

St. George Tabernacle

The Building that Built a Community

Lesson Objectives

Students will:

Examine how the construction of the St. George Tabernacle benefited the economy of Washington County.

Discover the symbolic significance of the St. George Tabernacle.

Design a building to symbolize Washington County today.

Teacher Background

For students who are not familiar with the concept of symbolism, begin this lesson with a brief overview of symbolism using the *Familiar Symbols* sheet. Ask students: *What do these pictures mean? How do you know?* Explain that a symbol is an object or picture that can stand for something else. Often symbols stand for ideas.

Setting the Stage

1. Tell students: *Settling a new place can be very challenging. Imagine that you are leading a group of settlers in a harsh desert region. The summers are extremely hot, water is scarce, and the crops you brought with you aren't growing very well. There have been outbreaks of deadly disease. It is a long way from your settlement to the next settlement and the roads are rough, so getting new supplies is difficult. Many of your fellow settlers are discouraged. Some have already left and others want to leave. What could you do to convince people to stay?*

2. Divide class into groups. Each group will brainstorm ways to raise morale in the settlement and then present their best idea to the class. List student ideas on the board.

3. Tell students: *Now that we've thought about this challenge, let's find out what Brigham Young did when he faced a similar situation during the settlement of Washington County.*

Tour Info

Address: 4 South Main Street, St. George

Tours offered: daily, 9 am - 5 pm throughout the year

To schedule a tour call: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints Visitors Center, (435) 673-5181

Duration

One to two
45-minute periods

Instructional Materials

How a Building Helped Build a Community
(1 copy per student)

St. George Tabernacle Questions
(1 copy per student)

Optional: *Familiar Symbols*
(1 overhead)

Supplies

butcher paper
(one sheet per student that will cover the front and sides of his/her desk and extend from the top of the desk to the floor)

Alternative: If students don't have individual desks, they can create their buildings using shoe boxes.

masking tape
drawing materials
rulers

Core Curriculum Objectives

4th Grade

Social Studies
6040-0101
6040-0102
6040-0202

Language Arts
4040-0101
4040-0202
4040-0302
4040-0601

Visual Arts
1040-0302
1040-0401

7th Grade

Social Studies
6100-0101
6100-0203
6100-0503

Language Arts
4070-0201
4070-0203
4070-0301

Visual Arts
1100-0301



Student Instruction

1. Handout *How a Building Helped Build a Community* sheets to each student. Assign students to take turns reading out loud and write down new vocabulary words.
2. Distribute the *St. George Tabernacle Questions* and ask students to work in pairs to answer them. Review student responses as a class.
3. **Tell students:** *The St. George Tabernacle was also an important symbol for the people in the struggling settlement of St. George. Imagine you are settler. What does the tabernacle project mean to you? Would it help you decide to stay in St. George or not? How would you feel about the building when it was done?*
4. **Ask students:** *Can you think of symbols that are important to our community, our state, or our country? What are they and why are they important? Can you think of any symbols that have inspired you or others during difficult times? What are they and how did they inspire?*
5. Assign students to write a journal entry on the following questions: *How would you feel if the St. George Tabernacle was torn down? Would our community lose something important?*

Student Activity

1. Ask students to consider the changes Washington County has gone through in the past 125 years. The county is no longer a struggling, isolated, desert settlement but an area of rapid growth and a popular tourist destination. As a class, brainstorm a list of things that symbolize life in Washington County today.
2. Assign students to create a building that is a symbol for Washington County today. Students will draw their building on a piece of butcher paper that they will tape to their desk so it hangs from the front and sides of their desk to the floor. (*Alternative: If students don't have individual desks, they can create their buildings using shoe boxes.*) Students must thus design the sides as well as the front of their buildings. Before they begin drawing, tell students to think about what elements of their building will be symbolic (e.g., its function, materials, decorations, style, location, or a combination of elements). Students may also wish to draw a plan of their building on a piece of drawing paper first for practice.
3. Have students measure the width of the front of the desk and mark off a section this wide in the center of their butcher paper so they will know where to draw the front and sides of their building. After they complete their drawings, help students hang them on their desks with masking tape.
4. Assign students to write a short description explaining how their building is a symbol for Washington County today.
5. Invite other students to come view your class' work. Students should be prepared to explain the symbolic significance of their buildings to visitors.

