

Elder Richard L. Evans

Of the Council of the Twelve Apostles

President McKay and my beloved brothers and sisters—you who are here, and you, my dearly beloved friends worldwide—we would want you to know that you whom we do not see are cherished, remembered, and appreciated.

The Tabernacle first used 100 years ago

Reference has been made by President Brown and President Tanner to the centennial of the Tabernacle, which was first used a hundred years ago for the general conference of the Church, in October 1867. It is most remarkable to note that it was built by an isolated people in the days of their poverty, at a time when the membership of the Church was fewer perhaps than 100,000; when there were only four stakes (or diocese, as our non-church friends would call them); and when Salt Lake City had a population of about 10,000.

We read from the *Deseret News* report of the first Tabernacle conference session of a century ago, October 1867:

"An hour before the appointed time for conference commencing, the immense building was crowded in every part, great numbers being unable to obtain admission. . . ."¹

"Altogether, the Tabernacle was full," said the minutes of the meeting, and "no building could be constructed large enough to hold the Saints."² (I suppose if we were to build a building today proportionate to our size as they did, it would perhaps have to seat at least 150,000.)

Basically the Tabernacle was built in not many months, although some phases of it were started as early as 1863 and some phases were pursued for some considerable time following 1867.

The Builders

I have read much of the men whose names are mentioned most in bringing

it about: Brigham Young; Henry Grow, the bridge builder, whose name seems most associated with the basic design; William H. Folsom, Church architect at the time; Truman O. Angell, who undoubtedly was largely entrusted with the interior; Joseph Ridges, the first builder of the organ. Their words are great and human, inspired and ordinary. History happens like that. It is occasional highlights in the intermixture of heroic accomplishment and the routine and drudgery of daily duty. I wish there were time to share their words at some length. But there is never that much time for the past; the present is always so compelling. But some of their words we would share.

Their story

Said Brigham Young in May of 1867, only four or five months before the building was to be ready for use: "... We want the Tabernacle finished, and when a man is asked to go and work on it, do not begin to make a wry face, and say, 'I have got so much work to do.' When you carpenters are asked to go and help to finish it, so that we can hold our October Conference in it, do not say 'I have so many jobs on hand' . . . wherever they will pay you sixpence more. . . ."³

Friday, June 14, 1867, Truman O. Angell wrote in his diary: "... Brigham Young took me in his carriage, . . . and we went together into the new Tabernacle. . . ."

"Tuesday, June 18th . . . There are some difficulties not over come. . . ."

"Friday 21st. . . . There is much to do . . ."

"Monday [July] 22nd. . . . I now have located a good place for the chorister, and he likes it very much. He is a very modest man. . . ."

"Thursday [August] 15th. Had a busy time of it today. The President came here today and made many requests. He made up his mind to have a change on the plan of the seats . . . I

like the change. . . . [He was wise to like it. Brigham Young was a very resolute man.]

"Friday 23rd. This morning I feel cast down. I think it is not important for me to stay here when so many smart men are on hand. . . . Surely they do not need me. So I pass it off till I am more reconciled. I feel crushed. This morning I had so many obstacles in my way, I felt like withdrawing from the appointment as architect. But President Young viewed the subject otherways and a few words from him made me reconciled. Thank the Lord."⁴

Five days before the opening of the Tabernacle, Truman O. Angell's son died, but on October 4th, two days before the opening, Truman Angell wrote: "Be assured then, the house is ready for use. . . ." (History is indeed at times heartbreakingly human.)

The largest number of men employed on the building at any one time was said to be 205, in addition to some seventy plasterers mentioned as working at one time.

"The scaffolding was taken down . . . without injury to any of the workmen. The single accident which occurred during the erection of the building resulted from carelessness, and was not fatal. . . ."⁵

"Prayer was offered by President Young [at that first Tabernacle session in October 1867], in which he expressed to the Most High the grateful feelings of the Saints for the favors which He had multiplied upon them, enabling them to have finished thus far an edifice in which they could assemble and worship Him their Creator in the name of His Son Jesus Christ, imploring the aid of the Holy Spirit to teach them how to pray and what to ask for acceptably in His sight. . . ."

