



**FIGURE 1.** Salt Lake Tabernacle, December 1905, photographer unknown (PH 91 8.1, 15 cm × 10 cm, contact print), Church History Library. The Latter-day Saints celebrated the one hundredth anniversary of Joseph Smith's birth in December 1905. Joseph F. Smith, the Prophet's nephew and sixth President of the Church, dedicated a granite memorial at Joseph Smith's birthplace in Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, on December 23, 1905. On the following day, twenty thousand Latter-day Saints gathered in the historic Salt Lake Tabernacle in two meetings to remember the Prophet. This photograph highlights a view of the interior of the Tabernacle, decorated for the centennial celebration of the Prophet's birth. The bright light in the ceiling comes from the skylight.

# Photographs of the Interior of the Salt Lake Tabernacle, December 1905

*Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Ronald L. Fox*

The United States government's war on The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints came to a sudden end with the issuance of the Manifesto in 1890.<sup>1</sup> The cessation of the conflict produced a period of goodwill between Latter-day Saints and their neighbors in Utah and with politicians in Washington, D.C. However, the fragile truce began to show cracks in 1896 when Utah achieved statehood, and by 1900, with the election of B. H. Roberts<sup>2</sup> to the U.S. Congress, the final vestiges of the armistice had all but disappeared. Four years later, in 1904, with the election of LDS Apostle Reed Smoot<sup>3</sup> to the U.S. Senate, the conflict widened and deepened.

In 1905, the year after Reed Smoot won the senatorial election, he was battling to retain his seat in the U.S. Senate.<sup>4</sup> This investigation in

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1. On the complexities of the 1890s for the Church and the U.S. government, see Thomas G. Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 3–15.

2. Brigham Henry Roberts (1857–1933) was a prolific writer, active in Utah politics supporting the Democratic Party, and a member of the Council of the Seventy from 1888 until his death in 1933.

3. Reed Smoot (1862–1941) was a prominent businessman, member of the Utah state legislature, U.S. senator from 1903 to 1933, and a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from 1900 until the time of his death in 1941. See Milton R. Merrill, *Reed Smoot: Apostle in Politics* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 1990).

4. Finally, on February 20, 1907, a motion to remove Smoot from the U.S. Senate was defeated.

Washington, D.C., really focused on LDS beliefs, practices, and history.<sup>5</sup> Never before had the Church been so thoroughly investigated by an official federal government body and criticized and lampooned in public lectures, newspaper articles, editorials, and political cartoons.<sup>6</sup>

During the year, Reverend T. C. Iliff, superintendent of the Methodist Church Mission in the Rocky Mountains and a major leader in the effort to remove Senator Smoot, delivered his lecture “Mormonism, a Menace to the Nation” to packed venues across the country.<sup>7</sup> The widespread attention his lectures received often elicited editorial rebuttals in the Church’s newspaper, the *Deseret Evening News*.<sup>8</sup> During 1905, two Utah newspapers, the *Salt Lake Tribune* and *Goodwin’s Weekly*, continued their unrelenting attacks on the Church and its leaders, especially Joseph F. Smith, the sixth president of the Church.<sup>9</sup> By October 1905, two LDS Apostles, John W. Taylor<sup>10</sup> and Matthias F. Cowley,<sup>11</sup> were forced to resign from the Quorum of the Twelve in the wake of the Smoot hearings.<sup>12</sup>

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5. See Kathleen Flake, *The Politics of American Religious Identity: The Seating of Senator Reed Smoot, Mormon Apostle* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

6. See Gary L. Bunker and Davis Bitton, *The Mormon Graphic Image, 1834–1914: Cartoons, Caricatures, and Illustrations* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1983), 57–70.

7. See James David Gillilan, *Thomas Corwin Iliff: Apostle of Home Missions in the Rocky Mountains* (New York: Methodist Book Concern, 1919), 73–96.

8. For example, see “Conflicting Rumors,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 30, 1905, 4.

9. See, for example, “Why Reed Smoot Will Be Kicked from Senate,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 21, 1905, 1; and “The Infamy of the Things,” *Goodwin’s Weekly*, December 9, 1905, 2.

10. John Whittaker Taylor (1858–1916) was the son of the third president of the Church, John Taylor (1808–1887), and a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles until he resigned in 1905. See Andrew Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia: A Compilation of Biographical Sketches of Prominent Men and Women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 4 vols. (Salt Lake City: Andrew Jenson History, 1901–36), 1:151–56.

11. Matthias F. Cowley (1858–1940) was a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles until he resigned in 1905. He was the father of LDS Apostle Matthew Cowley (1897–1953) and FBI agent Samuel P. Cowley (1899–1934). See Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:168–72.

12. See Victor W. Jorgensen and B. Carmon Hardy, “The Taylor-Cowley Affair and the Watershed of Mormon History,” *Utah Historical Quarterly* 48 (January 1980): 4–36.

