. Kimball 1840-1845 Diary, 26 January, 15 April, 1 October, 29 October 1845, Church Archives; Brigham H. Roberts, ed., *The History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Period Two: The Apostolic Interregnum* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1957), p. 387 (hereafter cited as HC, 7).

with the first row of circular windows.”²⁸ But on 26 January he counseled the Nauvoo high priests to postpone the construction of their High Priests Hall in order to devote their full efforts “to finish off the upper story of the Temple in which they could receive their washings and anointings and endowments.”²⁹ So it was that the Saints received their endowments in the “upper story” of the Temple, in the attic instead of the mezzanine rooms, and apparently some of those who received the ordinances there were surprised. One man wrote that he and his wife were “conducted to begin with, where [they] did not expect to go, that is, in the attic story of the Temple.”³⁰ Fortunately, of all the Nauvoo Temple’s interior, the attic is the best described, making it possible to reconstruct a fairly accurate picture of the area prepared for the administration of temple rituals.

Rising above the Temple’s massive limestone walls was the frame attic, consisting of two sections: a large box-like structure with a relatively flat roof on the western end of the building, and a long rectangular hall beneath a gabled roof on the remainder of the building to the east. A promenade, hidden from view at ground level by an ornamental railing, encircled the eastern portion of the attic.

The western section of the attic, usually called the “half-story,” was over eighty feet long and forty feet wide. This section corresponded to the narrower vestibules on the two floors below. The attic vestibule was enlarged to provide room for the massive structural timbers of the tower.³¹ The half-story was divided into a number of rooms. It was illuminated not only by the windows on its outside walls but also by six octagonal skylights of colored or painted glass.³² Access to the area was by either of two large, circular staircases in the northwest and southwest corners of the

²⁸*Times and Seasons*, 15 January 1845, p. 779.

²⁹HC, 7:364.

³⁰Increase M’Gee Van Dusen, *A Dialogue Between Adam and Eve, the Lord and the Devil, Called the Endowment* (Albany: Privately printed, 1847), p. 5. Van Dusen published a large number of pamphlets “exposing” the Nauvoo Temple endowment service. Each succeeding edition was more sensational than the last. His first pamphlet, however, lacks much of his later sensationalism and contains many facts helpful in reconstructing the attic, when compared with other sources. Some of his later pamphlets also included a few additional facts of value not mentioned in the first. For a detailed analysis of the Van Dusen pamphlets, see the Asael C. Lambert Papers, Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.

³¹Joseph Earl Arrington, “The Construction of the Nauvoo Temple,” MS, pp. 20–21, Church Archives. See also Arrington’s article, “William Weeks, Architect of the Nauvoo Temple,” in this issue of *BYU Studies*.

³²Arrington, “Nauvoo Temple,” p. 30; *New York Messenger*, 30 August 1845, p. 68. This article also indicated that the attic rooms on the western end would “be for the use of the highest order of the priesthood,” but this changed and the eastern was used instead.

Temple. Each stairway ascended to a landing “opposite the door of the outer court.”³³ This outer court, which ran along the western outside wall, consisted of a vestibule resting between the two landings.

The vestibule, or outer court, led directly to the “inner courts.”³⁴ The area, as the name suggests, did not consist of a single room but of a number of rooms which occupied the rest of the half-story to the east. It probably corresponded to the “two or three large, square rooms” in visitors’ descriptions of the front attic.³⁵ Unfortunately, the exact number and arrangement of these rooms cannot be determined with precision. There were at least four rooms: two “wardrobes” where the brethren and sisters changed into their temple clothing, a “sitting room” where couples waited for the endowment services to begin, and a “pantry” where temple workers and those receiving their endowments kept their lunches.³⁶

The inner courts “led to the sacred departments” through a double door which opened into a long hall running the remaining length of the attic to the east. This hall came to be called the Council Chamber.³⁷ It rested beneath the gabled roof, occupying a space of eighty-eight feet by twenty-eight feet. The hall had a low, arched ceiling which was divided into six spaces by the crossbeams supporting the roof.³⁸ A “double row of composite columns” supported the crossbeams.³⁹ The hall’s illumination came from a large, twenty-and-a-half-feet in span, semi-circular window on the east wall. This window was truly magnificent, enclosing four Gothic arches and three irregular triangles.⁴⁰ It may have corresponded to the drawing of a similar window in the Temple’s facade in a preliminary sketch prepared by William Weeks, architect of the Temple.⁴¹ There were also a double row of rectangular skylights, corresponding to the six divisions of the ceiling. The Council Chamber was fully carpeted, painted white, and heated by two

³³John D. Lee 1844–1846 Diary, 16 December 1845, Church Archives.

