

to them other than to demolish the Tabernacle. And yet, as William Morris wrote nearly a century ago, during a great debate over preservation in England, "I say that if we are not prepared to put up with a little inconvenience in our lifetimes for the sake of preserving a monument of art which will elevate and educate, not only ourselves, but our sons, and our sons' sons, it is vain and idle for us to talk about art — or education either."

At this writing, the Tabernacle lot in Coalville has been cleared and the construction of the new stake center delayed for architectural studies to determine whether the old stained glass windows can be incorporated into the new building. Whatever the precise details of the final design, however, there can be no doubt that the people of Summit Stake will soon have a building that is just as modern and efficient as those in dozens of other stakes throughout the Church. It will have another distinct advantage over the old Tabernacle too: no one will object when the time comes to tear it down.

THE COALVILLE TABERNACLE A POINT OF VIEW

Anonymous

On 5 March 1970 the Coalville Tabernacle was officially listed on the Utah State Register of historic sites. One year later, to the day, the Coalville Tabernacle was a pile of rubble.

During the controversy that surrounded the Tabernacle's demolition, a community was divided into factions, the stake president was called "a liar" by a local member, the Church was taken to court, and the process of Church decision-making was seriously questioned by many faithful members. The dominos set off within the Church hierarchy by the Coalville incident have yet to come to rest. The bitterness may remain for years.

The Coalville Tabernacle was a beautiful and inspiring building. Its historic importance was emphasized by the Utah Heritage Foundation, which called it "one of the four or five outstanding LDS buildings still standing."

It had its share of Church history: In 1886, while the Church authorities were in hiding over the polygamy issue, the General Conference of the Church was held in the still incomplete Tabernacle — one of the few conferences held outside Salt Lake City since pioneer times.

It had its share of sacrifice stories: the Relief Society women in the stake earned \$1,500 (a considerable sum in the 1890's) to send to Belgium for the stained glass windows. The fathers and grandfathers of many Summit County residents worked years on the Tabernacle, which was under construction from 1879 to 1899.

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And on 14 May 1899 when President Lorenzo Snow dedicated the Tabernacle, he prayed that it “be preserved until the Son of Man will come.” Many members believed that President Snow’s prayer meant the Tabernacle would play a central part in the Second Coming.

The religious mission attached to it and the community sacrifice expended to build it, meant the Tabernacle was emotional glue to much of the community and a point of great personal pride for many.

This fact was illustrated by one elderly woman who went to the Tabernacle site before the rubble had been cleared away. She carried her genealogy sheets with her and said she was going to bury them under the debris. Her ancestors had struggled to help build the Tabernacle, she said, and their records should remain with them now that their work had been destroyed.

The Coalville Tabernacle was beautiful; it was historic. But it was terribly inadequate as a church facility. It was not large enough to hold stake conference. It did not have a Junior Sunday School room, a Relief Society room, nor office space for bishops and stake officers. Its classrooms were pitifully small and without electric outlets. It did not have a basketball court. The kitchen was in the basement and the cultural hall on the second floor — an impossible situation for ward dinners. The second exit in the basement, required by fire regulations, was through a classroom. It was evident that the Summit Stake and the Coalville First and Second Wards needed new facilities.

After years of planning, it was decided that the best way to get adequate facilities was to tear down the old Tabernacle and build a new building on its site. Stake President Reed Brown said the stake originally planned to build a new stake house on land in another part of Coalville. The Church Building Committee vetoed that plan, however, saying if the stake was to build a new facility, it must be on the present location because the Church didn’t want an old building standing idle. The Church also discouraged the idea of making the Tabernacle into a museum because Coalville would have a hard time competing with the tourist promotion campaign at Temple Square, located just a half hour away along Interstate 80.

The Church also decided against building additional facilities next to the Tabernacle, with the old building continuing to serve as chapel, which is what the Utah Heritage Foundation and the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers wanted. The wisdom and competency of the Church Building Committee in advising the General Authorities *not* to approve the plan was a central point of contention throughout the struggle over the demolition of the Coalville Tabernacle.