## The Commemoration in Sharon, Vermont

During this challenging year, Joseph F. Smith<sup>13</sup> turned his attention to the upcoming one hundredth anniversary of Joseph Smith's birth in December 1905. Church leaders commissioned the production of a commemorative bronze medallion by the "well known painter and sculptor" Mahonri M. Young.<sup>14</sup> A description of the medallion was published in the *Deseret Evening News*: "The medal shows on its face a bust portrait of the prophet, with the date of his birth, and the date of its hundredth anniversary. On the obverse side is a sketch of the monument erected this year on the site of his birthplace, of the house in which he was born and an inscription explaining the nature of the occasion which the medal commemorates."<sup>15</sup>

Earlier in the year, Church leaders had also authorized Junius F. Wells<sup>16</sup> to locate and purchase the site of Joseph Smith's birth in Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, with plans to erect a monument in the Prophet's honor.

By May 1905, Wells had purchased the site and "submitted a design proposal to erect a monument and memorial in time to celebrate the centennial of Joseph Smith's birth in December."<sup>17</sup> The plans for the monument

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13. The First Presidency consisted of Joseph F. Smith as president with John R. Winder (1821–1910) and Anthon H. Lund (1844–1921) as counselors.

14. "Will Honor the Prophet Joseph," *Deseret Evening News*, December 13, 1905, 1. Mahonri Mackintosh Young (1877–1957) was the grandson of Brigham Young and a well-known and celebrated American sculptor and artist who created the This Is the Place Monument and Seagull Monument in Salt Lake City. See Norma S. Davis, *A Song of Joys: The Biography of Mahonri Mackintosh Young, Sculptor, Painter, Etcher* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Museum of Art, 1999).

15. "Will Honor the Prophet Joseph," *Deseret Evening News*, December 13, 1905, 1.

16. Junius Free Wells (1854–1930) was the first head of the Young Men's Mutual Improvement Association (YMMIA) and the chief organizer of the LDS Church's efforts to build a number of historical monuments in the early 1900s. See Paul Thomas Smith, "Junius F. Wells," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 4:1560–61.

17. Keith A. Erikson, "Memories, Monuments, and Mormonism: The Birthplace of Joseph Smith in Vermont," in *Born in the U.S.A.: Birth, Commemoration, and American Public Memory*, ed. Seth C. Bruggeman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012), 135.

were published in a lengthy essay by Wells in the *Deseret Evening News* in July 1905.<sup>18</sup>

Not surprisingly, given the explosive atmosphere at the time, the public announcement that the Church would erect a monument in Vermont generated negative attention.<sup>19</sup> For example, Fredrick M. Smith,<sup>20</sup> counselor in the First Presidency of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and grandson of the Prophet Joseph Smith, declared his opposition in an “Open Letter to All People,” published in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in July 1905.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, a few individuals in Vermont voiced concern. However, most residents, including businessmen and political leaders, supported the efforts to erect the monument and welcomed Church leaders who arrived in December 1905 to dedicate it.<sup>22</sup>

Wells sent President Smith a telegram in early December “convey[ing] the information that the erection of a monument of Joseph Smith, the Prophet, at his birthplace in Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, was then completed without serious accident to men or material, and that the surmounting monolith is said to be the largest polished granite shaft in America.”<sup>23</sup>

As the date of the centennial approached, the Church’s First Presidency invited a select group of Church leaders and prominent LDS families to attend the special dedication services in Vermont.<sup>24</sup> Orson F.

18. Junius F. Wells, “The Birthplace of Joseph Smith the Prophet,” *Deseret Evening News*, July 1, 1905, 13–14.

19. The 50-foot-tall (15 meters) monument weighed approximately 100 short (American) tons (91 metric tons). Quarried in Barre, Vermont, the 40-short-ton (36 metric tons) shaft of the monument is 38.5 feet (11.7 meters) long—one foot for each year of the Prophet’s life. See *Proceedings at the Dedication of the Joseph Smith Memorial Monument* (Salt Lake City: Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1905), 26.

20. Fredrick M. Smith (1874–1946) was the son of Joseph Smith III and president of the RLDS Church from 1915 until his death in 1946. See Paul M. Edwards, *The Chief: An Administrative Biography of Fred M. Smith* (Independence: Herald House, 1988).

21. See, for example, Frederick M. Smith, “Open Letter to All People,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, July 1, 1905, 3 (letter dated June 30, 1905).

22. Erikson, “Memories, Monuments, and Mormonism,” 139–44.

23. “Monument Is Now Completed,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 9, 1905, 1.

24. First Presidency, “First Presidency Invitation to Dedication of Joseph Smith Monument, 1905,” CR 1 141, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus

Whitney<sup>25</sup> noted in his journal, “Monday December 18, 1905. President Joseph F. Smith and a party left today in a special car for Vermont to be present at the unveiling of the monument erected in honor of the martyred Prophet at his birth place—Sharon. I was invited to go, but did not have the money—\$130.—to pay the expenses of the trip. . . . [Joseph F. Smith] left it to me to decide saying he did not wish to work up hardship on any one. I therefore thanked him and remained at home.”<sup>26</sup>

Joseph F. Smith’s party arrived in Vermont on Friday, December 22, 1905, to participate in the unveiling and dedication of the monument on the following day, Saturday, December 23, 1905.<sup>27</sup> Images of the trip and dedication ceremony have been widely published and are preserved in several photographic collections in the Church History Library.<sup>28</sup> Figure 2 is one such photo.

This was not the first year Joseph F. Smith had promoted the observance of the Prophet’s birthday among the Latter-day Saints.<sup>29</sup> However, because of the historic nature of the centennial, the First Presidency

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Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City; the invitation was also published in the *Deseret Evening News*, December 21, 1905, 1.

