

# Some Little-known Facts About a Well-known Building

By C. ED. MILLER. Photos by the Writer

*Just a few of the things which give character or individuality in the eyes of all men to this House of the Lord, erected by direct commandment to his people of the Nineteenth Century.*

**T**HE Kirtland Temple has been an object of veneration by the Saints since its completion in 1836. In this paper I propose to refer to some things which have not been frequently mentioned in articles on the temple.

The glass in the 3,500 windows was made by hand. Looking through some of this glass reveals the reason why there were laws

necessary to be intoxicated to see double or treble when you look through some of the lights in the Kirtland Temple. The corrugated glass does it, hence the old law referred to.

Some years ago when I was in charge of the temple, a wife of a physician from Cleveland visited the building, and when she noticed the handmade glass she became very



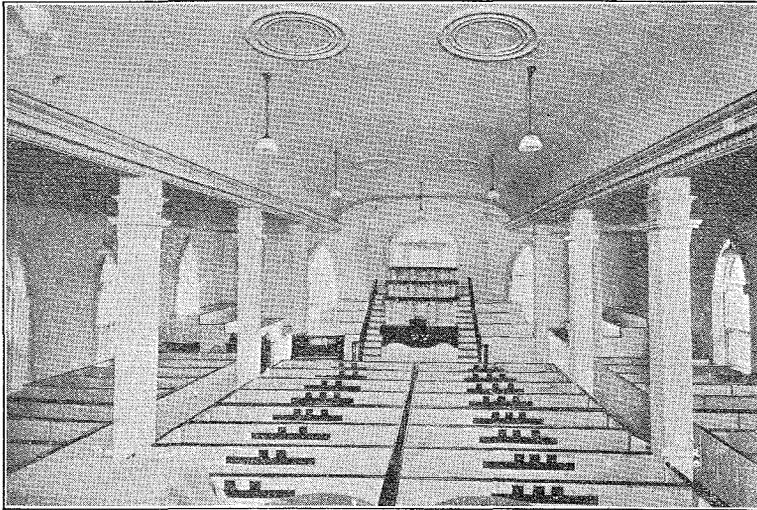
*The "Shadow Temple."*

placed on the statute books of various States disqualifying a witness who testified that he saw the thing he testified of while looking through window glass.

A drunken man sees double at times because the alcohol destroys for the time being the beautiful synchronizing of the two eyes, which under normal conditions see as one, but in the drunken man each eye sees an image independent of the other. It is not

much excited. She informed me she was specializing in collecting all kinds of glassware and intimated she was willing to pay well for one of the lights. I told her nothing about the structure was for sale, but I would make a bargain with her. I would take out one of the lights, if she would always explain to the people visiting her collection the difference between us and Utah. She readily agreed.

The three major windows in the east and west walls some think are symbolical of the First Presidency, while the twelve north and south windows are symbols of the second presidency, the Quorum of Twelve Apostles.



*The west or Melchisedec end of the Temple. Curtains used to drop from the ceilings, completely inclosing the tiers of pulpits. The law required the curtains to be made of asbestos, but the weight made it impracticable for them to be used as originally designed, so they have been taken down and stored away.*

Quite a number of years ago the *Ladies' Home Journal* featured the "Swastika." The editors of one of the departments seemed to think they had rediscovered the beauties of that ancient design. The Swastika is to be found in several places in the temple. It is cut in two places in the walnut arch of the magnificent colonial window in the upper auditorium, which I have been told Rockefeller tried to purchase from the church.

The manner of construction of the lower auditorium ceiling provides a dead air space of about five feet between the upper and lower auditoriums, and acts as insulation, deadening the sounds between the auditoriums.

The walnut communion table, while not in use, hangs down as an apron. It is inlaid with white letters, "P. E. M." signifying "Presiding Elder Melchisedec Priesthood." This table is not the original. While exploring in the basement one day, I found part of the original apron.

During the time when the temple was practically abandoned after the exodus of the Saints from Kirtland, vandals and souvenir hunters carried away some of the ornamen-

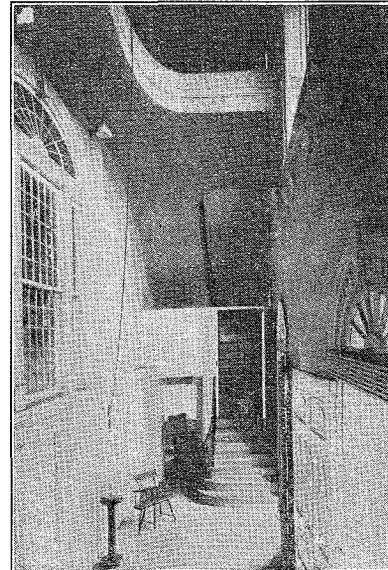
tations of the pulpit and stairway and destroyed the communion table.

While I was in charge of the temple, numbers of architects and builders visited the structure, and they all expressed their admiration after examining the ingenious way the doors of the pulpit were hung. There appear to be three separate movements in the doors when they are opening and closing. Of course this is just an optical illusion. The design of the doors seems to be entirely original.