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵*Nauvoo Independent*, 3 January 1890, p. 4.

³⁶Van Dusen, *A Dialogue*, p. 5; *Palmyra Courier*, 22 September 1847, as quoted in E. Cecil McGavin, *The Nauvoo Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1962), pp. 90–93.

³⁷*Palmyra Courier*, 22 September 1847. The term “sacred departments” comes from the John D. Lee 1844–1846 Diary, 16 December 1845. It is an apt description of the Council Chamber arranged for temple ceremonies.

³⁸*Palmyra Courier*, 22 September 1847; Stanley B. Kimball, “The Nauvoo Temple,” *Improvement Era* 66 (November 1963):978.

³⁹*Illinois Journal*, 9 December 1853, as quoted in Arrington, “Nauvoo Temple,” p. 16.

⁴⁰*New York Messenger*, 30 August 1845.

⁴¹Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 11 December 1845; William Weeks, Nauvoo Temple Drawings, Church Archives.

iron stoves.⁴²

Running the length of the Council Chamber along the north and south sides were twelve small rooms, six on either side. These side-rooms were approximately fourteen feet square, except for the two rooms on the west end which were slightly smaller. Their ceilings were low, the incline of the gabled roof preventing a man of six feet from standing erect by the exterior wall.⁴³ Each room had a door with a massive lock and on the outside wall a "beautiful circular window."⁴⁴

The twelve side-rooms were numbered, those on the south side having odd numerals and those on the north side having even numerals.⁴⁵ Room one was not, as is usually customary, the first room on the right as a person entered the hall, but instead it was the last room in the southeast corner. This anomaly was apparently intentional. Brigham Young selected this room for his office because he felt that as the intense light of the sun in the northern hemisphere comes from the southeast, so also the southeast corner of a temple represented the strongest source of revealed light.⁴⁶ The other side-rooms were also assigned to individuals or priesthood quorums. The final assignments for the rooms on the south side were—numbers three through seven to the Twelve (three to Heber C. Kimball; five to Orson Pratt, Parley P. Pratt, and Orson Hyde; seven to John Taylor, Amasa M. Lyman, John E. Page, and George A. Smith); number nine to Joseph Young and the seventies; and number eleven for male initiatory ordinances. The rooms on the north were assigned with number two to Newel K. Whitney and the bishopric, room four to John Smith and the Nauvoo High Council, numbers six and eight to George Miller and the high priests, number ten to the elders, and room twelve for female initiatory ordinances.⁴⁷

⁴²*Palmyra Courier*, 22 September 1847; Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 11 December 1845; Arrington, "Nauvoo Temple," p. 75.