25. Orson Ferguson Whitney (1855–1931) was the city editor of the *Deseret News*, member of the editorial department for the *Millennial Star* in England, Salt Lake City treasurer, professor at Brigham Young College in Logan, state legislator, bishop of the Salt Lake City Eighteenth Ward, and a member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles, beginning in 1907. See “President Smith Goes to Vermont,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 18, 1905, 1.

26. Orson F. Whitney, Diary, December 18, 1905, 175, Orson F. Whitney Diaries, 1877–1931, MSS 188, Special Collections and Archives, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.

27. The broader context of this story is outlined in several important articles by Keith A. Erikson. See Keith A. Erikson, “The Joseph Smith Memorial Monument and Royalton’s ‘Mormon Affair’: Religion, Community, Memory, and Politics in Progressive Vermont,” *Vermont History* 73 (Summer 2005): 30–68; and Keith A. Erikson, “‘Out of the Mists of Memory’: Remembering Joseph Smith in Vermont,” *Journal of Mormon History* 73 (Summer/Fall 2005): 117–51.

28. See Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, T. Jeffrey Cottle, and Ted D. Stoddard, *Church History in Black and White: George Edward Anderson’s Photographic Mission to Latter-day Saint Historical Sites* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1995), 202–8; and Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Paul H. Peterson, “New Photographs of Joseph F. Smith’s Centennial Memorial Trip to Vermont, 1905,” *BYU Studies* 39, no. 4 (2000): 107–14.

29. Beginning in 1894, Joseph F. Smith “called for wider celebrations of his uncle’s birth. . . . In 1901, [Joseph F. Smith] became president of the Church and directed local congregations to hold commemorative services on the Sunday





FIGURE 2. Joseph Smith's birthplace, Sharon, Vermont. In commemoration of the Prophet's one hundredth birthday on December 23, 1905, President Joseph F. Smith traveled to the Solomon Mack farm to dedicate the Joseph Smith Memorial Cottage (left) and a granite monument (right). WLC Litho. Courtesy Larry C. Porter.

underscored the importance of the celebration this particular year by inviting all Church members to participate in special services to honor the Prophet throughout the Church on Sunday, December 24, 1905.

The official announcement stated, "Memorial services will be held on Sunday, the twenty-fourth of December, in all the Assemblies of the Latter Day Saints throughout the world. You are cordially invited to attend these services wherever most convenient to join in honoring the memory of one who was honored of God and is beloved by his people."<sup>30</sup>

### Commemorations in Utah outside Salt Lake Valley

Most LDS congregations and communities complied with the request and gathered on Sunday, December 24, to celebrate the birth of the

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nearest Joseph Smith's birth each December." See Erikson, "Memories, Monuments, and Mormonism," 134.

30. "First Presidency Invitation," *Deseret Evening News*, December 21, 1905, 1.

Prophet. An exception was Vernon, Tooele County, Utah, where “the Sunday school celebrated Joseph Smith’s birthday” on December 23, 1905.<sup>31</sup> In many instances, these celebrations included Christmas music and readings as a way to transition into the celebration of Christmas on Monday, December 25—the traditional day Christians celebrate the birth of Jesus Christ. In Provo, Utah County, Utah, local stake president David John<sup>32</sup> noted, “Services were held throughout the Church in [commemoration] of the birth of the prophet Joseph Smith, the 100 years of his birth. Elder Ulboud and sister Alice Reynolds, spoke in the Utah Stake tabernacle.”<sup>33</sup>

Another report from Utah County noted, “The Springville four wards honored the Prophet Joseph Smith’s birthday in a fitting manner in the Sunday schools and in general and ward meetings, all exercises being appropriate for the occasion. Acquaintances of the Prophet addressed each meeting, relating many reminiscences. William Mendenhall, Milan Packard, James Oakley, O. B. Huntington, Harriett Hunting, Polly Smith, William Lowrey, Sidney Dibble, Daniel Bagley, Nephi Packard and George B. Matson, citizens of Springville, were all acquainted with the great latter-day Prophet.”<sup>34</sup>

Church leaders in Logan, Cache County, Utah, announced, “The public has a most cordial invitation to be present and strangers have a particular invitation” to join the Saints in the Logan Tabernacle to celebrate the special occasion.<sup>35</sup> Lucy Walker Smith,<sup>36</sup> the “only surviving

31. “Vernon,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 30, 1905, 9.

32. David John (1833–1908) was an influential businessman, politician, and religious leader in Utah County, where he served as counselor and later president of the Utah [Provo] Stake between 1877 and 1908. See Jensen, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:488–90.

33. David John, Journal, December 24, 1905, MSS 21, 19th Century Western & Mormon Manuscripts, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah.

34. “Springville Honors Prophet’s Birthday,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 28, 1905, 9.

35. “Tomorrow Afternoon,” *Logan Republican*, December 23, 1905, 1.