"Monday morning, October 7: President Young said he had no idea when Conference would terminate, but . . . he would ask . . . [the brethren] for short sermons"⁶—a request that some echo even in these days.

The building's fame

"Built a century ago," recently wrote Professor Carl W. Condit of Northwestern University, the Tabernacle "is the largest work of timber roof framing surviving, and the only one in which lattice trusses were built as arch ribs. Despite its mammoth size, the structure was built completely by hand in an area isolated from centers of building activity and railroad lines. . . ."

"The celebrated acoustical properties of the Tabernacle," Professor Condit continues, "are a result of both shape and material. The concave ellipsoidal surfaces above the organ and choir blend and hold instrumental and vocal sounds, projecting the reflected waves cleanly throughout the auditorium. The possibility of annoying echoes is further reduced owing to sound absorbency of the cattle hair embedded in the plaster. . . ."⁷

Frank Lloyd Wright said on a visit to Salt Lake City that "the Salt Lake Tabernacle on Temple Square is 'one of the architectural masterpieces of the country and perhaps the world.'"⁸

Adelina Patti, world-renowned artist of her triumphal time, said: "Never have I encountered such perfect resonance as here in the Tabernacle. Why, my voice is twice as large here. It carries further and with ever so much more tone than in any hall that I have ever sung in."⁹

Fame fostered by the Choir

The Tabernacle Choir recently appeared twice again in concert with the Philadelphia Orchestra, in the choir's most successful Tabernacle Centennial-Expo '67 concert tour, which reminded us again of some significant things pertaining to the Tabernacle from Eugene Ormandy: "We have, as you probably know, performed in almost every great hall in the world," said Mr. Ormandy, "but we have found no better hall anywhere than the Tabernacle. Its acoustics are superb, and I only hope that no human hands will alter them in trying to make improvements. It is as near perfect now as any hall can be, and it is a joy to perform in it. . . ."¹⁰

And by the uses of the building

Many presidents of the United States of the past century have spoken here. Many of the great artists and orchestras of the century have performed here. Many significant messages have been heard here. And on this coming December 17, 1967, the two thousandth performance of "Music and the Spoken Word," with the Tabernacle Choir and organ, the oldest continuously presented nationwide network broadcast in American radio history, is scheduled to be presented from here—which broadcast is now in its 39th year, and heard ever more widely over the world.

Pageant of history of 100 years

There were perhaps not then in all America, in 1867, a handful of auditoriums of such size. And as we have performed in the great capitals and concert halls of Europe and America, we are ever more grateful and humbled and ever more amazed at what our pioneer forebears did with what they had—people not long since homeless, at times hungry; facing untold hazards; some six thousand of them died along the way before the railroad came; no rescue by helicopter, no drugstores, no hospitals, no doctors, for the most part; death and birth; illness, accident, anxiety; and yet they traveled the world sharing the gospel message, and built homes, schools, theaters in the desert, places of worship, temples, the Tabernacle. They demonstrated their willingness to work, not only for physical necessities, but for ideals and culture and family and freedom. And along with implements and utensils, they brought with them books and musical instruments, even pianos, by ox cart across the plains, as circumstances made possible. This was not a cowboy culture, but the gathering of talented and dedicated and resourceful people from many places of the earth to the mountains and the valleys, and spreading out from here to establish a hundred or more settlements not only in the intermountain area, but in other areas, including California and the West Coast, with many disappoint-

ments, many setbacks, but with solid foundations.

One of the wonders of the world

Well, the Tabernacle was many years before its time, but it is still one of the wonders of the world, architecturally, artistically, acoustically, spiritually, and an evidence of the faith and foresight of our fathers. God bless them and their memories.

Principles of the people who built it

But I didn't want to talk today only about a building. I want to say something of the principles of the people who built the building, the convictions that caused them to give up homes and all physical possessions for freedom, for the truth as they testified of it, and at times to lay down their lives—a people who sang in their homeless, hard-pressed sorrow: "All is well! all is well! And should we die before our journey's through, . . . all is well."¹¹ A people who knew that God lives; that education is essential; that chastity and honesty, health and cleanliness, integrity and solvency, work, service, and sacrifice are essential to happiness; that life is limitless, that the family is forever, and that by keeping clean, keeping virtuous, keeping the commandments, there is peace and purpose, comfort and a quiet conscience, and love and respect and happiness at home.

