



Face of Fillmore

By Sherry Shepard
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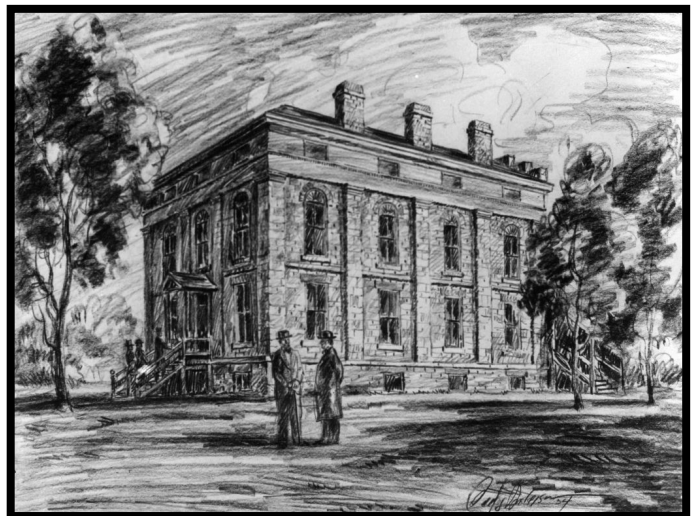
With Statehood Day on January 4, quickly approaching, it is interesting to take a look at the construction of the building through the words of some people who were there for the planning and building of the Territorial Statehouse.

From the moment in October, 1851, when early resident Doris Warner recorded that Brigham Young placed his cane on a spot in the center of the town site and told Jesse Fox to begin surveying the public square where the capitol building would be located to its dedication a few years later, much planning and hard work went into the building. While the community was busy building their own homes and beginning their farms, work on the State House moved forward much more slowly than hoped.

Truman O Angell, Architect of Public Works for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, wrote that his drawings and journal of this event were kept “of my time, kept by my own hand”.

The original design was an elaborate system in the shape of a cross with the four wings square with the compass, and at one center a rotunda to be topped by a Moorish dome. These plans were well beyond the knowledge of most who had come to establish the community so men who were skilled at the work of carpenters and stone masons would have to be hired to do the complicated work. Dr. John K. Bernhisel was the one who was assigned the task of getting the U.S. Congress to appropriate more money for the project. Years of requests, mostly denied, were sent in hopes of completing the building.

A letter from Dr. Bernhisel to Architect Angell gives some discouraging detailed information: “To your request I embrace this opportunity to inform you of the progress of the work in this place. We arrived here in May and found very little had actually been done to forward the work on the State House. We have worked 46 days on the dam, 14 days on the road in the canyon and there will have to be 100 days more, at least before we can get timber enough to start building. The rock is to be hauled about five miles from the quarry. The sand is to be hauled 10 miles. The limestone is yet in the quarry and the kiln not built for nor the wood to fire it is not yet in town. We have hauled a little lumber for our shanties and are yet camped in tents and wagons. We have commenced the water ditch to fetch the water to the State House which will probably cost about 150 days work, as yet we have had no work from the citizens here except some logs hauled from canyon by Brother Call.”



Early Sketch

“We are scant on tools, crowbars, spades picks and axes. If hands come to labor, they ought to bring more tools. There are but a few wagons in this place fit to haul logs from the canyon. If the Church has some strong wagons perhaps it would be well to send them here. It would take what hands there are here about a year I suppose to get ready to build the State House. Some of the hands are rather uneasy with the circumstance. Their hands get blistered by using the pick and crowbar in the rocky soil and they tear their clothing in the canyon and wear out their shoes scrambling over the rocks. Some of the joiners would be glad to return to your city if they could get there.”

William Felshaw wrote a letter to Daniel H. Wells, dated December 30, 1852. He reported:

“I think we shall live through the winter if the Indians don’t kill us off. I should be getting timber from the canyon for the State House if I had feed for my cattle and that could be almost impossible at present as the snow is so deep in the canyon. It snows or rains nearly all the time. The people are trying to get out timber for the mill, but they make slow progress. I shall be under the necessity of closing this letter for my candle is about out and I have no other.”

During the summer and winter of 1853, weather conditions, lack of tools, food, and lack of finances slowed the progress, but it went on at a slow pace for a time. By the fall of 1854 they were ready for the stone masons and stone cutters to be sent from Salt Lake City. George Woodward and his crew of seven masons, three stonecutters, and the mason tenders and four horse teams for moving the stones arrived in Fillmore in September. The citizens, who were busy harvesting their crops, were shocked to see them so late in the year, but work began on the stone the very next day. Felshaw had the door and window frames ready for the stone masons to install, so work proceed quickly, and the masons were finished with their work by December 9. There was still much work to be done with the roofing and plastering and painting, but workers were determined it would be ready for the 1855 Legislature to meet there.

Through the next year the settlers finished many of their own homes while helping with the statehouse. The Legislature arrived in Fillmore for their first meeting on December 10, 1855. The legislators were housed in private homes around town. George A. Smith wrote of this: “I was impressed by the hospitality of the people of Fillmore. They invited us into their homes and made us comfortable.” He also wrote his impressions of the State House, “The State House is very impressive, also, and the Legislative Hall is spacious ad well-furnished and beautifully lighted.”

As Governor Brigham Young and the members of the Legislature convened for business on December 10 in the State House’s South Wing, they were all impressed with what had been accomplished. They looked forward to the completion of the entire building. George Albert Smith remarked, “When the design of Governor Young is carried out, the four wings, with the rotunda in the center will form one of the most splendid buildings to be found in any state capital.”



Statehouse in the snow