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Appendix D: Historical Descriptions of the Kirtland Temple

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From John Corrill, *A Brief History of the Church of Christ of Latter Day Saints, (Commonly Called Mormons;) Including an Account of Their Doctrine and Discipline; with the Reasons of the Author for Leaving the Church* (St. Louis: By the author, 1839), 21–22.

John Corrill was an early member of the Church of Christ of Latter-day Saints who later left the group and became a prominent politician in Missouri. He published this statement concerning his past, apparently to defuse concerns about the character of one who had at one time espoused Mormonism. This account is especially important because Corrill acted in a supervisory position in the construction of the temple and wrote this account only three years after its completion.

The church also kept gathering at Kirtland. They laid out a town, appointed certain lots for various purposes, one of which was to build the house of the Lord upon, for the building of which they had received a revelation. This building they commenced, if I recollect rightly, in '33, in poverty, and without means to do it. In 1834 they completed the work, and in '35 and 6 they nearly finished it. The cost was nearly \$40,000. A committee was appointed to gather donations. They traveled among the churches and collected a considerable amount, but not sufficient, so that in the end they found themselves 13 or \$14,000 in debt. This house was 80 feet by 60; and 57 [sic] feet high to the top of the wall. It was divided into two stories, each twenty-two feet high, and arched overhead. Ten feet was cut off from the front end by a partition and used as an entrance, and it also contained the stairs. This left the main room 55 by 65 feet in the clear, both below and above. In each of these rooms were built two pulpits, one in each end. Each pulpit consisted of four different apartments; the fourth standing on a platform raised a suitable height above the floor; the third stood directly behind and elevated a little above the fourth; the second in rear of and elevated above the third; and so was the first above the second. Each of these apartments was just large enough, and rightly calculated to receive three persons, and the breast-work in front of each of these three last mentioned, was

constituted of three semi-circles, joining each other, and finished in good style. The fourth, or lower one, was straight in front, and had a table-leaf attached to it, that could be raised at pleasure, for the convenience of administering the sacrament, &c. These pulpits were alike in each end of the house, and one was for the use of the Malchisedec [sic], or high priesthood, and the other for the Aaronic, or lesser priesthood. The first, or higher apartment, was occupied by the first presidency over all the church; the second apartment, by the President of the high priests, and his two counsellors; the third by three of the High Priests; and the fourth by the President of the Elders, and his two counsellors. The highest apartment of the other pulpit was occupied by the Bishop of the church and his two counsellors; the next by the President of the priests and his two counsellors; the third by the President of the teachers and his two counselors; and the fourth by the President of the deacons and his two counsellors. Each of these apartments had curtains hanging from the ceiling, over head, down to the top of the pulpit, which could be rolled up or dropped down at pleasure; and, when dropped down, would completely exclude those within the apartment from the sight of all others. The room itself was finished with slips and seats, so calculated that, by slipping the seats a little, the congregation could change their faces towards either pulpit they choose, for in some cases the high priesthood would administer, and in other cases the lesser would. The room was also divided into four apartments, by means of curtains hanging from the ceiling, over head, down to the floor, which could be rolled up at pleasure, so that the room could be used all in one, or divided into four rooms, and used for different purposes. Thus the house was constructed to suit and accommodate the different orders of priesthood and worship peculiar to the church. The first story, or lower room, was dedicated for divine worship alone. The second story was finished similar in form to the first, but was designed, wholly, for instruction, and supplied with tables instead of slips. In the roof were finished five rooms for the convenience of schools, and for the different quorums of the church to meet in, &c.

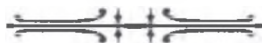


From Henry Howe, *Historical Collections of Ohio* (Cincinnati: Derby and Bradley, 1847), 282–83.

This account was written in 1846 and appears to be based at least in part on interviews with a former Saint who was currently a follower of James Strang, as can be discerned by the following note: “The Mormons still use the temple at Kirtland. This sect is now divided into three factions, viz.: the Rigdonites, the Twelveites, and the Strangites. The Rigdonites are the followers of Sidney Rigdon, and are but a few in number. The Twelveites—so named after their twelve apostles—are very fanatical, and hold to the spiritual wife system and the plurality of Gods. The Strangites maintain the original doctrines of Mormonism, and are located at this place and Voree” (284).

The temple, the main point of attraction, is 60 by 80 feet, and measures from its base to the top of the spire, 142 feet. It is of rough stone, plastered over, colored blue, and marked to imitate regular courses of masonry. It cost about \$40,000. In front, over the large window, is a tablet, bearing the inscription: "House of the Lord, built by the church of the Latter Day Saints, A.D. 1834." The first and second stories are divided into two "grand rooms" for public worship. The attic is partitioned off into about a dozen [five] small apartments. The lower grand room is fitted up with seats as an ordinary church, with canvas curtains hanging from the ceiling, which, on the occasion of prayer meetings, are let down to the tops of the slips, dividing the room into several different apartments, for the use of the separate collections of worshippers. At each end of the room is a set of pulpits, four in number, rising behind each other. Each pulpit is calculated for three persons, so that when they are full, twelve persons occupy each set, or twenty-four persons the two sets. These pulpits were for the officers of the priesthood. The set at the farther end of the room, are for the Melchisedek priesthood, or those who minister in spiritual concerns. The set opposite, near the entrance to the room, are for the Aaronic priesthood, whose duty it is to simply attend to the temporal affairs of the society. These pulpits all bear initials, signifying the rank of their occupants.