36. Lucy Walker (1826–1910) was an early LDS convert who was sealed to Joseph Smith on May 1, 1843, in Nauvoo, Hancock County, Illinois. See Lucy Walker Kimball, “A Brief Biographical Sketch of the Life and Labors of Lucy Walker Kimball Smith,” Church History Library, as quoted in Lyman Omer Littlefield, *Reminiscences of Latter-day Saints: Giving an Account of Much Individual Suffering Endured for Religious Conscience* (Logan, Utah: Utah Journal Co., 1888), 46.



wife of the Prophet Joseph,” and Melvin J. Ballard,<sup>37</sup> a prominent Church leader, spoke on Sunday, December 24.<sup>38</sup>

The Saints in Lehi, Utah County, gathered on “Sunday afternoon at 2 p.m.” in “the new Tabernacle in honor of the 100th anniversary of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith. A few of those who knew the Prophet were present and spoke and the remainder of the time was occupied by Elder Mathonihah Thomas of Salt Lake City, who spoke of the relationship of God to the people on this earth, etc. Those of Lehi’s citizens who knew the Prophet Joseph are: M. B. Bushman, Mrs. Steward, Mrs. Sarah Rhodes, Luke Titcomb, Hiland D. Wilcox, Mr. Zina Willis, Peter Lot, Mrs. Elisabeth Jacobs, Mrs. Emma Woodhouse.”<sup>39</sup>

“A splendid program” was held at Caineville, Wayne County, Utah, “under the auspices of the Mutual Improvement associations.”<sup>40</sup> Another program was held without much formality in Cedar City, Iron County, Utah, as reported in the local newspaper: “Sunday services, both of the Sunday school and afternoon session, were carried on extemporaneously in commemoration of the one hundredth birthday of the Prophet Joseph Smith. A number of young women were called to speak.”<sup>41</sup>

The Sunday Schools of the two Manti wards in San Pete County, Utah, “held special exercises last Sunday morning in honor of the Prophet Joseph Smith’s one hundredth birthday. In the afternoon memorial services were held in the tabernacle. William D. Livingston, Daniel Henrie and George Hoggan spoke of the prophet and his work. The following brethren and sisters who have seen the Prophet Joseph were present: William Johnston, Horace Thornton, Daniel Henrie, George A. Rush, George Coleman, Azriah Smith, William A. Cox Sr., Frederick W. Cox, Walter Stevens, Adelia Squires, and Adaline Buchanan.”<sup>42</sup>

The “old acquaintances” of the Prophet Joseph Smith in Santaquin, Utah County, Utah, testified to the “grand character of Prophet Joseph” in a meeting “well attended in this ward, the meetinghouse being filled.” Among those in attendance who knew the Prophet were “Ann Clemons

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37. Melvin J. Ballard (1873–1939) was a missionary and mission president before serving in the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from 1919 until his death in 1939. See Jenson, *Latter-day Saint Biographical Encyclopedia*, 1:419–20.

38. “Tomorrow Afternoon,” *Logan Republican*, December 23, 1905, 1.

39. “Memorial Services,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 30, 1905, 9.

40. “Caineville,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 30, 1905, 9.

41. “Kanarra,” *Iron County Record*, December 29, 1905, 1.

42. “Manti Anniversary Services,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 28, 1905, 9.

and Elizabeth Wall,” who “addressed the congregation for a short time. . . . Sister Roxena Carter, another acquaintance of the Prophet residing in this ward, was unable through sickness to attend meeting, but wrote her testimony, and it was read to the assembly.”<sup>43</sup>

### Commemoration at the Salt Lake City Tabernacle

In Salt Lake City, where the largest LDS community existed, the four Salt Lake stakes combined their efforts to host as many as twenty thousand Saints in the Salt Lake Tabernacle during two sessions honoring the Prophet. Known as the “New Tabernacle” or “Great Tabernacle” during the nineteenth century, the Salt Lake Tabernacle, along with the Salt Lake Temple, had become by 1905 two of the most recognized buildings of the Church and in the American West.<sup>44</sup> During its history, the Tabernacle was the site of many gatherings, meetings, and special events.<sup>45</sup> In 1905, the Ensign Stake president, Richard W. Young,<sup>46</sup> was appointed the chairman of the program committee. Several other committees were organized to assist with the celebration. Of particular interest was the sixteen-member decoration subcommittee, who were responsible to prepare the interior of the historic building for the event.<sup>47</sup>

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43. “Santaquin. Memorial Services,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 27, 1905, 3.

44. See Elwin C. Robison with W. Randall Dixon, *Gathering as One: The History of the Mormon Tabernacle in Salt Lake City* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2014), 25, 257–58; see also Richard Neitzel Holzapfel and Ronald L. Fox, “An Edward Martin Photograph of the Construction of the Great Tabernacle,” *BYU Studies Quarterly* 56, no. 3 (2017): 2–11.

45. See, for example, Ronald W. Walker, Richard Neitzel Holzapfel, and James S. Lambert, “Salt Lake Tabernacle Interior Photograph: Sabbath School Union Jubilee, July 1875,” *BYU Studies* 42, no. 2 (2003): 65–74.

46. Richard W. Young (1858–1919) was the grandson of Brigham Young, a West Point graduate, a military officer, and a lawyer, and had been chosen as the president of the Ensign Stake on April 1, 1904, when the stake was created. See *Brigadier General Richard W. Young: Biographical Sketch, Funeral Ceremonies, Resolutions of Respect* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1920); and Andrew Jenson, “Supplement to Church Chronology 1899–1905,” 19, in *Church Chronology* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1914).