In the summer of 1970, President Reed Brown called Gary Forbush of the Utah State Historical Society about the building and indicated that he wanted to work with the Historical Society to preserve it. Brown met with Forbush and Melvin Smith, the Utah State Preservation Officer, and invited them to his home in Hoytsville for a cookout and meeting to discuss the Tabernacle. Those who were to attend included John Vandenberg, the

Presiding Bishop of the Church; Mark E. Petersen, head of the Church Historic Arts Committee; Alvin Dyer, whom Forbush described as “pro-preservation”; and the Summit stake and ward leadership. Then for no apparent reason, the meeting was cancelled.

The Church then decided the Tabernacle should be torn down. President Reed Brown pointed out that the decision was authorized by the First Presidency, approved by the Council of Twelve, and received unanimous approval of the Stake Presidency, the Stake High Council and all of the Summit Stake Bishops. Before voting, all of the bishops of the stake interviewed each of their families individually to discuss their feelings on the matter.

Finally, in accordance with Church procedure, a vote of adult priesthood holders was held. The meeting was advertised beforehand in priesthood meetings and it was announced the special meeting “would concern the building program.” But no specific proposals were mentioned. At the meeting, the men were asked to vote “to sustain the stake leadership in its decision” to tear down the old building and construct a new one. The vote, as expected, was unanimous in support of the stake leadership. Some later said they abstained from voting, but no one voted against the decision.

Shortly after this stake meeting a petition was circulated by the Coalville Camp of the Daughters of the Utah Pioneers (DUP). It asked that the Tabernacle be preserved and incorporated into a new facility. Mabel Larson, DUP Parliamentarian and an active Church member, said that 55 percent of the adult Church members in Coalville signed the petition.

The issue came to broad public attention when the Salt Lake City news media picked it up the week of February 14. Before it was over, the incident even hit the pages of the *New York Times*. The *Deseret News*, for the most part, however, made no mention of the story throughout the entire event, except for the publication of official statements by Church leaders.

On Wednesday, February 17, the University of Utah Student Council appropriated \$1,500 for the University’s architecture department to study ways to save the building.

On Thursday, February 18, a Salt Lake City woman, Mrs. Marilyn Jensen, obtained a permit from the City Council for a demonstration in front of the Church Office Building the next day. Mrs. Jensen obtained the permit on behalf of her brother-in-law, David Fitzen of American Fork.

By this time, the DUP had obtained a lawyer, Thomas Blonquist of Salt Lake, to see if the courts could do what their petition had failed to do — stop the planned demolition.

Friday, February 19, was D-day for those fighting to save the Tabernacle. The contract for demolition was going to be signed that day and work was to begin the next Monday. At noon, the demonstration went off as planned. About thirty people picketed. Some carried signs: “A Thing of Beauty Is a Joy Forever” and “Joseph Fielding Save Our Building.” Most of the demonstrators were housewives and businessmen.

The demonstration was only good for public attention. The demon-



One of the ceiling portraits of presidents of the Church.

strators doubted the Church would be swayed by their marching. Their real hopes, however slim, lay with lawyer Blonquist and the courts. Late in the day Blonquist achieved what must be some kind of legal milestone in Church history. At 4 p.m. Allen B. Sorenson, presiding judge of the Utah Fourth District Court, signed Blonquist's petition seeking a temporary restraining order stopping the Church from demolishing the Coalville Tabernacle. Judge Sorenson scheduled a hearing on a permanent injunction for March 1 in Coalville.