On the Melchisedek side, are the initials P.E., *i.e.* President of the Elders; M.P.H., President of the High Priests; P.M.H., Pres. of the High Council, and M.P.C., Pres. of the Full Church. On the Aaronic pulpits, are the initials P.D., *i.e.* President of Deacons; P.T.A., President of the Teachers; P.A.P., Pres. of the Aaronic Priesthood, and B.P.A., Bishop of the Aaronic Priesthood. The Aaronic priesthood were rarely allowed to preach, that being the especial duty of the higher order, the Melchisedek.



From James F. Ryder, *Voigtländer and I: In Pursuit of Shadow Catching* (Cleveland: Imperial Press, 1902), 69–70.

Ryder, a traveling photographer, set up a studio in the temple during the summer of 1850.

Next morning I visited the temple and explored it with much interest and curiosity. On entering upon the main floor, that which would be in usual churches the auditorium, from the entrance doors of which—there was one on each side—were aisles running back to the altar. On either side of the aisles were broad pews, separated into compartments by partitions of canvas, heavily painted with white upon both sides. These partitions or curtains were heavy as sails to a ship. They were fastened at bottom to large rollers and rigged with ropes and pulleys at top like curtains in theaters, for raising and lowering. Each curtain, with its heavy roller, dropped into the space immediately behind the pew backs and well in front of sitters in the pews, so they could be entirely secluded from occupants of other pews—separated as

completely as though stowed in pigeon-holes. Or, if desired, the partition curtains could be raised and the congregation seen as a whole. Why these partitions, or for what purpose, was one of the things I could never learn. There were a good many Mormons left in Kirtland, but none who would talk of the rites or ceremonies practiced in the temple. The room above was similar in size as to floor space, but lower in height of ceiling. There were no dividing partitions in this room. It was filled with pews, and at either end with curious pulpits; as many as six pulpits. This I fancied had been a section or department for the lesser saints, or possibly for Sunday-school. In this room, which had broad and high north windows, I determined to locate my studio. I built a floor over the tops of the pew-backs, using them as joists; constructed a flight of steps with hand-rail, by which to ascend and descend from the floor proper. With my background, my sidescreen a little table and Voigtlander set up upon my studio floor, I was ready for business. Here permit me to claim the unique distinction of being the only photographer extant who ever had a Mormon temple for a studio—a distinction of which I am proud.



From Frederic G. Mather, "The Early Days of Mormonism," *Lippincott's Magazine* 26 (August 1880): 208–11.

Unlike the previous accounts, Mather's article is a somewhat disdainful discussion of what he considered an odd chapter in Ohio history. While occasionally this attitude does get in the way of the facts (note his designation of the lowest tier of Aaronic pulpits as being for the "Presiding Aaronic Door-keeper"), he does record details of the building not written down elsewhere.

By far the most important and enduring monument left by the Mormons in Kirtland is their Temple. The advent of several hundred strangers into the midst of the insignificant hamlet was an event of considerable importance, but when they selected a most commanding site, of easy access to the public highway, and commenced the building of a church, all Northern Ohio looked on in wonder. A structure of such pretensions would be a tax upon a goodly-sized town of this generation, but the several hundred Mormons who built it gave cheerfully each one his tenth in labor, materials or money for the four years from 1832 [sic] to 1836, the entire cost being estimated at forty thousand dollars. The visitor, come from whatever direction he may, has the Temple constantly in view as a reminder of the quaint style of "meeting-houses" in New England. Its architectural superiority over the meeting-houses is probably due to the fact that Smith had a "revelation" which gave him the exact measurements and proportions. The size upon the ground is eighty feet by sixty, and the eastern gable runs up into a square tower, surmounted by a domed belfry, to the height of one hundred and twenty-five feet. Two lofty stories above a low basement are covered by a shingled roof pierced with dormer windows. Large Gothic windows of the Henry VIII. shape are filled with seven-by-nine glass, and afford relief to the solid walls of stone and stucco that have so well survived the ravages of nearly half a century, though

the iron rust streaking the exterior, the moss-grown shingles, and wasps' nests under the eaves, and the two immense chimneys already tottering to their fall, give evidence of approaching ruin.