47. Committee members were Dryden R. Coombs, A. Mervin Woolley, Julian F. Smith, Haven Eardley, Archie B. Kessler, Alfred C. Rees, Dorothy Bowman, Florence Ashton, Johnage H. Glenn, Chas. P. Margetts, Lillian McLachlan, Joseph V. Smith, Etta F. Toronto, Margaret C. Hull, Clara Holmes, and Lela Timpson. See *Program Commemorating the One Hundredth Anniversary of the*

On December 13, 1905, the *Deseret Evening News* published a general invitation for the members of the four local Salt Lake City stakes to attend the gatherings: “The tabernacle services will be held both in the morning and in the afternoon, and at the morning service the Sunday schools of the four stakes of the city will be participants, while the general stake authorities will have charge of the afternoon service.”<sup>48</sup>

A printed invitation, dated December 10, 1905, was prepared bidding all those who lived within the four stakes who knew the Prophet Joseph Smith in life to attend.<sup>49</sup> To ensure no one was missed, Arthur W. Brown,<sup>50</sup> chairman of the invitation committee, prepared another announcement that was published in the *Deseret Evening News* on December 21, 1905: “Every effort has been made to invite members of the Church residing in the Liberty, Pioneer, Salt Lake and Ensign stakes, who were personally acquainted with the Prophet Joseph Smith, to attend the services to be held in his honor in the Tabernacle Sunday morning and afternoon next. Such brethren and sisters will be considered the guests of honor upon those occasions, and in case any have been overlooked, it is most earnestly desired that they will be at the east entrance of the Temple grounds before 10 o’clock, where they will be received by the invitation committee and escorted to seats reserved for them.”<sup>51</sup>

The agenda for the commemoration services was published on Wednesday, December 20, 1905, in the *Deseret Evening News*.<sup>52</sup> On the following day, Thursday, December 21, 1905, the *Deseret Evening News* reported, “Altogether it will present a picture such as has never before been seen in it.”<sup>53</sup> This was highlighted in the Saturday, December 23,

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*Birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: n.p., 1905), copy in Church History Library.

48. “Will Honor the Prophet Joseph,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 13, 1905, 1.

49. “Invitation to Centennial Anniversary Service,” Church History Library, <https://history.lds.org/exhibit/historic-sites/vermont/joseph-smith-birthplace/birthplace?lang=eng#mv13>.

50. Arthur W. Brown (1863–1922) was involved in various callings, including ward and Ensign Stake Sunday School programs in Salt Lake City, and should not be confused with the Spanish-American war veteran from Utah by the same name or the non-LDS Utah senator Arthur Brown, who was killed by his mistress in 1906. See “Active Mormon Church Worker Answers Call,” FamilySearch, <https://www.familysearch.org/photos/artifacts/12832035?p=13635744>.

51. “To Those Who Knew Him,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 21, 1905, 1.

52. “In Honor of Joseph Smith,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 20, 1905, 2.

53. “A Great Celebration,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 21, 1905, 1.

1905, edition of the *Deseret Evening News* when it announced on its front page in large type size, “Tabernacle Transformed.”<sup>54</sup> According to this report, it took “an army of decorators” several days to prepare the building for the two meetings.<sup>55</sup> The story added, “The affair will be the most pretentious natal celebration in the annals of the Church.”<sup>56</sup> On the day following the services, the *Salt Lake Tribune* basically mimicked the earlier prediction when it reported that the celebration had been “of the most pretentious character.”<sup>57</sup>

### Documenting the Tabernacle Celebration Decorations

Several copies of photographs taken at this time of the interior of the Tabernacle are found in two separate library collections, “Joseph Smith Memorial dedication trip 1905 December” (PH 91, figures 1, 4) and “Joseph F. Smith centennial photograph album” (PH 8029, figure 3) in the Church History Library, and another is in private possession (figure 6). These views are an important source to reconstruct the physical setting of the services held in the Salt Lake Tabernacle on Sunday, December 24, 1905.

The *Deseret Evening News* and the *Salt Lake Tribune* provided word pictures describing the interior of the Tabernacle. Combined with the black-and-white photographs, these descriptions allow us to see in our minds the decorations as they were seen by those who participated in the two special memorial services on Sunday, December 24, 1905. The *Deseret Evening News* reported, “The decorations are elaborate, yet simple.”<sup>58</sup>

Dominating the scene, as can be seen in the accompanying photographs of the Tabernacle, was a large portrait of the Prophet by noted LDS artist Lee Greene Richards.<sup>59</sup> The *Deseret Evening News* description added, “High up on the organ front is a large crayon picture of the Prophet . . . with appropriate frame, and great festoons of national

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54. “Prophet’s Birth 100 Years Ago,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 23, 1905, 1.