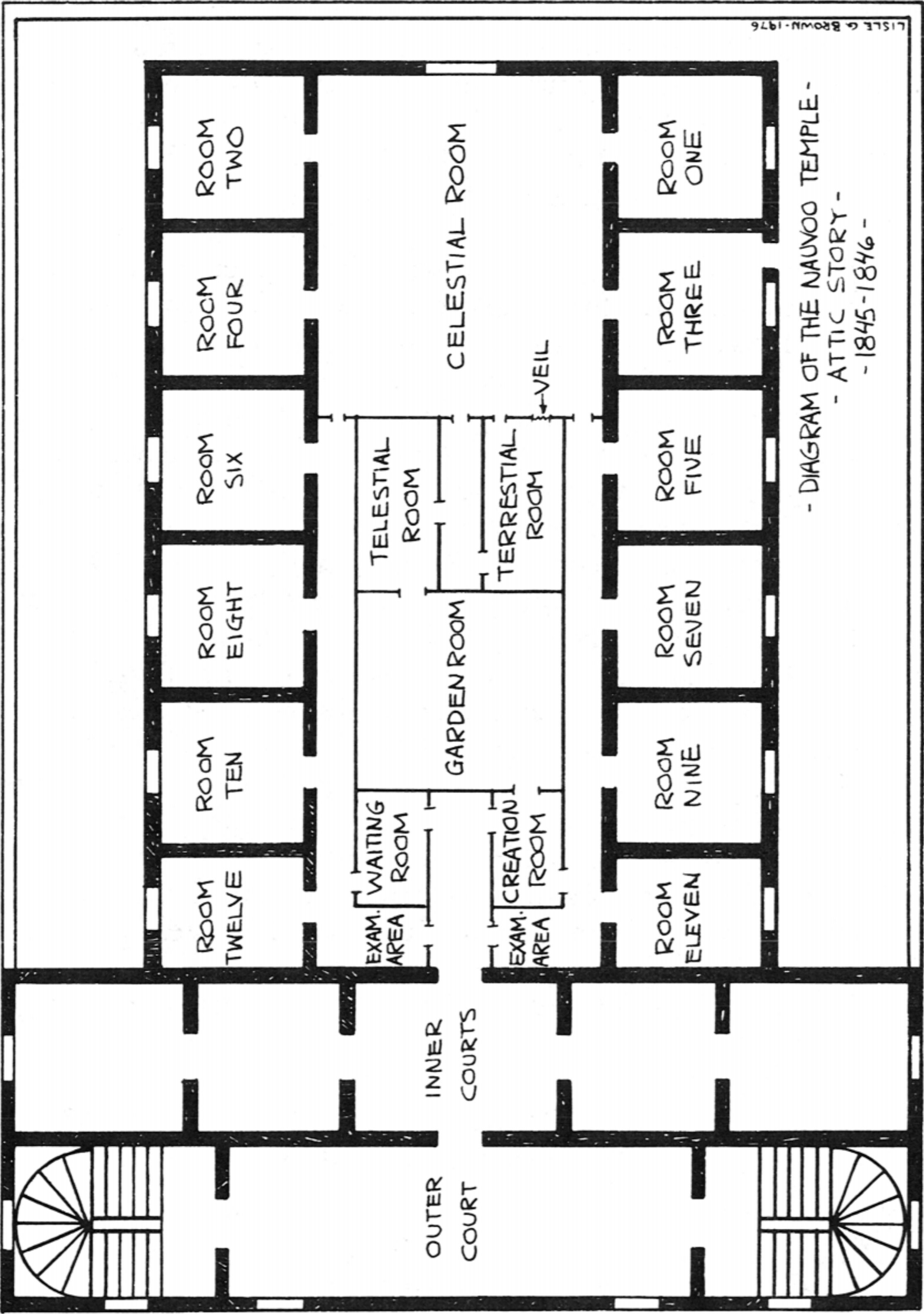
⁴³*New York Messenger*, 30 August 1845.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*; Van Dusen, *A Dialogue*, p. 5; Arrington, "Nauvoo Temple," p. 30.

⁴⁵It is not clear if actual numbers were painted or affixed to the doors, but many individuals referred to the rooms by number (Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 23 December 1845; John D. Lee 1844–1846 Diary, 12 January 1846; Brigham Young 1844–1846 Diary, 27 January 1846, all at Church Archives; C. Edward Jacob, *The Record of Norton Jacob* [Salt Lake City: Norton Jacob Family Association, 1949], p. 18).

⁴⁶*Journal of Discourses*, 1:133.

⁴⁷*HC*, 7:542. When originally made, the room assignments varied slightly from this list. Room one was an office for the use of Brigham Young. Room three was shared by Brigham Young, Heber C. Kimball, and Willard Richards. (*HC*, 7:534–35; Nauvoo Historical Documents, John Taylor's record of a meeting held by the Twelve in the Temple, 30 November 1845, Church Archives.) Heber C. Kimball ultimately had exclusive use of room three when President Young took room one as his own and Willard Richards' illness kept him from the Temple, except for a few visits. Elder Wilford Woodruff received no room assignment, because he was not in Nauvoo but was on a mission in England.