How a Building Helped Build a Community Handout

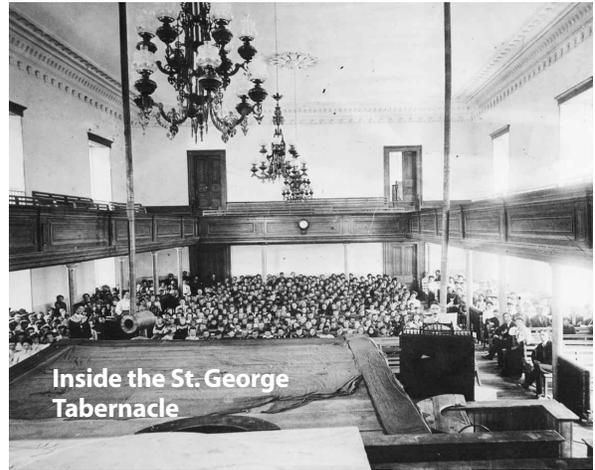
by Dr. Douglas D. Alder

Erastus Snow was the leader of the Mormon settlement of St. George in 1861. After the settlers worked at establishing their town for six months, he reported to Brigham Young that they were very discouraged. The heat, the lack of water, and the failure of their dams and ditches convinced many that coming to St. George was a mistake. Their supplies were running short and the harvest was going to be skimpy. Starvation was a real possibility for the settlers.

Brigham Young could see that the colony was about to fail. He made a major decision: the settlement had to succeed even if outside help was necessary. He wrote a letter to Erastus Snow telling the settlers to build “as speedily as possible a good, substantial, commodious well furnished meeting house, one large enough to comfortably seat at least 2,000 persons, and that will not only be useful, but also an ornament to your city, and a credit to your energy and enterprise.”

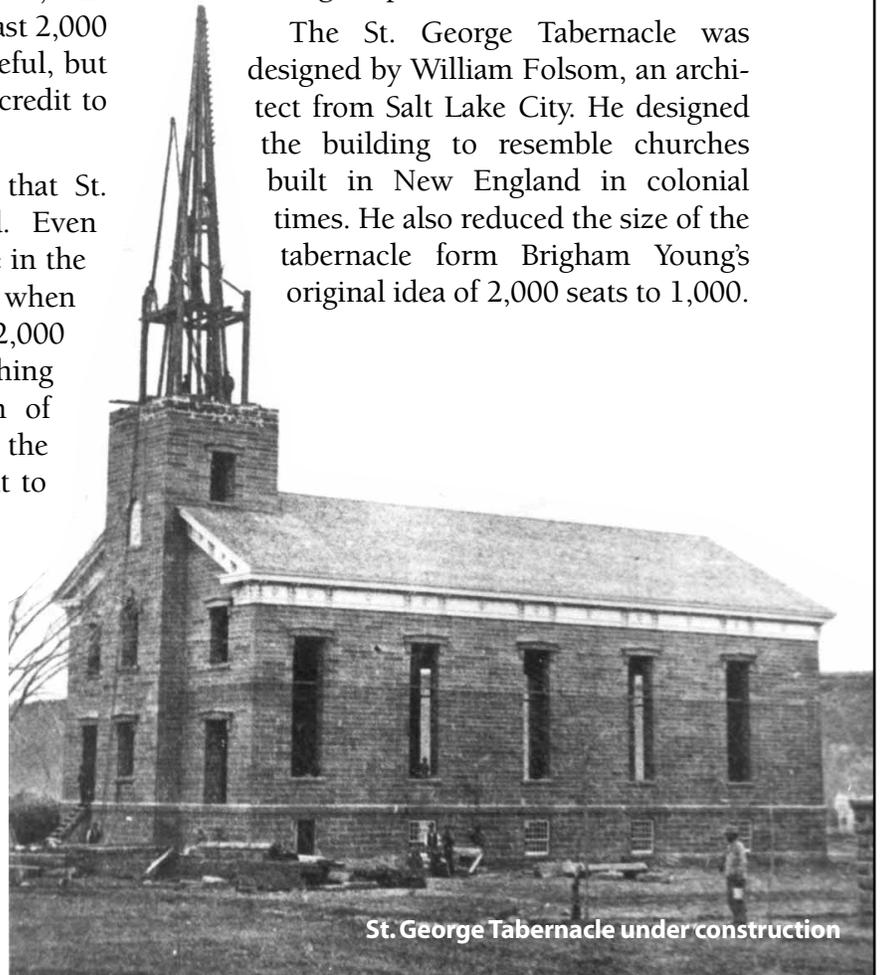
Brigham Young’s request meant that St. George was not to be abandoned. Even though there were about 1000 people in the town, Young was looking to a future when St. George would need a building for 2,000 people. His letter also stated that tithing funds, or donations to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, from the settlers in Iron County would be sent to help pay for the construction.

