



The Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
April 13, 2011

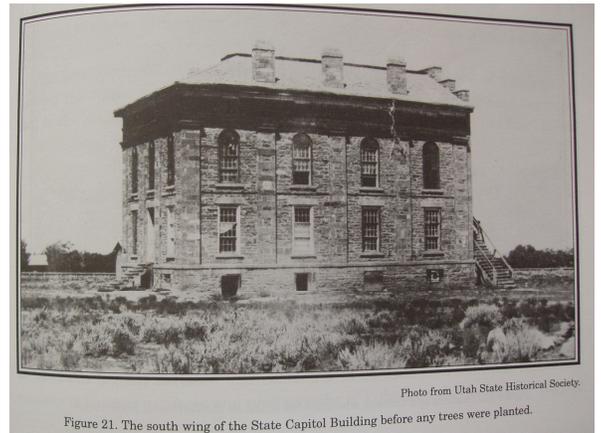
This week the Face of Fillmore spotlights the most prominent building in Fillmore – the Territorial Capitol Building. Visits to Fillmore are not complete without at least driving by, if not stopping to take a tour of the grand old building.

Construction of the building began in 1851, shortly after the pioneers' arrival. This was, of course, the main reason for settling Fillmore.

In a message from Governor Brigham Young to the territorial assembly dated January 5, 1852, we read: "In accordance with a resolution of the legislature locating the government at Pauvan Valley and authorizing me to appoint commissioners to select a site for the capitol, I complied with that requirement by appointing Professors Orson Pratt and Albert Carrington. Jesse W. Fox, Esq., William W. Stains and Joseph L. Robison said commissioners. They immediately proceeded to the performance of their duties and have made their report which I take great pleasure in presenting to you. It appears from their observations that the location chosen on October 29, 1851, is far more central than this city (meaning Salt Lake City). At Fillmore City one wing of the State House will probably be finished of the accommodation of the ensuing legislature. This will be built with funds furnished by the general government for the erection of suitable public buildings at the seat of government."

Truman O. Angel was the architect for the building and William Felshaw was the superintendent of construction. The first phases of construction went slowly and only the basement was dug in 1851. In the spring of 1851, work resumed. Red sandstone was quarried from the mountains east of Fillmore. The lumber was hand-hewn near Parowan and brought to the site by oxen-drawn wagons. The first appropriation for funds was for \$20,000, but because of a misunderstanding, no further funds were given from the general government fund that Brigham Young mentioned.

By 1855, the south wing of the building was nearing completion and was dedicated on December 11 of that same year, and the fifth session of the state legislature was held in its entirety in the building. The sixth session convened there on December 8, 1856, but adjourned that afternoon to the Social Hall in Salt Lake City. The session in the winter of 1857-58 was held in Salt Lake City because of the coming of Johnston's Army. On



December 22, 1858, the eighth annual session convened in Fillmore and resolution to adjourn to Salt Lake City was passed.

Following that time the building was turned over to Fillmore City and Millard County and it began years of several different uses, offices, schools, social and religious gatherings, printing office, jail or for any other use that was needed. When the court house, schools and churches were built and put into use, the building slowly began a period of its history when it was not in use.

As years passed, the citizens of Fillmore became concerned about the condition of the building. This concern grew into a project with an impressive outcome.

In 1921, Maude C. Melville, who had become very active in the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers, visited her home town of Fillmore and toured the run-down capitol building. She realized the great amount of work it would take to save the structure and talked with Flora Horne who was the president of the Central Company of the Daughters of the Pioneers in Salt Lake City. She visited the building and promptly took action, working with Mayor Joseph F. Anderson. A local chapter of the DUP was organized with Hannah Huntsman as president. The group proceeded to clean up the first floor as a possible hall to display pioneer relics. However, the DUP authorities from Salt Lake, who could have put the project in motion, never came at this time to carry out their plan.

In 1924, the local DUP was reorganized with May Stevens as president and through their efforts along with Mayor Edward Nelson and other city officials, a motion was made to ask the State of Utah to take back and restore the building as a monument to the State of Utah. At that time Daniel Stevens was a state senator and influential in having this action taken. Governor George H. Dern was also enthusiastic about this and made several trips to Fillmore to meet with city officials and visit the building. On October 2, 1927, a deed conveying the title of the site to the State was drawn up.

Contractors Young and Hansen were awarded the contract to restore the building. The outside walls were painted, new windows and doors were put in where needed, and floors repaired or replaced. A new copper roof was added. Indirect lighting was added in the large legislative hall. This was the first time the building had seen electric lights as it had previously been lighted with oil lamps.

Nearly a year passed before the rooms were completely cleaned and filled with museum relics, histories and documents by the DUP.

On July 24, 1930, Fillmore was put in the state spotlight. Nearly ten thousand people were in town for the dedication. Mayor Wells Starley turned over the keys of the city to Governor George H. Dern who gave the dedicatory prayer at the opening ceremony, making the old State House a pioneer museum and Utah's First State Park. The Governor instructed the local camps of the Daughter of the Pioneers to be the custodians of the building.

Governor Dern brought with him many of his office staff and set up carrying out the business affairs of the state from that location.

Forty members of Utah's legislature with Hamilton Gardner, president of the senate were in attendance. One interesting event was a mock session of the legislature. One other event in the two day celebration was a banquet followed by a grand march led by the Governor and Mrs. Dern in the legislature hall of the state house.

Parades and pageants were also featured in the celebration with an elk meat barbecue for the community on the second day.

Work soon followed on the grounds with money from the state. Roy A. Dame was the supervisor for the project with many hours of volunteer work donated. Red sandstone like that on the building was brought for walkways. Plants and shrubs were planted with the grounds now hosting one of the most beautiful rose gardens in the state. Much of the work was done by the Daughters of the Pioneers with Mary Dame and Prudence Robinson in charge.

Later an annex for restrooms facilities and a new heating system were added to the building. In recent years, more renovations made the lower level the main entrance to the building, thus saving the original steps from further use and making the building more accessible for wheelchairs.

In recent years, the state house has seen busses of tourists and school children on field trips, families stopping to take a look at the past, as well as wedding receptions and even the inauguration of Governor Jon Huntsman Jr.

A visit to the Territorial State Capitol Building is a must for every citizen in Fillmore. From here, the city's roots sprang out and it is here that one can view the history from its beginnings. This grand building certainly is an impressive part of the Face of Fillmore!