Beginning with 21 December 1845, Brigham Young directed that as members of the high priests quorum, seventies quorum, and the high council received their endowments they should meet daily in their assigned rooms for prayer. The first quorum to meet was the high priests, who met on 22 December in room eight. The next day the high council commenced their daily prayer meetings in room four. By 27 December the seventies were also meeting. It may be assumed that after the elders received their endowments they met in their assigned room for prayer.⁴⁸

On 30 November Brigham Young and twenty men who had received their endowments from Joseph Smith met in room one and dedicated the attic for temple ordinances. Between 1 December and 9 December the Council Hall was prepared for the endowments. From 3 December to 5 December the brethren suspended canvas from the ceiling and crossbeams, dividing the Council Chamber into six rooms.⁴⁹ Most likely the canvas came from a supply of several thousand yards which Orson Hyde had brought to Nauvoo two months earlier.⁵⁰

On 2 December Heber C. Kimball and his son William picked up a wagonload of thirty potted plants from Hiram Kimball, who had earlier gathered the plants from houses throughout Nauvoo. The Kimballs delivered the plants to the Temple. Between 4 December and 8 December William W. Phelps carried the plants to the attic and arranged them in one of the canvas rooms. During this same time, other men and women hung paintings, portraits, maps, and mirrors in the attic rooms. They also arranged tables, chairs, sofas, and other furniture, all generously donated by the Saints to beautify the temple rooms. Other persons labored on the various temple vessels used in administering the ordinances. The sisters sewed temple clothing, and the brethren built altars. Heber C. Kimball and Brigham Young donated two large

⁴⁸Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 21, 22, 27 December 1845. Those high priests who received their endowments from Joseph Smith were also using their room before the Temple opened for ordinance work (ibid., 4, 5, 8 December 1845), as well as occasionally meeting with the Twelve in prayer circle (ibid., 6 December 1845).

⁴⁹Ibid., 3, 4, 5 December 1845. The entry for 5 December is particularly informative about the general arrangement of the Council Chamber, "The big Hall is convertd into Six Sepret rooms for the convienience of the Holy Preasthood two Large ones and fore small and a Hall pasing through between the small ones pasing from the west done through the Center, and dores into Each Room."

⁵⁰On 8 June 1845, Orson Hyde left Nauvoo for the East to purchase canvas for a proposed tent, called the Tabernacle, which was to be located near the Temple. He returned 17 October 1845, with 5,000 yards of topsail Russian duck canvas. The tent was never erected. Most likely this canvas was used in the attic, while the rest was made into tents and wagon covers for the Saints' westward journey. (HC, 7:426, 482; Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 18 December 1845. See also Elden J. Watson, "The Nauvoo Tabernacle," in this issue of *BYU Studies*.)

wooden tubs for the initiatory ordinances. At sunset on 4 December Newel K. Whitney brought to the attic the veil used in the lifetime of Joseph Smith and materials for a new veil. Brigham Young, following the exact pattern set down by Joseph Smith, fashioned the new veil, and the next day the sisters sewed and hemmed it. On 7 December President Young hung the veil, and by 10 December all the preparations had been completed.⁵¹

One entered the "sacred departments" through a double door on the west wall of the Council Chamber. Immediately inside the room was a canvas hallway, approximately five feet wide and nineteen feet long. There were doorways, perhaps only draped openings in the canvas walls, on either side of the hallway. Each door led to an examination room. The sisters' room was on the north and the brethren's on the south. This area was furnished with a few chairs and small tables, where the clerks recorded the names of persons receiving the endowment. The examination rooms led directly to the two initiatory rooms, side-rooms eleven and twelve. These rooms were "considerably shaded nearly to twilight." Each room was furnished with a stove for heating water, a wooden bathtub for washings, and a stool for anointings.⁵²

Two small canvas rooms stood on either side of the entrance hallway. The room on the south was the Creation Room, which was darkened and devoid of furniture. The corresponding room on the north was also shaded and was apparently used as a waiting room for the sisters before rejoining their husbands in the Creation Room.⁵³

Between these two rooms and the "third partition [sic] in the arch" was a large room, which was "shaded, at least as dark as twilight."⁵⁴ This room was "nice[ly] decorated and set up with shrubs and trees in pots & boxes to represent the Garden of Eden."⁵⁵ The plants, consisting of evergreens, shrubs and flowers, were arranged into aisles and walkways. One of the plants represented the Tree of Life, and another, which was draped with raisins and grapevines, represented the Tree of Knowledge of Good

⁵¹This account is taken from Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 2–9 December 1845.