*The Professional Architectural Monthly* of August, 1924, which sells at one dollar per copy, has a leading, splendidly illustrated, and well-written article on the Kirtland Temple. The writer says:

"The most distinctive feature of the temple is the plan, the number and the arrangements of the pulpits being unique in every respect. It is here that this

first Mormon temple differed from all other religious edifices in the world. The form and arrangement were dictated by the ritualistic



*The vestibule, showing the winding north stairway.*

ideas instituted by Joseph Smith, and a study of the plan, which is here presented in measured drawing, will show that the temple had little in common with the usual church edifice.

"The most interesting features of the interior are the pulpits, especially the two in the main, or temple, auditorium. They are the most distinctive features of the whole building, and because of their design and architectural details are worthy of special attention. There are two groups of pulpits in the main auditorium, one at each end of the room, representing the two priesthoods of the church, viz., the Melchisedec and the Aaronic. Each of these is divided into four sections, to represent the four grades of presiding officers, and each section contains three seats, for the officer and his two counselors. Thus we have twelve pulpits in one—the number being symbolical of the number of disciples. The pulpits are elevated and terraced and are

made accessible by flights of steps. At either side of the pulpits are elevated box-pews, at a slightly lower level than the pulpits, and in-



*A picture of the light well of the second floor. By this arrangement the four sides of the Temple were illuminated by sunshine.*

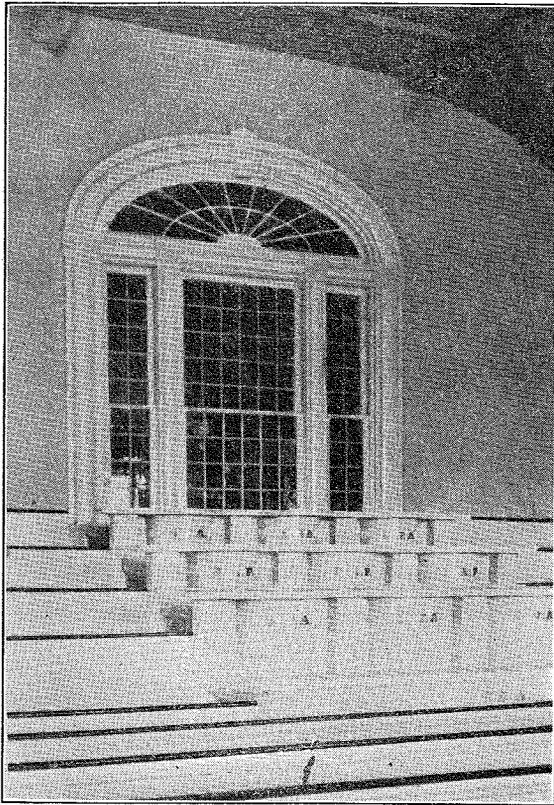


*Joseph Smith's chair, which he used while engaged in literary work.*

tended for minor officials or missionaries of the church. These are entered, not from the pulpit steps, but by means of separate doors and steps from the main aisles. The whole ensemble is most pleasing, piling up in a majestic manner, and when filled with church dignitaries must have presented a stately appearance to the worshippers.

"The pulpits are highly ornamented with hard-carved work and are unusual both in design and in combination of details. The craftsmanship is excellent in every respect; and, although neglected for half a century, they are to-day in a fine state of preservation. The two groups of pulpits are identical except for the initial inscription which indicates the rank of the various members of the two priesthoods. The drop leaf of the front section of each of the pulpit groups and the handrails of the step railing are of native black-walnut wood, stained dark, but the balance of the pulpits are finished with native white wood, painted white. The paneling, moldings, and carving on the pilasters show refinement of line and careful execution. The chief carved ornament used is the guilloche, known to us from the time of the Greeks and the favorite motive during our Greek Revival period.

"The prophet announced that in a vision he was 'instructed by the Lord to build a house of worship called a temple,' and that 'a pattern of the building, with dimensions, was shown to me.' Such was his power over his followers that the work of building the temple was begun immediately. On July 23, 1833, the corner stone was laid, and the temple was completed and dedicated on March 27, 1836, at an estimated cost of \$60,000.



*This photo reveals some of the beauty of the famous east colonial window.*

"As to how and to what extent architect, builder, and artisan contributed to make Smith's 'vision' a reality, little is known. But, whatever his vision, he had to depend upon the usual craftsmen of a pioneer country to carry out his plans. The form, plan, and arrangement he could fix, but the matter of architectural detail seems to have been based largely upon the practice of the time. Considering the period, the inadequate facilities of the early settlers, and the lack of funds, it is remarkable that such an edifice should have been erected. Religious zeal and inspiration, no doubt, were largely responsible for the fine result.

