

The Nauvoo Temple

The next temple built, and the only other temple fully designed under the leadership of Joseph Smith, was the Nauvoo Temple, which was begun in 1841 and completed in 1846. The Nauvoo Temple plans called for a building about 128 feet by 88 feet, approximately a 60 percent increase over the dimensions of the Kirtland Temple. Because of the building's increased size, the interstitial spaces between floors to each side of the arched ceiling were tall enough to hold a series of offices. The Nauvoo Temple was built of cut limestone, not rubble sandstone plastered over to look like cut stone. The general plan established in Kirtland was followed in Nauvoo, with the proportion of length to breadth roughly the same in both temples and as were the two large congregational spaces and sets of double pulpits intended for each space. This time, however, Joseph Smith could capitalize on the skills of a trained architect, William Weeks, who produced several preliminary renderings (fig. 9-2). Owing to the skill of Weeks, the original design of the Nauvoo Temple was not a combination of several architectural styles but was a far more coherent composition in the Greek Revival style.³

Specific elements in the Nauvoo Temple design can be attributed directly to Joseph Smith. The sun and moon motifs on the capitals and bases of the pilasters certainly were done under his direction. In addition, the preliminary concept of Gothic arches in the pediment window recalls the specification of "gothic tops" for the windows in Kirtland. Happily, this Gothic detailing was eliminated in final designs, as it does not blend well with the boldly articulated Greek Revival shell. Joseph directed that the pediment be replaced with a full attic story on the facade to provide additional office space (fig. 9-3). Having commissioned the construction of one temple and various schoolhouses, offices, and homes, Joseph began to voice aesthetic opinions as well. Despite the architect's objections, Joseph was determined to include round windows in place of the semicircular ones on the side elevation.⁴

The construction of the Nauvoo Temple was radically different from that of the Kirtland Temple. Weeks's detailed drawings eliminated the errors in design that can result from overlooking structural spaces. Furthermore, the initial construction phases were not marked by scarcity of materials and workers as they were in Kirtland although there were some problems. Truman Angell recalled that the foundations were "much botched" by the committee that began construction.⁵ But this problem seems to have resulted from a lack of communication between the committee and the architect and not from a lack of architectural expertise.

The larger Nauvoo Temple was also designed for a more elaborate series of functions. Because baptisms on behalf of the dead had been instituted, the basement was provided with a large baptismal font instead of a dirt

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The First Mormon Temple

Design, Construction, and Historic
Context of the Kirtland Temple

by

Elwin C. Robison

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