As much as this even the careless passer-by cannot well avoid seeing. The more patient and accurate visitor may readily repeat my own experience as I went in search of the key on a bleak day in December. "The people ought to fix it up," said one informant: "it is a good thing for Kirtland;" the force of which remark I did not realize till I called upon an old Mormon woman who was said to have the keys. Inquiry at her little cabin resulted in my being directed to "go to Electy Stratton's." The latter personage, my cicerone, stated that her parents were Mormons—that her father had spent several hundred dollars in the cause; and so "it was thought best that their family should have the keys for a while now." The small fee for visiting the Temple was the "good thing for Kirtland," and the custody of the keys was not to remain long in one family. Opening a rickety gate, we entered the churchyard. High aloft, just under the pediment, I could read this inscription in golden letters upon a white tablet: "House of the Lord, built by the Church of Christ, 1834." Instead of the words "of Christ" the original inscription read "of the Latter-Day Saints." The Temple faces the east. Solid green doors, with oval panels, open into a vestibule extending across the entire front, and terminating on either hand in a semi-circular stairway. The ceiling is cut away from the front wall to allow a flood of light to enter from a huge square window above, and the open space is railed off like a steamer's cabin. At the right, under the stairway, is the "Temple Register Room," containing a record of visitors. On the left is the "Library," with a curious collection of whale-oil chandeliers. On the left of the wall, parallel with the front, is the "Gentlemen's Entrance;" on the right is the "Ladies' Entrance." Between these doors are the inscriptions: "Laus Deo," "Crux mihi anchora," "Magna veritas, et prevalebit." The auditorium occupies all the rest of the first story, but one could wish that the wall which divided it from the vestibule need not have spoiled one of the beautiful windows at either end, thus leaving an ungainly half window in the auditorium. A row of wooden pillars on either side gives the effect of galleries as the room is entered, but a closer view shows that the space between the rows is arched toward the centre of the ceiling. One of the pillars contains a windlass, which in former times controlled the heavy canvas curtains from above. The larger curtain fell into grooves between the high-back pews in such a manner as to separate the men from the women: the smaller curtains, at right angles to the other, divided both the men and the women into separate classrooms. Thus the audience was quartered or halved at pleasure, and the whole audience was enabled to face either westward or eastward by simply changing the movable benches from one side of the pews to the other. Clusters of richly-carved pulpits, rising by threes, in three tiers, fill up either end of the room. The eastern cluster is devoted to the Aaronic Priesthood, which also includes the Levitical Priesthood, and administered the temporal affairs of the Church. Each of the three pulpits in the upper tier has upon the front the letters "B.P.A.," meaning Bishop Presiding over Aaronic Priesthood; the middle tier has the letters "P.A.P.," Presiding Aaronic Priest; the lower tier has the letters "P.A.T.," Presiding Aaronic Teacher; a smaller pulpit below is labelled "P.A.D.," Presiding Aaronic Doorkeeper. The pulpits against the western end are built up

against an outer window, with alternate panes of red and white glass in the arched transom. These pulpits were occupied by the spiritual leaders, or the Melchisedec Priesthood, Joe Smith's seat being in the highest tier. This tier of pulpits is marked "M.P.C.," Melchisedec President of Counsellors; the middle tier is marked "P.M.H.," Melchisedec Presiding High Priest; the lower tier is "M.H.P.," Melchisedec High Priest. Curtains from above were arranged to come down between the different tiers of the priesthood, but so arranged that while those of one degree might shut themselves away from the audience "for consultation," they could not hide themselves from their superiors in ecclesiastical rank. Strings and nails in the ceiling are the only remnants of these remarkable partitions. A simple desk below the Melchisedec pulpit bears the title "M.P.E.," Melchisedec Presiding Elder. The letters are in red curtain-cord, and the desk itself, like all the pulpits above, is covered with green calico. In the days of the Temple's glory rich velvet upholstery set off all the carved work of the pulpits, and golden letters shone from spots which are now simply marked by black paint. The gilt mouldings which formerly set off the plain white finish of the woodwork were first despoiled by the vandals, and then entirely removed by the faithful to prevent further destruction. These mottoes still remain upon the walls: "No cross, no crown;" "The Lord reigneth, let His people rejoice;" and "Great is our Lord, and of great power." Over the arched window behind the ten Melchisedec pulpits, and just beneath the vertical modillion which forms the keystone of the ornamental wooden arch, is the text, "Holiness unto the Lord."

Such is the auditorium to-day—a room which will comfortably hold six hundred people, but which was often packed so full that relays of worshippers came and went during a single service. . . .

Over the auditorium is a similar room with lower ceilings and plainer pulpits, each marked with initials which it would be tiresome to explain. The hall was used as a school of the prophets where Latin and Hebrew were taught. Marks of the desks remain, but the desks themselves have long since been carried away. . . .

The space under the roof is utilized by a series of school-rooms, each with falling plastering and "ratty" floors. Here the young Mormons were taught to ascend the Hill of Science by trudging up some scores of steps several times a day. Strange and dark cubbyholes stare at the visitor from all sides. In one of these was kept the body of Joseph, the son of Jacob, known by a roll of papyrus which was found in his hand. Joe Smith translated the characters on the roll, being favored with a "special revelation" whenever any of the characters were missing by reason of the mutilation of the roll.

Still up the stairway within a small square tower, now without a bell, I thrust my way until a little trap-door allowed an egress. But the railing had gone, and I clung to the belfry-blinds while I surveyed the cold waters of Lake Erie on the north, the rise of Little Mountain on the south, and, between them the broad tract of rolling country divided by the Chagrin River. I descended through labyrinthine passages, and came again to the ground and to the outer air with a sense of relief after my two hours' sojourn within the Mormon Temple.