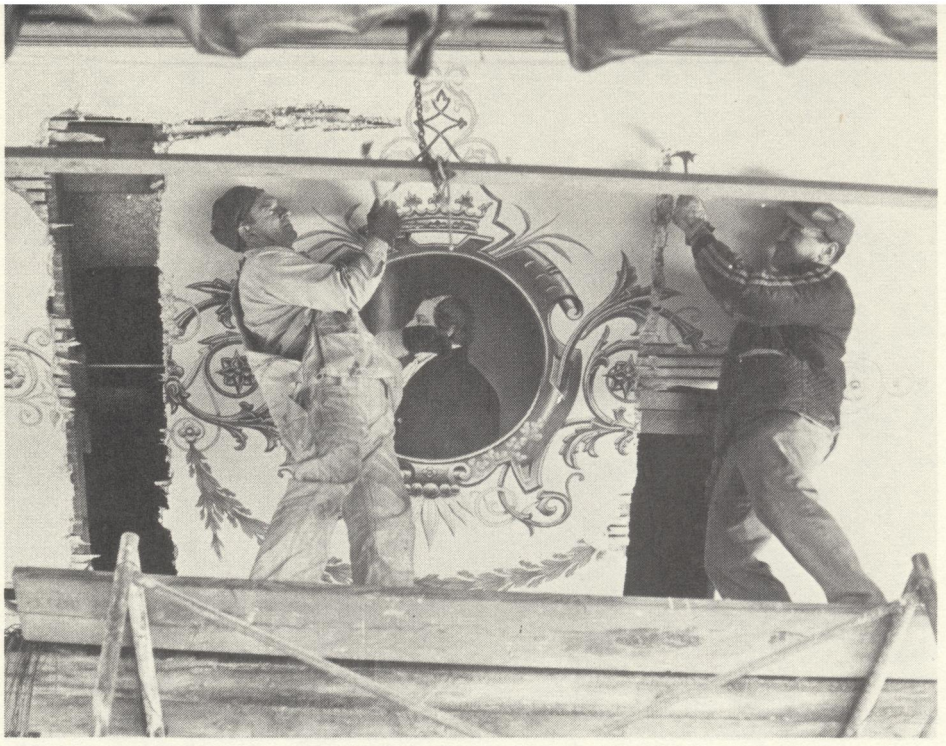
The arguments Blonquist used in seeking the injunction were based no less than on the concept that the Church was governed by the principle of common consent. It contended that "Members of the Summit Stake of the said church as a group were never given the opportunity to give their consent to the demolition of said tabernacle prior to the time the decision was made to demolish said structure."

In addition to the common consent argument, Blonquist also contended that each Summit Stake member had a property right in the Tabernacle: "As members of said church, each plaintiff has a property right in said tabernacle and a right to voice his consent or dissent as to its demolition."

The temporary injunction bought time for the anti-demolition people. At this point, they did not look upon the court as the real solution to saving the building. The next Monday, February 22, they held a public meeting in Salt Lake. About 350 people attended, not quite half of whom were present or former Coalville residents. There also were representatives from nearly 20 historical and architectural groups in Utah.

At the meeting, a committee of six* was elected to try to get an audience

*Thomas Blonquist, the lawyer; Mrs. Bernett Smith, Captain of the Coalville Camp of the DUP; Melvin Smith, Utah State Preservation Officer; D. James Cannon, Salt Lake banker and former head of Pro-Utah; Robert Bliss, chairman of the University of Utah's



Removing the ceiling portrait of Joseph Smith.

with the First Presidency. The committee, using the resources of the University of Utah Architecture Department and the \$1,500 allocated by the student government, wanted to work with the Church and its building department in trying to find a way to save the Tabernacle.

The committee worked mainly through D. James Cannon, a veteran of the Save-the-Heber-City-Tabernacle fight a few years earlier and a published Church writer. They succeeded in getting a meeting with the First Presidency on Friday, February 26. The committee asked for a 30-day moratorium on demolition and offered the services of the University's architecture department. The First Presidency listened to the committee but made no commitment.

With the court hearing approaching, Summit Stake moved to clear up the question as to what the majority of the stake membership thought about the demolition. The DUP petition showed 55 percent of the Coalville membership opposed to demolition. The stake's priesthood vote, however, had been unanimous in support of the Stake leadership's decision.

On Saturday night, every stake member was delivered a notice signed by President Brown announcing that the membership would "vote in favor or against the proposed program in sacrament meeting in each ward February 28," the next day. The meetings would not be open for discussion, the notice said.

Accompanying the notice was a one-page statement outlining the reasons the leadership believed only a completely new facility could provide for the stake's needs, and listing the disadvantages of remodeling the existing Tabernacle and building additional facilities adjacent to it. (The Summit Stake had already purchased the land next to the Tabernacle to use

Architecture Department; and Chad Dobson, representing the University's student government.

in building its new building.) Under the remodeling plan the chapel would still be too small, the cultural hall would not be adjacent to the chapel so there would be no overflow capacity, the circulation pattern in a remodeled building would be bad, and the small exits in the Tabernacle were unsafe. Therefore, "The cost of remodeling would be equal to or greater than a new building and it would not provide a workable facility". The statement concluded, "It is obvious that a completely new building would provide the most usable facility for the local wants."

