Fig. 1. Crowd at Alberta Temple site dedication, July 27, 1913, Henson Photo. This image has been computer enhanced to eliminate some damage to the right side of the original photograph.
New Photographs of the Alberta Canada Temple Site Dedication, 1913

Richard Neitzel Holzapfel

President Joseph F. Smith and a group of other LDS Church leaders, family, and friends left Salt Lake City on July 23, 1913, for Canada. During their visit, President Smith dedicated the site for the Cardston Temple, the first LDS temple outside the United States. President Smith's stay in the Mormon settlement of Cardston, Alberta, Canada, was captured in a series of photographs recently discovered in Canada.

Provenance of the Photographs

The first collection was found in the possession of Norma Grace Litchfield Smith (see fig. 1 for one of the images in this collection). The collection's eight images are mounted on a black board measuring 19 3/4 inches by 15 3/4 inches. The black board, identified as "Souvenir of Cardston Temple Site Dedication," was copyrighted by the Arthur T. Henson Photo Studio in 1913.

A second collection of photographs, located at the University of Utah (see fig. 2 for one of the images from this collection), was originally identified as taken at the time of the dedication of the Cardston Alberta Tabernacle. The recent discovery of the photographs in Canada and subsequent research has demonstrated beyond a reasonable doubt that these two collections of images both derive from the dedication of the temple site.

Historical Context of the Photographs

A large contingent of LDS Church members from southern Alberta, a group estimated at being between 1,500 and 2,000, attended services held in the Alberta Stake Tabernacle on the Temple Block on July 27, 1913. Three meetings were held in the tabernacle itself, and following the afternoon meeting, another was held outside at the actual site dedication.

Like most photographs taken by a particular studio, the actual photographer of these historic images is unknown, even though they are copyrighted by Henson Photo Studio. Arthur T. Henson, the owner of the Henson Photo Studio, wrote in his autobiography, "I was made Stake Organist for the Alberta Stake. . . . During this time the land for the new Cardston Temple was selected and I was given the assignment of leading the singing of
the dedication of the site by Pres. Joseph F. Smith."5 Henson's assignment makes it likely that someone else working for him took the photographs.

Apparently, local LDS Church leaders asked all the young Sunday School children to attend the services specially dressed, as seen in the view of the crowd at the dedications (see fig. 1). This fact was verified by Alma C. Hanson, who as a young woman was present at the services. At 102 years of age, she recalled in August 1999, "When we met in the Tabernacle, all the Sunday School children were dressed in white."6 She added, "We were all so thrilled. Quite a solemn occasion—a wonderful occasion."7 Olive Wood Nielson, seven years old at the time, similarly recalled being present in the meeting dressed in white: "It was a happy day. A special day."8 Both women played a significant role in verifying or identifying individuals in the photographs and confirming the historical setting of the images themselves.

The Alberta Stake president, Edward J. Wood, recorded his feelings on the occasion in this diary entry: "The Great Day for Canada—the greatest day in our history. The day our Temple site was dedicated. We had 1329 at our 10 A.M. meeting. President Smith, President [Charles W.] Penrose, Bishop [Charles W.] Nibley and Geo. A. [Albert] Smith, all spoke well and the music was excellent."9

President Wood also described the actual site dedication:

We all went to the Temple site and never did I attend an out door meeting like it. We formed a hollow square—sang We Thank Thee Oh God for a prophet—Geo. Albert Smith offered prayer—We sang "O Ye Mountains High" and Pres. Smith offered the dedicatory prayer, which was inspired indeed. Bishop Nibley spoke well and took a vote from the hundreds present. We sang "Our God We Raise to Thee" and closing prayer offered by Pres. Penrose.10

*The Cardston Globe* expanded beyond President Wood’s diary entry:

At the conclusion of the [afternoon] services, the officials and members accompanied by the choir, proceeded to the site of the [dedication] . . . for the erection of the $250,000 temple, which is to be built just west of the present tabernacle. The services were opened by the choir and congregation singing a hymn, and prayer was offered by Pres. Penrose. Pres. Smith then led in prayer, officially dedicating the land to its holy purpose, and giving his blessing to the Alberta Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Bishop Nibley, delivered a short address, stating that the Church was taking a step which would mark an epoch in the history of Mormonism in Canada. The services were concluded with a short prayer by Apostle Geo. A. Smith, and an appropriate hymn by the choir.11

**Conclusion**

The Henson Photo Studio in Cardston took several photographs at the dedication. These rare photographs preserve a visual record of an important moment in Church history. The event, wrote President Wood, "was
indeed a red letter day for the Church in Canada," for it was the day when the site for the “only L.D.S. Temple in the British Empire” was dedicated.12

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1. Norma Grace Litchfield Smith obtained the collection of photographs in 1997 from Ruth Minor Fromm, who found them that year in her deceased husband’s photographic collection. Moses Fromm was a photographer in the Cardston area for a number of years. I recently donated these photographs, with the consent of Norma Grace Litchfield Smith, to the Archive Division, Historical Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah; hereafter cited as LDS Church Archives.

2. The other photographs, in addition to figure 1, attached to the “Souvenir of Cardston Temple Site Dedication” board are labeled as follows: “Cardston Temple Photo Taken from the Official Plans,” “Pres. Jos. F. Smith,” “Pres. Smith Speaking in the Tabernacle, July 27, 1913,” “Pres. Smith and Party at the Conclusion of Dedictory Services on the Temple Site,” “1st Councillor Thos Duce,” “Pres. Ed J. Wood,” and “2nd Councillor Sterling Williams.” Originally, there was an additional mounted photograph, now missing, identified as “Cardston Tabernacle,” making a total of nine photographs originally on the board. A small photographic copy of “Souvenir of Cardston Temple Site” is found in Card Pioneer Home, located at 337 Main Street, Cardston, Alberta, Canada. A comparison between this copy and the original large “souvenir” board shows the missing image on the board to be one identified as opening of Tabernacle, Cardston, taken on May 18, 1912.

3. Arthur Thomas Henson (1888–1985) purchased the Jake Scott Photo Studio in 1904 and continued his photographic business in Cardston during the next eleven years except while serving an LDS mission to England from 1910 to 1912. He eventually moved to southern California, where he died in 1985. Like many other professional photographers at the time, Henson probably used employees to help him with his work, so it is not always possible to identify the specific individual responsible for the photographic work. Another photographer in the area was John Francis Atterton (1875–1966), who may have worked for Henson part time. Atterton came to Raymond, Alberta, Canada, around 1912 and was active in taking photographs during this period. He purchased Henson’s studio in 1916.

4. George Albert Smith Collection (P 0036), numbers 150–58, Manuscripts Division, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah, Salt Lake City.


7. Hanson, interview.


Fig. 2. President Joseph F. Smith following the site dedication, July 27, 1913, Henson Photo. Front from left: unknown woman (partial view), Silas S. Smith, Joseph F. Smith, Royal G. Smith (holding hands with his father), Zina Card Young, Amy L. Allen, Henry L. Hinman, Nancy Ross Steed, Joseph E. Steed, and unidentified man (slightly blurred). Behind Royal G. Smith are two women: to the left is Pearl C. Card and to the right is Joseph F. Smith’s wife Mary S. Smith (mother of Silas and Royal).