

REVIEWS

Building “as Great a Temple as Ever Solomon Did”

Matthew McBride. *A House for the Most High: The Story of the Original Nauvoo Temple*. Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2007, 448 pp. \$34.95.

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It is a pleasure to review this excellent book which will be a standard work on the Nauvoo Temple among the Mountain Saints for many years to come. McBride, the manager of online development at Deseret Book Company and an avid researcher, has written an easy-to-read and well-documented history of the Mormon temple at Nauvoo.

In the opening chapter, McBride cites Joseph Smith’s public announcement on July 19, 1840: “Now brethren I obligate myself to build as great a temple as ever Solomon did, if the church will back me up” (2). McBride cites portions of LDS Doctrine and Covenants 124 concerning the temple, emphasizing verses 31, 33, and 37, which state that the temple had to be built “within a sufficient time” or the church would be rejected (35–36).

In Chapter 2, “Laying the Foundation: February 1841 to October 1841,” McBride discusses the initial work on the temple foundation and cornerstones and the purchase of lumber mills in Wisconsin, providing the reader with a solid understanding of this early period and explaining why the hierarchy pleaded for members to gather to Nauvoo.

Chapter 3, covering November 1841 to April 1842, includes accounts of the dedication of the temple font and the first baptisms for the dead, also supplying an interesting essay about the temple stonecutters. He presents the first endowments, meetings of the Quorum of the Anointed, and the Prophet’s letters on baptism for the dead in a thorough manner, nicely reinforced by essential background information.

Chapter 5 addresses obtaining funds for the temple, the work of the temple committee, logging operations, and the development of endowments. It also covers the introduction of celestial marriage, plural marriage, prayer meetings, and the Relief Society during the 1843 building

season. The deaths of Joseph and Hyrum Smith headline Chapter 6, and McBride correctly describes accounts of the “last charge” (or the claims that Joseph Smith assigned the Twelve to continue his work of governing the Church) as retrospective. “The Ascendancy of the Twelve: July 1844 to December 1844” is the title of Chapter 7, in which McBride emphasizes the determination of the Twelve to continue building the temple.

Chapter 8, in part, cites the completion of the exterior walls and Sidney Rigdon’s declaration that the Church was rejected because the temple was not completed. This chapter also explains that Brigham Young changed the pattern of baptizing (in which any individual could be baptized for any other) by directing that only men could be baptized for men and that only women could be baptized for women.

In Chapter 9, “The Roof and Tower: June 1845 to September 1845,” McBride comments: “The summer of 1845 was perhaps the most exciting building season on the temple” (213). As the walls were completed, emphasis shifted to the interior. Under the heading “Heightened Security at the Temple,” McBride acknowledges that cannons were rebored in the basement of the temple and explains the Mormons’ defensive posture due to the burning of Mormon houses in the countryside by bands of Gentiles. Not included are parallel accounts of Mormon violence. On April 3, 1845, the Nauvoo police “almost beat a man to death in the Temple,” an act applauded by both Hosea Stout, captain of Nauvoo’s police force, and Brigham Young.¹ Nor does McBride include Stout’s September 30, 1845, entry describing a search of the temple by Illinois state militia for the bodies of two murdered Gentiles.²

Chapter 10, “Conference in the Temple: October 1845 to November 1845,” describes the first general conference held in the temple, during which William Smith’s conduct was reviewed and he was not sustained as Church patriarch. (He was excommunicated six days later.) McBride quotes Jesse Wentworth Crosby: “President Young asserted that we owed the United States nothing, not a farthing, not one sermon. They have rejected our testimony, killed the prophets; our skirts are clear from their blood” (251 note 31).

The central theme of Chapter 11 concerns endowments in the temple during the intense months from December 1845 to February 1846. McBride first reviews how the Saints prepared the temple for the endowments and, maintaining a chronological timetable, describes the dedication of the attic story and early attempts to sell the temple, including an

early effort to effect a sale to the Catholic Church: “Despite this optimistic encounter, the sale fell through. One month later, Father Tucker wrote to inform the Twelve and the trustees that ‘the Catholic bishop could not raise money enough to purchase our property, but would either purchase or rent one of our public buildings, but would not insure it against fire or mobs.’ With evident annoyance, Brigham Young responded that the Twelve ‘would not answer the letter and that the Catholics might go to hell their own way’” (270).