⁵²Van Dusen, *A Dialogue*, pp. 4, 5, 9; cf. Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 11 December 1845.

⁵³Increase M'Gee Van Dusen, *Startling Disclosures of the Mormon Spiritual-Wife System and Wonderful Ceremonies of the Celebrated Endowment* (New York: Privately printed, 1864), pp. 7–8. The location of the waiting room is speculative, but it seems that it corresponds best with the room opposite the Creation Room. Otherwise this room appears to have no function.

⁵⁴Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 11 December 1845; Van Dusen, *A Dialogue*, p. 5.

⁵⁵Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 11 December 1845.

and Evil.⁵⁶ An altar stood in the center of the room. One individual wrote that the Garden Room “formed a sight both novel and sublime in the extreme.”⁵⁷

Beyond the Garden Room were two smaller rooms, separated by an intervening hallway. The room on the north, which represented the “telestial kingdom or the world,” was darkened; in fact, it was “darker than any of the others.”⁵⁸ The room was “ornament[ed] to represent the present world.”⁵⁹ Opposite the Telestial Room was “another apartment [sic] of the same size representing the terrestrial kingdom and between them two [was] an alley about 4 feet wide.”⁶⁰ In the center of this room was an altar with a Bible, Book of Mormon, and Doctrine and Covenants on it.⁶¹ On the east canvas wall was the veil of the Temple, “drawn on a wire across the vacancy in the partition,” and a cotton curtain hung in front of it, shielding it from view.⁶² Four feet to the left of the veil was a doorway into the Celestial Room.

It is likely that a canvas partition encircled these ordinance rooms, separating them from the side-rooms wherein marriages, family sealings, and prayer meetings might be held while the endowment ordinances were being performed. The commotion and disruption caused by those in the side-rooms would have interfered with the quiet atmosphere required for the endowment had the side-rooms opened directly into the ordinance rooms.⁶³

The Celestial Room occupied the rest of the Council Chamber on the east. It was a “very large and spacious room, perfectly light, all nicely furnished.”⁶⁴ In the center of the room stood “two splendid tables and four splendid sofa’s [sic].” Beneath the curtained, semi-circular window on the east wall stood another table upon which rested “the celestial and terrestrial Globes.” Upon the east and north walls hung a number of mirrors, paintings, and portraits of Church members and their wives. A marble clock stood against the north wall. Also on the north wall was a map of the world. On the west partition were three maps of the

⁵⁶Ibid., 8 December 1845; Van Dusen, *A Dialogue*, p. 9.

⁵⁷Van Dusen, *Startling Disclosures*, p. 8.

⁵⁸Van Dusen, *A Dialogue*, p. 8; Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 11 December 1845.

⁵⁹Van Dusen, *Startling Disclosures*, p. 14.

⁶⁰Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 11 December 1845.

⁶¹Van Dusen, *A Dialogue*, p. 12.

⁶²Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 6, 11 December 1845.

⁶³“The side rooms might have been closed off from the main hall by curtains or doors” (Stanley B. Kimball, “Nauvoo Temple,” p. 978).

⁶⁴Van Dusen, *A Dialogue*, p. 15.

United States and a street map of Nauvoo. On the south wall were more paintings, and mirrors, as well as another large map of the United States. The room had “a very splendid and comfortable appearance.”⁶⁵

Side-rooms, numbers one through four, opened directly into the Celestial Room. Although these four rooms were assigned to various Church authorities, they also doubled as special offices and ordinance rooms. Room one served as the office in which were kept the records of temple work. While William Clayton served as temple recorder, Brigham Young, because of the large volume of work, also appointed two special clerks—John D. Lee and Franklin D. Richards.⁶⁶ Elder Lee indicated that the clerks’ office was room one.⁶⁷ This room also served as sealing room, in which couples were sealed in the Holy Order of Matrimony. It was also called the Holy of Holies.⁶⁸ An altar was installed in the room on 7 January 1846 and was dedicated by Brigham Young the same day. Heber C. Kimball left a description of the altar, which was later included in the published *History of the Church*:

The altar is about two and one-half feet high and two and one-half feet long and about one foot wide, rising from a platform about 8 or 9 inches high and extending out on all sides about a foot, forming a convenient place to kneel upon. The top of the altar and the platform for kneeling upon are covered with cushions of scarlet damask cloth; the sides of the upright part or body of the altar are covered with white linen.⁶⁹

After the installation of the altar in room one, Brigham Young began sealing couples in the Holy Order of Matrimony. The highest ordinances of the temple were also performed in the same room.⁷⁰ Apparently because it proved difficult to continue administering both marriages and these ordinances in the same room, Brigham Young later assigned rooms two and four for giving the most sacred ordinance, as he noted in his diary on 27 January. Both John D. Lee and Norton Jacob wrote of receiving their blessings of the fulness of the priesthood in rooms two and four respectively.⁷¹

⁶⁵Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 11 December 1845.

⁶⁶Brigham Young 1844–1846 Diary, 12 January 1846.

⁶⁷John D. Lee, *Mormonism Unveiled, or the Life and Confessions of the Late Mormon Bishop, John D. Lee* (St. Louis: Bryan, Branc and Co., 1877), p. 169.

⁶⁸Jacob, *Norton Jacob*, p. 18.

⁶⁹HC, 7:556; Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 7 January 1846.

⁷⁰Heber C. Kimball 1845–1846 Diary, 7 January 1846; Brigham Young 1844–1846 Diary, 8, 11 January 1846.

⁷¹John D. Lee 1844–1846 Diary, 14 January 1846; Jacob, *Norton Jacob*, p. 18.

Room three served as a public office. On 23 December 1845 workmen completed a wooden stairway to the room, which was "converted into an office for the convenience of transacting business with persons from without."⁷² That the room actually served as a public office can be found in Heber C. Kimball's diary for 26 December, "Sheriff Backenstos came to the Temple, [he] was admitted to the office No. 3 by the back stairs."

When Brigham Young closed the Nauvoo Temple for ordinance work, the Saints who had lent their household furniture to beautify the attic "could be seen . . . busily engaged removing articles of furniure, stoves, carpets, pictures and other furnishings" from the Temple.⁷³ Apparently not all of the furnishings were removed immediately, because the workmen who remained to complete the lower portions of the Temple for dedication continued to use the attic for social gatherings, meetings, and prayer circles.⁷⁴ After the Temple's private dedication on 30 April 1846 and public dedication between 1-3 May 1846, the workmen stripped the attic of any remaining vestige of the sacred work conducted within its precincts. So thorough was their work that a non-Mormon visitor to the deserted Temple wrote of the Council Chamber, "The chamber itself is devoid of ornament, and I was unable to ascertain whether it was intended to have any, if it should have been completed."⁷⁵

Perhaps it was fortunate that all traces of the sacred use of the Council Chamber and its side-rooms were obliterated so that any unsympathetic non-Mormon visitors, who might belittle and desecrate the rooms, would have no inkling of their former sacred functions. But, to the Latter-day Saints who received their endowments and sealings in the rooms, they were holy sanctuaries. A statement of Erastus Snow undoubtedly reflected the Saints' sentiments about their experiences in the Council Chamber, "The Spirit, Power, and Wisdom of God reigned continually in the Temple and all felt satisfied that during the two months we occupied it in the endowments of the Saints, we were amply paid for all our labors in building it."⁷⁶

⁷²Heber C. Kimball 1845-1846 Diary, 23 December 1845.

⁷³Journal History of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 3 February 1846, Church Archives.

⁷⁴Samuel Richards Journal, typescript in Nels B. Lundwall Collection, microfilm reel 5, item 2, contains an account of the completion and dedication of the Temple, with almost daily references to the workmen's use of the Council Chamber for many functions, both secular and ecclesiastical.

⁷⁵*Palmyra Courier*, 22 September 1847.

⁷⁶Andrew K. Larsen, *Erastus Snow* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1971), p. 96.