This explanation by the Summit Stake Presidency followed in broad outline the reasoning used throughout the controversy. It emphasized that the real purpose of an L.D.S. Church building is not to provide beauty nor preserve history — although those things are nice — but to aid people in living the Gospel. And since, to their minds, the present or a remodeled Tabernacle could not service all the programs of the Church, it was not serving its function and should be replaced.

The vote was held in each of the wards Sunday evening and the result was overwhelming. Eighty-five percent of those voting favored tearing down the Tabernacle and erecting a new building on its site.

Mabel Larson of the DUP charged that the vote was unfair because in many wards the proposition was presented not as a vote on a building but as a vote sustaining the leadership in its decision. The people were led to believe it was a choice of tearing down the Tabernacle or not having new facilities at all. In two wards where, according to her, it was presented fairly, Upton and Wanship, the vote was against tearing the Tabernacle down. Mont Winters, a ward clerk in the Hoytsville Ward of Summit Stake and an opponent of the demolition, said, "The people did not vote their convictions in church. How can you stand in church and say no. The people were scared into voting with the authorities."

It is, however, hard to dispute such a lopsided vote. For whatever reasons: fear, misinformation, fatigue of the controversy, or fully-informed free opinion, the overwhelming majority of the Summit Stake membership seemed to want the Tabernacle controversy ended and a new building constructed.

The vote set the stage for the court hearing on Monday, March 1, in Coalville under Judge Maurice Harding. At the hearing, Thomas Blonquist argued that since the Tabernacle had just been named a national historic site, the American public as a whole had an interest in the building. That interest, he said, overrode the property right of the Church. Blonquist's original petition, however, made no mention of the historic site argument and Judge Harding had to rule on what was before him. The Constitutional principle of separation of church and state determined his ruling. "The court has no business in this matter," he said. And the injunction died. "I had hoped that this Tabernacle could be saved," Judge Harding added. "It's a remarkable building. But it now appears I'm going to have to be satisfied with a photograph." It was all over in little more than an hour.

Afterwards President Reed Brown said no date had been set for the demolition to begin. He promised a cooling-off period before anything would be done. And he said any action would have the unanimous consent of the authorities from the ward, stake and general level.

The anti-demolition group asked D. James Cannon to try to contact the First Presidency again and get a voluntary moratorium on the Tabernacle's destruction and also to ask about the possibility of purchasing the building. If Cannon failed, Blonquist said he would file another petition, this time in federal court, using the historical site arguments.

After the court hearing, the man who organized the demonstration in front of the Church Office Building, David Fitzen, called Harold B. Lee. He told Elder Lee his group wanted to buy the building. Elder Lee told Fitzen to write up his request and send it to him. Fitzen did and then called Elder Lee back on Tuesday. But this time Elder Lee said the matter was a local decision and that he couldn't do anything about it. Fitzen then called President Reed Brown Tuesday at 5 p.m. After a bit of haggling, Fitzen said President Brown agreed to sell the Tabernacle for \$150,000. Fitzen said he could give the stake \$3,000 to \$5,000 in earnest money and pay the rest in 30 to 60 days. President Brown told Fitzen he was meeting with his counselors that night and he would present the proposal to them, but he didn't think there would be any problem in their accepting the offer. Fitzen said Brown told him he would call him back if there were. Otherwise, they agreed to talk again on Friday. Less than 12 hours later, on Wednesday, March 3, the demolition of the Coalville Tabernacle began.

Late Tuesday night the bishops had called selected members of their wards to assist in the demolition. The volunteers met at 5 a.m. Wednesday morning and worked until noon, tearing out the inside furnishings of the building. The surprise move stunned most people. Passions ran strong in Coalville. At noon, Mark Garff, head of the Church Building Committee, called Ron Robinson, Sheriff of Summit County, and asked him to tell the workers to stop the demolition. No reason was given.