Such were their beliefs—and such are ours also.

Where from here?

Now, where from here?—in such an age as ours, an age where all are searching, some with inspired and inspiring achievement, and some in appalling aberration and lack of respect for life.

To the young we would say, indeed to all: There are no shortcuts to salvation, or excellence, or exaltation—nor to peace and self-respect. Whoever you are, wherever you are: Don't waste life. It is all you have. Study, learn, prepare, respect your privileges; respect and keep the law; respect yourselves.

"Cease to be idle; cease to be unclean. . . ." (D&C 88:124.) Keep the commandments; live and work to qualify and accomplish and to be comfortable with conscience. Don't be misled by those who are confused and cluttered and dissipated in their lives, those who give way to irresponsibility and low-minded morals. Most earnestly one could wish that there would not be given so much play and publicity to the comparatively few (but much too many) who receive too much attention in entertainment and otherwise, as President Hanks referred to, in their eccentric and sometimes sordid ways. Why should we so much emphasize the unwholesome?

And for those who may need reminder of the irrevocable law of cause and consequence, we recall these words of Robert Burns, to whose memory we recently paid our respects with a visit to his birthplace:

"But pleasures are like poppies spread,
You seize the flower, its bloom is shed;

Or like the snow falls in the river,
A moment white—then melts forever."¹²

This is not a time for letting down. It is a time for learning and knowing, for doing and developing, for increasing competence and quality.

The glory of God is intelligence. Righteousness does exalt a nation. Life is everlasting. And "what we are to be, we are becoming." Life here is so short and eternity is so endlessly long. And to young and old, to the eager and impatient, to the weary or any who feel lost along the way: Keep the faith. Keep serving, working, improving, repenting, conquering, overcoming. Take courage and comfort in the assurance that there is divine plan and purpose. It is never too late to begin to do what we ought to do. God has given us no requirements, no commandments, that we cannot keep.

True to the faith

I would plead with my generation and the generations of my children and children's children to be true to the faith, to the commandments of God.

They are still effective and in force. Don't try to ignore them or explain them away or set them aside. There are still laws and standards and qualities of character upon which all blessings are predicated, and as we live the principles we shall realize the results in peace and self-respect and the blessed assurance of everlasting life with loved ones.

May I leave with you my witness that God lives, that he did make us in his own image, that he wishes us to succeed, that he sent his divine Son to show us the way and to redeem us from death; that the gospel is with us here; and that it has been restored, with all that is required of us to realize our highest happiness here and hereafter.

"To be what we are," said Robert Louis Stevenson, "and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life."

God give us the wisdom and courage so to live, I pray in the name of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹Deseret News, October 9, 1897.
 - ²Minutes of the 37th semi-annual conference of the Church.
 - ³Deseret News, May 29, 1867.
 - ⁴Truman O. Angell, unpublished personal journal.
 - ⁵Salt Lake Telegraph, October 6, 1867.
 - ⁶Ibid., October 8, 1867.
 - ⁷Carl W. Condit, *Progressive Architecture*, November 1956, pp. 158-61.
 - ⁸Salt Lake Tribune, April 27, 1954.
 - ⁹Levi Edgar Young, "The Great Mormon Tabernacle and Its World Famed Organ" (Salt Lake City: LDS Bureau of Information, 1917), p. 23.
 - ¹⁰Eugene Ormandy, letter to Isaac M. Stewart.
 - ¹¹"Come, Come, Ye Saints," *Hymns* 13.
 - ¹²Robert Burns, "Tam O'Shanter."
- See also Stewart L. Grow, "A Historical Study of the Construction of the Salt Lake Tabernacle" (Master's Thesis, Brigham Young University).

President Hugh B. Brown

He to whom you have just listened is Elder Richard L. Evans of the Council of the Twelve. As you may know, he is also the author of the Spoken Word, which is heard almost worldwide every week with the Tabernacle Choir.

Again we say: Thank God for the faith of our fathers and for the faith and loyalty of their descendants.