Initial endowments were administered on December 9, 1845, under the guidance of the Holy Order or Anointed Quorum. Abraham O. Smoot’s record is an example of the ceremony which might have taken more than six hours:

At the hour of 8 o’clock in the morning I was received into the preparation rooms with several others of my brethren, and I was there prepared to be conducted into the washing and anointing room, where I received my washings in clean and pure water, preparatory to my anointing, which I received under the hands of Samuel Bent, President of the High Council. I was then presented with a garment bearing the marks of the Priesthood, which I was instructed to wear as prevention from evil. I was now prepared for the reception of further ordinances in the House of the Lord which were to me sublime, great and glorious, making on the mind endurable impressions, or as the prophet said “Engraving upon the heart and written on its inner parts.” (272)

Young established rules of conduct for behavior in the temple in the second week of December 1845. According to William Clayton, “Some men were doing things which ought not to be done in the Temple of the Lord. Some three or four men and perhaps more, had introduced women into the Temple, not their wives, and were living in the side rooms, cooking, sleeping, tending babies. . . .” (275). McBride did not complete Clayton’s statement which ended, after “tending babies,” with “and toying with their women.”³

In an interesting section titled “We Danced before the Lord,” McBride describes Mormon dancing in the temple. In an intriguing scene, Joseph Smith III recalled Brigham Young “anointing” Justin Morse’s violin for this activity:

Brigham Young made quite a show of welcoming him, was glad to see him, glad he had brought his violin with him, etc., and then, taking the instrument from Mr. Morse’s hand, he proceeded to pour some oil on it, anointing it thoroughly, and laid hands upon it after the manner of a sa-

cred ordinance, and blessed it for the purpose of making music for the dancing of God's people. The whole thing happened so quickly Mr. Morse said he had not the opportunity to tell Mr. Young that it was a "Gentile" instrument he was blessing and dedicating, even if he had dared to, for he felt sure had he informed the dominating leader of the fact, the borrowed violin would have been thrown down and smashed. The affair made him very indignant and disgusted, for he felt that it was bad enough for the Saints to dance in the Temple, but worse to make such sacrilege of it. He says he never played for them again. (277-78)

McBride does not address the "oath to avenge the blood of the prophets" which became part of the Nauvoo Temple endowment ceremonies⁴ and further fails to cite William Clayton's journal entry of December 21, 1845: "There are from seven to twelve persons who have met together every day to pray ever since Joseph's death and this people have been sustained upon this principle. Here is brother [Theodore] Turley [who] has been liberated by the power of God and not of man, and I [Clayton] have covenanted, and never will rest nor my posterity after me until those men who killed Joseph and Hyrum have been wiped out of the earth."⁵ McBride also does not quote Brigham Young's address in the temple on January 2, 1846, in which he announced: "And we will go to a land where there are at last no old settlers to quarrel with us, where we can say that we have killed the snakes and made the roads, and we will leave this wicked nation, to themselves, for they have rejected the gospel, and I hope and pray that the wicked will kill one another and save us the trouble of doing it."⁶ Such statements would have added texture and richness in re-creating this emotionally fraught time.

Chapter 12, "Monument to a People: March 1846 to August 1848," describes, among other topics, the private and public dedications of the temple. In the latter, Joseph Young prayed "that God would avenge the blood of His servants the Prophets and of the Saints who have been slain for the testimony of the truth and mete out to our enemies the same measure which they had meted out to us" (329-30). An interesting discussion about the completeness of the temple follows, a matter of consequence because of Joseph Smith's revelation in which God threatened to reject the Church if the Saints failed to complete the temple "within a sufficient time." According to Joseph Smith III, the temple was not completed; Young admitted as much in 1877 by asserting that the temple was "nearly" completed (334). McBride then quotes Doctrine and Covenants 124:49, which had, in a parallel way, suspended the Saints' responsibility to build

the temple in Missouri: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, that when I give a commandment to any of the sons of men to do a work unto my name, and those sons of men go with all their might and with all they have to perform that work, and cease not their diligence, and their enemies come upon them and hinder them from performing that work, behold, it behooveth me to require that work no more at the hands of those sons of men, but to accept of their offerings.”

Efforts to sell the temple form a most interesting part of the narrative. McBride cites the claims of James J. Strang that he would have to approve any sale since he claimed to be “trustee in trust” for the Church. Other obstacles included the claims of Isaac Galland, who said he had a “lien on the temple and other Church properties for \$20,000” (339) and Emma Smith Bidamon’s threats to sue to stop the sale of the temple. Finally, the battle of Nauvoo and the desecration of the temple by the mob are recounted.

Chapter 13 tells of the dramatic burning of the temple in October 1848, the purchase of its gutted remains by Icarians in March 1849, and the tornado eight months later that finished the demolition. The final chapter, “Epilogue: The Temple Resurrected,” contains interesting accounts about how the LDS Church purchased the temple property and ultimately rebuilt the temple.

This book falls short of being a great book because, by its selectivity in excluding difficult or challenging material, it fails to present a more complete portrait of that turbulent period and the enormous energies that focused on the temple. However, it is unquestionably an excellent book in many ways and for many reasons.

Notes

1. Juanita Brooks, ed., *On the Mormon Frontier: The Diary of Hosea Stout, 1844–1861*, 2 vols. (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1982), 1:32.

2. *Ibid.*, 1:78.

3. George D. Smith, ed., *An Intimate Chronicle: The Journals of William Clayton* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 235.

4. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1995), 179.

5. Smith, *An Intimate Chronicle*, 224.

6. *Ibid.*, 251.