"Smith was, through his vision, no doubt,

a designer and director of the work. His church was 'organized after the ancient pattern as contained in the Bible' which accounts for many of its peculiarities. But as the tabernacle was revealed in terms and elements of the Hebrew architecture of the time, so it is not surprising to find Smith's temple resembling and having many of the characteristics of the post-colonial churches of his time. Whether there were certain mechanics in direct charge of parts of the work is not recorded. To the architectural historian it is of special interest to note the evidences that the builders drew freely from past styles for their architectural details. There is a curious mixture of Gothic, Colonial, and Greek Revival elements. The small windows in the front and rear and on the sides are Gothic in general form. The large central windows, the dormers, and cupola indicate Colonial lineage, while many of the interior details show a tendency toward the Greek Revival.

"The finish was all prepared by hand, on the premises. Some interesting accounts are given as to methods employed, one of the most unusual being that oxen were used to draw the large planes used in fluting the casing members of the eight wood piers in the main auditorium.

"The names of the designer and craftsmen who executed the beautiful interior work of the temple will probably never be known. Of this we may be sure: They were not only craftsmen of unusual skill, but were inspired artisans working in the same spirit as did the builders of the great cathedrals in medieval times.

"At the time of the exodus of Joseph Smith and his followers from Kirtland to Independence, and thence to Nauvoo, there seems to have been a number of the less radical of the cult who remained in Kirtland and vicinity. This little remnant, after many years of outward inactivity, together with other followers, left behind when the main body of the Mormons moved to Utah, and who seem not to have approved of the later developments within the Mormon Church, became reorganized as an independent church. This body through legal proceedings, gained possession of the old temple in Kirtland in 1880. Through their efforts the building has been completely renovated and restored, and it stands to-day in practically its original condition. To this little band of followers we are indebted for the preservation of

this unusual example of early American architecture. In many details, the work is of sufficient architectural value to make it an interesting study."

Apparently no space around the temple was permitted to go to waste. There are a number of small cupboards built in unlooked-for places. While exploring one of these one day I discovered a drum that had once been placed under one of the pulpit seats and had been used as a windlass on which the ropes operating the curtains were wound. These drums were also placed in four of the columns supporting the floors. A little door in the columns gives access to the drums.

Originally "veils" or curtains which made it possible to divide the auditorium into two, three, or four rooms were made of canvas. When I was in charge of the temple, part of the apparatus, consisting of rods, etc., was in the basement, with partial remains of the curtain still attached to the rods. When the exodus of the Saints from Kirtland took place, the canvas curtains were taken down and were used to cover the "prairie" schooners.

To satisfy my curiosity I took a spirit level to test the skill of the builders of the steps in front of the temple. I found the great stones forming the steps absolutely

level. I do not know if they have been adjusted in recent years or whether they are in the same position in which the builders left them eighty-nine years ago.

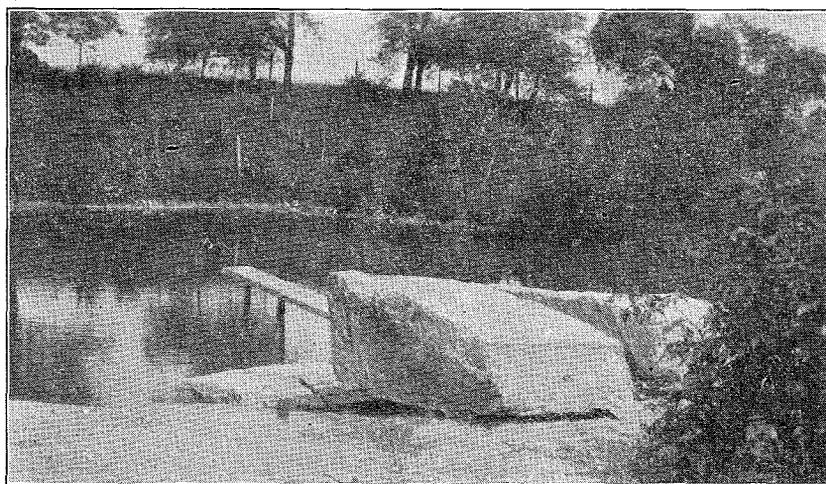
I shall finish this article by quoting from *The Professional Architectural Monthly*:



GRANDSON OF SIDNEY RIGDON VISITS TEMPLE

*The elderly man at the left is Mr. F. G. E. Ellis, of Ingram, Pennsylvania, a grandson of Sidney Rigdon. This was his first visit to the Temple, March 11, 1925. The others are Mr. Ellis's son and daughter-in-law, from Cleveland Heights.*

"Here at Kirtland the religion as revealed by the so-called prophet, Joseph Smith, took form and made its first material growth. The culmination of the activities in the community was the building of a house of worship. Although there are in the world many temples, cathedrals, and churches of architectural and historical interest, yet of all these there is none more unique architecturally or more interesting historically than the "temple" which these Latter Day Saints built in the little village of Kirtland, and which may be called the first Mormon temple."



*Stone was quarried one and a quarter miles from the site of the Temple. The quarry has now become "the old swimming hole," as is shown in photo.*