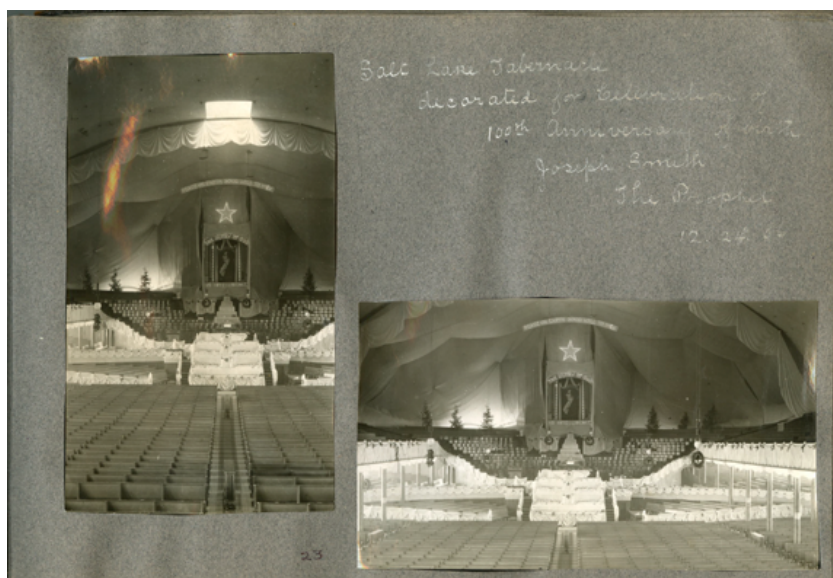
55. “Prophet’s Birth,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 23, 1905, 1.

56. “Prophet’s Birth,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 23, 1905, 1.

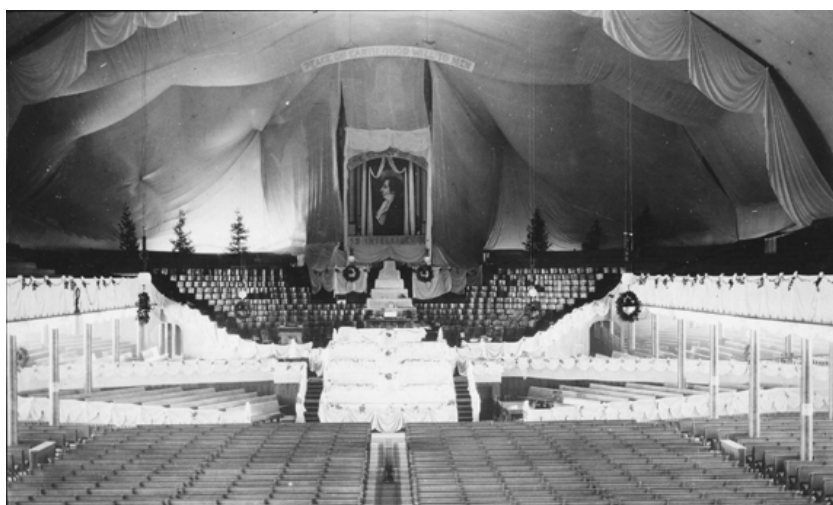
57. “Saints Observe Smith’s Birthday,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 25, 1905, 1.

58. “Prophet’s Birth,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 23, 1905, 1.

59. Levi Greene Richards (1878–1950), known as Lee, was a well-known Utah portrait artist. See Barbara Boyer Ostler, *Lee Greene Richards, 1878–1950* (Salt Lake City: Utah Museum of Fine Arts, University of Utah, 1994). Richards’s illustration of the Prophet has not been located in any Church repository and is probably no longer extant.



**FIGURE 3.** A page from Joseph F. Smith's photo album of the dedication of the Joseph Smith Monument, 1905, Joseph F. Smith Centennial Photograph Album (PH 8029, Album page size 25.5 cm × 17.5 cm; photographic images 14.2 cm × 8.4 cm and 14.4 cm × 8.2 cm, contact prints), Church History Library. This page contains two interior views of the Salt Lake Tabernacle taken in December 1905. Similar views are found in another Church History collection, Joseph Smith Memorial Dedication Trip 1905 December (PH 91 8.1, 8.2, 8.3).



**FIGURE 4.** Expanded interior view of the Salt Lake Tabernacle, looking west, decorated for the centennial celebration of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 1905 (PH 91 8.2, 15 cm × 10 cm, contact print), Church History Library. In this photo, the star over the portrait is in place but is not illuminated.

colors running toward the choir seats on either sides. The ceiling of the west end of the building has been covered with a great canopy of sky blue bunting from which sparkle and glitter countless gold and silver stars.”<sup>60</sup> The *Deseret Evening News* reporter added, “A wealth of white bunting, palms, potted plants, holly and Christmas trees, bells and other holiday effects, adorn the great auditorium which is sure to prove a most pleasing surprise to those who will be present.”<sup>61</sup>

The *Deseret Evening News* also noted that electric lights would illuminate some special features in the front of the Tabernacle. “On the right side of the organ at the given signal, will appear a representation of the Star of Bethlehem. The effect, it is believed, will be wonderful. Then there are prominently placed, electrically illumined creations of ‘Peace on Earth and Good Will towards Men’ and ‘The Glory of God Is Intelligence,’ the latter one of the Prophet Joseph’s sayings.”<sup>62</sup>

The *Salt Lake Tribune* also highlighted the following aspect of the decorations in its report the day after the services on Monday, December 25, 1905:

The organ front was beautifully draped with light blue and on the ceiling of the west end of the building, immediately over the choir and the speakers’ stand, was spread a canopy of the same material studded



FIGURE 5. Detail of figure 6, interior of the Salt Lake Tabernacle, highlighting the illuminated electrical lights of the “Star of Bethlehem” and the scriptural phrases “Peace on Earth Good Will To Men” and “The Glory of God Is Intelligence.” In private possession (see fig. 6).