The First Presidency issued a statement that day justifying its decision to tear the Tabernacle down. The statement said the idea of remodeling the Tabernacle was rejected because a remodeled facility "would be wholly inadequate for current needs and the cost of remodeling would be prohibitive." It explained that the Tabernacle was rejected as a Church information center and as a museum. The First Presidency also said preservation was not justified on historical grounds, because there was no unusual history connected with the building, . . . nor for architectural reasons — "After the Assembly Hall on Temple Square was erected, its plan was used in construction of the Summit Stake Tabernacle. Hence, we have concluded there is no significant loss of architectural heritage." The statement continued:

Having expended several years in the above feasibility studies, it was determined that a new stake center should be erected on the site presently occupied by the Summit Stake Tabernacle, and after the recent resolution of the legal matters before the court, and after



all church procedures had been satisfactorily complied with, and [after] it was determined that the overwhelming affirmation of the people in that stake was to proceed with the demolition and erection of a new facility, authority was given to the Church Building Committee to proceed with the work.

The questions still remained, however, as to what happened to the cooling-off period President Brown had promised after the court hearing Monday, and as to his promise to sell the building to Fitzen. The next day, Thursday, President Brown issued a statement explaining the demolition.

I had first anticipated a cooling-off period following a recent court hearing on the matter before ordering demolition of the building.

However, when informed of attorney Thomas R. Blonquist's threat to the people of Summit Stake of further legal harassment if terms of a sale could not be reached in one day, a special meeting of stake authorities was called to reconsider the matter.

After a thorough discussion, it was decided that it was in the best interests of the people to move ahead.

Arrangements were made to have local members donate their time early Wednesday before commencing their regular jobs in order to assist in saving such items in the tabernacle that have historic interest or artistic significance.

Thus, early in the morning the local people commenced on a voluntary basis to help preserve the fine stained glass windows and artistic work. These will be retained for possible use in the new structure.

Attorney Blonquist denied ever having mentioned any one-day deadline. In fact, he said he never talked to President Brown about selling the

building. Blonquist said under American legal tradition anyone has the right to seek legal redress in a court of law, and that his action could hardly be called "legal harassment."

Late Thursday, March 4, work continued on removing the ceiling artwork. On Friday, March 5, heavy equipment moved in and destroyed the Coalville Tabernacle.

THE LESSON OF COALVILLE

Paul G. Salisbury

As suggested in the preceding discussions, the confrontations surrounding the destruction of the Coalville Tabernacle were so devisive and frustrating that those involved on any side of the issue must have vowed to avoid similar experiences in the future. At the same time everyone must be aware that the idea of preservation will become more rather than less important. There are many more chapels, tabernacles and tithing offices whose existence will be questioned, whose value (historic, aesthetic or economic) will be challenged, and whose future will be on trial.

After the demolition of the Coalville Tabernacle, representatives of the Utah Heritage Foundation, the Utah Industrial Promotion Division, and other concerned groups met with Elder Mark E. Peterson, the chairman of the L.D.S. Historic Arts Committee in an effort to set guide-lines for future cases regarding buildings owned or built by the Church. Elder Peterson was most cordial and showed genuine interest in the slide presentation and the discussion, but stated that while the Historic Arts Committee was willing to work with preservation groups, the committee could not be tied down to designating any specific structures for preservation.

A brief description of those groups in Utah most conspicuously involved in preservation might be helpful.

THE UTAH HERITAGE FOUNDATION (603 East South Temple, S.L.C.) is a public supported, tax-free corporation concerned with the preservation of the buildings, groups of buildings and sites of historic, archaeological or artistic value. Its members include architects, artists, businessmen and educators.

THE L.D.S. HISTORIC ARTS COMMITTEE (47 East South Temple, S.L.C.) evaluates Church buildings for their historic or artistic merit and is composed of the following members: Elders Mark E. Peterson, Richard L. Evans, Gordon B. Hinkley and Alvin R. Dyer. Also on the committee are Florence Jacobsen and John Q. Cannon, director, Church information service.

CORNERSTONE: *An Organization of Latter-day Saints for the Preservation of their Architectural Heritage* (Bevan Chipman or Frank Fergu-