

## AN INTERVIEW WITH THE NAUVOO TEMPLE ARCHITECT

*Roger Jackson—FFKR Architects*

*Editor's Note: Roger Jackson was the principal in charge of the architectural team for the Nauvoo Temple, representing FFKR firm from Salt Lake City. The following is an interview with Jackson that first appeared in Meridian Magazine.*

Meridian: We can't imagine how you begin to draw a plan where you are replicating a building from the past with standards from the present. How did you find the information you needed to reconstruct this?

Jackson: We have some drawings from the original architect William Weeks. With those, and photographs, stone fragments from the temple, the archaeological report from the 60's and written descriptive accounts from journals, we tried to piece the picture together. In some of the fine points, like the shape of a molding or how this piece abutted to that piece, it wasn't clear from the photographs, so we studied other buildings of the time and we made up things. It was like the principle of revelation discussed in *Doctrine & Covenants* 9, we studied it out, struggling and struggling to come up with a solution to the problem until it felt right. You figure out things on your own and you ask for help. There are a lot of logs and documents that we looked at quickly. We didn't grind through every piece of information, but we feel good that we are 99%.

Meridian: How many people were working on the architectural drawings?

Jackson: At one point we had 14 people and probably another 25 engineers.

Meridian: The research phase must have been a big part of this. How long did it take?

Jackson: We started doing preliminary research in April of 1999. We had been the architects for the Vernal temple which was an existing building that we remodeled. That was much easier because we could go measure the building. By September of 1999, we were officially brought on as the architectural firm. There was so much information to sort through that the research work overlapped the construction document time by several months.

Meridian: How similar is the interior of the temple to the original one?

Jackson: Historically it was two large halls similar to the Kirtland temple. There's some question as to how much was finished. Was just one floor finished, and if so, which one? Some thought that it might be the second floor instead of the first floor. In William Weeks' drawings are a few that hint at the interior—the molding details, simple elevations and trim around the windows. We used those details that we had and built them into the plan, but basically the arrangement inside is completely different. We tried to think, "If the Saints back then were building these rooms, how would they have built them? What would they have looked like? What would the molding be? What would the trim on the windows be? What would the trim around the doors be? What would be the proper feel of the character and of the time? We studied other buildings from the period—primarily statehouses and New England churches to get the sense of how they would have built this. We studied the buildings that are here in Nauvoo. We presumed that many of the buildings would have been done by the same craftsmen. We studied Kirtland, and we studied the St. George temple, because many of the same craftsmen could have been involved on those projects. The endowments were all given in the attic space in a place with temporary partitions and furnishings that the Saints brought from their homes. They used the temple as the major meeting place of the town because there wasn't another place to meet.

Meridian: In building something as monumental as this, there must have been miracles along the way. Did you see them?

Jackson: We are trained professionally to come up with a lot of ideas, to bring up alternatives, to look at them critically and weigh them against each other to decide what is the right solution. And I'm often thick enough in the head that I don't always know where things come from, or to say we had a miraculous manifestation from the Spirit on one day. I never felt that. I know we had guidance from the Spirit, but it speaks in a still small voice, and it usually entails a lot of work for us. The challenge was the nature of the project, and the time constraints we were under, and the primary sources we had to go from.

Meridian: It seems you were asked to do a huge job with incomplete research materials in a short time frame.

Jackson: For us, it all starts with a line on a paper. The construction team was brought on board at the same time we were officially brought on, and they were anxious to get going. They had a charge to build the temple quickly, and so we had what we call a fast track process where we prepare bidding and construction documents in packages. Then the contractor can start on the first group, while we prepare the documents for the next batch. In this way we stay ahead of the contractor, sometimes just by the hour so they can start building. To do this, we had to make some early assumptions, and then we keep going building on the early assumptions that we make.

Meridian: It seems that kind of process opens the possibility for change orders and other challenges.

Jackson: There was an instance where there was an area that just didn't happen—and everybody looked at each other and said, "That's what happens in a fast track job." Some concrete was torn out. Everybody shrugged and said, "We didn't catch it. We didn't catch it. We didn't catch it." And that's the fast track process.

Meridian: There is a story that Joseph Smith looked at William Weeks' plans for the temple and said, "Where are the circular windows?" Apparently Weeks answered that they didn't know how to do circular windows and support the upper structure. Joseph answered that he didn't know how to do it either but that is what he'd seen in the vision, and so they had to do it. Do you see things in this project that would have been difficult for the pioneers that is now easy?

Jackson: Not really. I've read that story. I haven't really studied it carefully so I don't know if it is the round windows in the upper part or the lower round windows between the tall windows. Stone masonry can stand up by itself. But the challenge would have been to build the roof and floor structures that supported that because it is a long span from wall to wall, but these craftsmen were experienced timber-framing contractors and they knew how to do this. We have modern steel reinforced concrete that holds the building up.

Meridian: Is it surprising to you that this small band of pioneers had an architect and craftsmen capable of creating the Nauvoo temple?

Jackson: Not really. The architect was able and capable. He had had some informal training. Joseph Smith gave the overall image of the building and William Weeks put it together. The Lord moved in people's lives to bring craftsmen and tradesmen into the Church who could build these buildings. There were enough experienced stonemasons, carpenters, millworkers and painters. Two or three experienced people can train a lot of people to do the job.

Meridian: What has it meant to you to be involved in this project?

Jackson: It's really been a great blessing. My great, great grandfather John Mills Wooley worked on the building. That may sound like a miraculous coincidence, but to anybody who is in the Church who had ancestors in Nauvoo, they worked on the temple, too. How much he did and what he did, I don't know. We have three small journal entries that said, "I worked on the temple that summer." But it's been fun to think that my great grandfather could be watching. I've wondered what impact my children will get from this. What will they learn from us? My children are young. The oldest is 13; the youngest is 5. I think perhaps only when they are older will they understand the impact this project has had in our family.

Meridian: Why does this temple wrench so much at our heartstrings?

Jackson: We've had the culture in the church of having this temple lost to us. Every few years in the back of a church magazine, they publish one of these fuzzy, old daguerreotype images. You see a list of all the temples, and you see Nauvoo, which is gone. For President Hinckley to have the vision to say, "Let's rebuild our temple," has really caught the imagination of the Church, because what is lost is now found. It is a great tribute to our pioneer ancestors who established through their faith and their efforts the strength of what the Church is today. ☺