60. “Prophet’s Birth,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 23, 1905, 1.

61. “Prophet’s Birth,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 23, 1905, 1.

62. “Prophet’s Birth,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 23, 1905, 1.





**FIGURE 6.** Interior view of the Salt Lake Tabernacle looking west, decorated for the centennial celebration of the birth of the Prophet Joseph Smith (6.1 cm × 4.2 cm, contact print), 1905, in private possession.

with silver stars which dazzled in the everchanging light, and on the right of the organ was a large electric star, emblematic of the star of Bethlehem. On the front of the organ, electrically illuminated, were the words, 'The Glory of God Is Intelligence,' the Sunday-School motto, and high up, suspended from the ceiling, was emblazoned the sentiment of the season, 'Peace on Earth, Good Will to Men.' Festoons decked with evergreens and holly were swung around the choir and speakers' stand, and the front of the entire gallery was draped with white, this being the prevailing color. From the arc lights hung large wreaths. In the center of each were large red Christmas bells, and the effect produced was a particularly brilliant one."<sup>63</sup>

The Sunday meetings held in the Tabernacle were highlighted in local newspaper articles and in personal journals of some of those participating. The first meeting, as noted earlier, was hosted by the four Salt Lake City Stake Sunday School organizations at 10:30 a.m., with Charles H. Felt presiding.<sup>64</sup> Some ten thousand people gathered on the occasion; the majority

63. "Saints Observe Smith's Birthday," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 25, 1905, 1.

64. Charles H. Felt (1860–1929) was, at the time, the superintendent of the Salt Lake Stake Sunday Schools. See *Program Commemorating the One Hundredth Anniversary*, [2].

were Sunday School children.<sup>65</sup> The children were seated by stake with the Pioneer Stake Sunday school children seated on the south side of the auditorium; the Salt Lake Stake children on the north side of the auditorium; the Ensign Stake children in the north gallery of the Tabernacle; and the Liberty Stake children in the south gallery of the Tabernacle. On the speakers' stand were seated the four stake presidencies. To the right of them were seated members of the four stake Sunday School boards.

The program included prayers, Christmas hymns, special musical numbers, recitations, and talks, including one by James E. Talmage<sup>66</sup> entitled, "A Word to the Children."<sup>67</sup>

Talmage recorded in his journal:

December 24; This sabbath had been set apart by the Church authorities for special services in commemoration of the birth of the prophet Joseph Smith. Yesterday was the exact centenary of his birth. A large party, consisting of the general authorities of the church and others gathered at Sharon, Windsor County, Vermont, yesterday and dedicated the monument just reared on the site of the house in which the first prophet of the last dispensation was born. Today's exercises in Salt Lake City comprised general services in the tabernacle during the forenoon under Sunday School auspices; public service in the tabernacle during the afternoon; and ward services in the local meeting houses at night. I had a small part in the forenoon proceedings.<sup>68</sup>

The Sunday afternoon session was held at 2:00 p.m. "under the auspices of the Liberty, Pioneer, Ensign, and Salt Lake stake presidencies" with President John R. Winder of the First Presidency of the Church presiding.<sup>69</sup> This meeting also attracted ten thousand participants.<sup>70</sup> Two speakers were originally planned for this gathering, as noted in the

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65. "Saints Observe Smith's Birthday," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 25, 1905, 1.

66. James E. Talmage (1862–1933) was an educator, author, and member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles from 1911 until his death in 1933. See John R. Talmage, *The Talmage Story: Life of James E. Talmage—Educator, Scientist, Apostle* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1972).

67. *Program Commemorating the One Hundredth Anniversary*, [3]. Talmage also delivered the Christmas message in the Tabernacle on the following day, December 25. See "Great Prophet of Galilee," *Deseret Evening News*, December 25, 1905, 1.

68. James E. Talmage, Journal, December 24, 1905, 86, MSS 229, 19th Century Western & Mormon Manuscripts.

69. *Program Commemorating the One Hundredth Anniversary*, [4].

70. "Saints Observe Smith's Birthday," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 25, 1905, 1.

printed program, but because of a last-minute conflict, B. H. Roberts was unable to attend. This left Orson F. Whitney, the second speaker, to take the entire time—an hour and half in which he focused on “the history of Joseph Smith.”<sup>71</sup>

Not all those who wished to attend the centennial celebration in the Tabernacle were able to do so. For example, Maria H. Burton<sup>72</sup> noted sadly, “Mr Burton had a bad night. not able to attend the Celebration of the 100 Anniversary of the Prophet Joseph Smith. We were both disappointed his cold is very tight he is very hoarse Willard called to see him Lew and Theresa called in the evening moved the bed into sitting room again it is so cold in parlor.”<sup>73</sup>

Newspaper reports, published on Christmas Day, December 25, 1905, provided an overview of the meetings. The *Deseret Evening News*, for example, observed, “A scene strikingly magnificent was that which presented itself at the Tabernacle yesterday morning. . . . The building had been beautifully decorated in white, which, intermingled with holly, palms, and potted plants, made an excellent foreground for a dually descriptive scene of the birth of the Savior and the Prophet Joseph Smith.”<sup>74</sup>

As noted in an earlier report on Saturday, December 23, lights illuminated special features in the Tabernacle during the services. “The former [the scene commemorating the birth of Christ] was made the more striking through the representation of the Star of Bethlehem, while around it myriads of stars of lesser magnitude shone out bright, shedding their rays on the very memorable angelic sentiment, ‘Peace on earth, good will to men.’ The front of the great organ was covered with a life-like bust of the Prophet Joseph, with a framework of white crepe, and above and below it the words, ‘The Glory of God Is Intelligence.’”<sup>75</sup>

Nevertheless, what impressed the *Deseret Evening News* reporter was not the physical decoration but the presence of the Sunday School

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71. “Able Address by Bishop Whitney,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 25, 1905, 2.

