

St. George Utah Temple

The St. George Utah Temple was the first temple completed by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints after their exodus from Nauvoo, Illinois, and is the oldest temple still actively used by the members of the Church.

Brigham Young, the president of the Church at the time, announced plans for the St. George Utah Temple on November 9, 1871. Due to the pressing need of the Church for an appropriate place for temple ceremonies and ordinances, the temple's groundbreaking ceremony was held the same day the temple was announced, and the tedious work began.

Unbeknown to him at the time, Brigham Young chose a swampy six-acre plot as the future temple site. In an effort to deal with the swampy site and underground streams, the Saints created drains to eliminate excess water, then decided to haul in and crush lava rock to use as the temple's foundation. The Saints put an old cannon to use as a pile driver in a pulley system to crush the volcanic rock.

The cannon itself packed quite the history. It was originally made in France and used by Napoleon during his siege on Moscow. After it lay abandoned from Napoleon's hasty retreat, it was dragged to Siberia, Alaska, then finally to a fort in California where it was retrieved by the Mormon Battalion and wheeled all the way to St. George, Utah. Today, the old cannon is displayed at the temple's visitor's center.

Once the foundation was stabilized, work began on the temple's structure. Saints worked for nearly five and a half years to complete the temple, oftentimes donating one day in ten as tithing labor, half their wages, or food, clothing, and other goods to those working full-time on the building. The temple's exterior walls were constructed from St. George's red sandstone then plastered for the white finish. At its completion, the temple contained nearly a million feet of lumber - all of which had been hand-chopped and hauled between forty and eighty miles - and seventeen thousand tons of volcanic rock and sandstone.

The temple was dedicated on April 6, 1877. The St. George Utah Temple was the only temple completed while Brigham Young was president. When the temple was completed, Young was dissatisfied with the "squatty" tower and dome and suggested having it fixed. Nearly a year after the temple's dedication however, a lightning bolt struck the tower of the temple, causing extensive damage and necessary reconstruction. Brigham Young's wishes were taken into account and the dome was constructed taller than before.

In the 1970's, the temple was closed for extensive interior remodeling and was rededicated by Spencer W. Kimball on November 11, 1975.