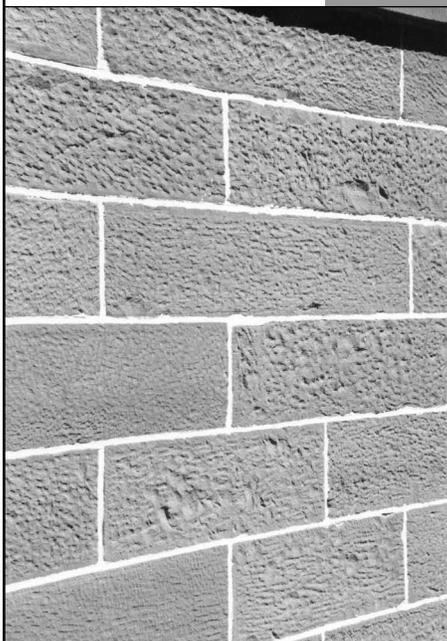
One hundred men worked for eight years (1863-1875) to quarry the stone, cut the timber, build roads to the lumber mills, and do the construction work on the St. George Tabernacle. These men were paid with the supplies donated from settlers in Iron County and



Washington County. This provided an economic subsidy, or support, for St. George while other families tried to get farming adapted to the desert.

The St. George Tabernacle was designed by William Folsom, an architect from Salt Lake City. He designed the building to resemble churches built in New England in colonial times. He also reduced the size of the tabernacle form Brigham Young’s original idea of 2,000 seats to 1,000.





Notice the different textures left by the original stone carvers on the tabernacle's sandstone exterior.

If you look carefully, you can still see the different styles of carving today. One worker carved his name in a stone. It is on the south side near the west corner of the building at about adult eye level.

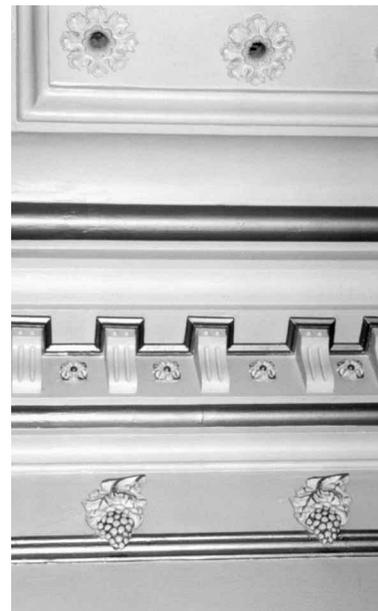
The lumber for the St. George Tabernacle was milled in Pine Valley, 40 miles north of St. George. Several lumber mills were set up there and they became essential to the construction of many local buildings. Building roads and wagons to bring the lumber to the tabernacle was another major task.

The interior of the tabernacle has been restored and is very close to its original appearance. It features an "all seeing eye," a symbol of the Church of Jesus Christ



of Latter-day Saints, on the west wall. Plaster grapes serves as trim all around the ceiling. Grapes were an important crop in Washington County at the time. All the plaster decorations in the building were made locally.

The glass in the windows is also mostly original. The panes of glass could not be made in St. George, so they were purchased in the East and shipped around Cape Horn in South America and up the Pacific coast to San Diego. The settlers in St. George had to raise \$800 to pay for the shipping costs when their wagons went to pick up the glass. After six months of asking for donations from all the settlers, only \$200 had been raised. In part, this was because money was not used in Mormon settlements at the time. Instead, people bartered goods or exchanged them for tithing script, a special kind of money that could be used to buy things at the tithing stores. Peter Neilson, an immigrant from Denmark, donated the \$600 the settlers needed just as the wagons were leaving for San Diego. He had brought the money from Denmark to pay for building a house.



Grapes and cotton flowers decorate the plaster molding on the tabernacle's ceiling.

The "all-seeing eye" is a symbol of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

The tabernacle's balcony also has an interesting story behind it. Miles Romney was the general supervisor of the tabernacle's construction. His personal delight was building the two beautiful spiral staircases that led to the balcony. When Brigham Young visited the tabernacle, he noticed that the people sitting in the balcony could not see the speaker's podium. He also felt that the balcony should run through the middle of the tall windows, about six feet lower than Romney had installed it. It was clear that two strong wills were confronting each other. Romney did not intend to change the staircases since that

would ruin their proportions, yet Young insisted that the balcony be lowered. When you visit the building, climb the stairs and see how Romney solved the problem.

The St. George Tabernacle has become one of America's distinguished buildings and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places. It housed Latter-day Saint congregations and stake conferences. In earlier times school classes and even Dixie College classes were held there. Today it is a center for concerts, lectures, historical tours and other public functions.



The tabernacle has beautiful spiral staircases.