72. Maria Haven Burton (1826–1920) was an 1848 Mormon pioneer, the wife of Robert Taylor Burton (1821–1901), a member of the Presiding Bishopric of the Church from 1874 to 1907. See “Widow of Gen. Burton Dies at Advanced Age,” *Deseret Evening News*, March 31, 1920, 2:1.

73. Maria H. Burton, Journal, December 24, 1905, MS 6329, Maria H. Burton Diaries, 1875–1919, Church History Library.

74. “Children Honor Prophet Joseph,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 25, 1905, 5.

75. “Children Honor Prophet Joseph,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 25, 1905, 5.

children. "But these scenes were purely incidental to the making of the picture which was presented, for above and beyond it all was that of thousands of bright, smiling faces no less than 8,000 Sunday school children."<sup>76</sup>

The *Salt Lake Tribune* also highlighted the presence of children in its report of the celebrations: "The school children again raised their voices in song, 'Far, Far Away on Judea's Plains,' the sweet, fresh voices blending in beautiful harmony."<sup>77</sup>

An interesting part of the program was the presence of nearly eighty "greyed hair veterans," individuals who "were acquainted with the Prophet Joseph Smith" during his life.

The respected guests were seated on the right side of the stand in a special place of honor and were asked to stand during the program.<sup>78</sup> The *Salt Lake Tribune* claimed, "With the exception of those who were too old and infirm, all those now in Salt Lake who were assembled with the prophet were present."<sup>79</sup>

Given the hostile environment of the time, it may not be surprising that James E. Talmage and Orson F. Whitney took the opportunity to make sure no one could claim that the celebration of Joseph Smith's birth on the eve of Christmas was in any way an attempt to equate the mortal prophet with the divine Son of God.<sup>80</sup> Whitney, for example, emphasized, "I wish to make it plain at the outset that we do not wish to insinuate any parallel between them. We do not worship Joseph Smith; we do worship Jesus Christ. He to us is the God of Heaven manifest in the flesh, the soul begotten, the Savior of the world. But we revere the memory of the prophet who was chosen by Jesus Christ to come as his forerunner in the last days, and to institute a work, a marvelous work,

76. "Children Honor Prophet Joseph," *Deseret Evening News*, December 25, 1905, 5.

77. "Saints Observe Smith's Birthday," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 25, 1905, 1.

78. John W. Rigdon (1820–1912) was the son of Sidney (1793–1876) and Phoebe Rigdon (1800–1888) and was rebaptized in 1904. "John W. Rigdon Dies at an Advance Age," *Salt Lake Tribune*, April 7, 1912, 32. During the centennial celebration, Rigdon fainted and was carried out of the building but recovered. See "Children Honor Prophet Joseph," *Deseret Evening News*, December 25, 1905, 5.

79. "Saints Observe Smith's Birthday," *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 25, 1905, 1.

80. An editorial in the *Salt Lake Tribune* in November 1905 argued that the Church was "not the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, but the Church of Joseph F. Smith" because of the honor and respect given to current presidents. See "Not Jesus, but Joseph," *Salt Lake Tribune*, November 26, 1905, 4.

that is to prepare the world for the second and glorified coming of the Son of God.”<sup>81</sup>

Despite the challenges the Church experienced in 1905, an editorial published in the *Deseret Evening News* at the end of the year stated, “To the Latter-day Saints it is a source of great satisfaction to know that the work of the Lord is continually growing throughout the world. . . . At home the Saints have been greatly blessed in their Sabbath meetings, their quorum meetings, and their conference. . . . These last gatherings especially have been more numerously attended than ever in the history of the Church. . . . The faith of the Latter-day Saints who endeavor to live in the light of the Gospel of the Redeemer, is growing stronger, and their testimony is becoming ever more firmly established.”<sup>82</sup> In conclusion, the editorial declared that the “raising and dedication of a monument to the memory of the Prophet Joseph Smith on the spot where he was born, is one of the memorable events of the year.”<sup>83</sup>

Added to the commemoration held in South Royalton, Windsor County, Vermont, and the multiple memorial services held in the many congregations of the Saints throughout the world was the grand celebration in the Salt Lake City Tabernacle, witnessed by some twenty thousand people. The historic photographs presented here help us reconstruct what it would have been like to attend the centennial celebration on Sunday, December 24, 1905, and preserve the efforts of the Saints to honor their founding prophet.

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81. “Saints Observe Smith’s Birthday,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, December 25, 1905, 1.

82. “Retrospective,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 30, 1905, 4.

83. “Retrospective,” *Deseret Evening News*, December 30, 1905, 4.