SALT LAKE THEATRE

The Salt Lake Theatre was built in downtown Salt Lake City in 1861–1862 at a cost of over $100,000. President Brigham Young donated more than half of the funds because he believed the Saints needed a theater to bring recreation, relaxation, and additional unity to the pioneer community. Visitors from other areas were shocked and even a little scandalized by his support because the theatrical stage did not have a good reputation in the 1860s. However, a glance at his talk given at the dedication shows that President Young made very clear his expectations for good, moral theater (JD 9:242–45).

The Salt Lake Theatre, with a seating capacity of 1,500, was one of the finest buildings in pioneer Salt Lake City, comparing well to theaters worldwide. It was praised by many of the professional actors who performed in it, including such theatrical greats as Sarah Alexander, Julie Dean Hayne, E. L. Davenport, and John McCullough. "There was scarcely a 'star' of the American stage who did not make a Salt Lake Theatre appearance" (Walker and Starr, p. 73).

After more than half a century of significant productions, however, the financially troubled and aging playhouse was sold in 1928 to be razed for a commercial office building. But the elements of theater—music, dance, and drama—established by the Salt Lake Theatre by the Mormon pioneers through six decades of continuous operation could not be torn down or destroyed. In 1962 the Pioneer Memorial Theatre, commemorating the old Salt Lake Theatre, was dedicated on the University of Utah campus and has since played a full season each year (see DRAMA).

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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SALT LAKE VALLEY

In 1847 Brigham Young, like a modern Moses, led the first pioneer Saints across a 1,300-mile stretch of "wilderness" into a large valley, surrounded by high mountain peaks and bordered on the northwest by a large lake of salty water, which gave the valley its name. Religious persecution of the 1830s and 1840s in the more populated eastern states necessitated the movement of the Latter-day Saints to the West, where they could be more isolated. The Prophet Joseph Smith had designated Jackson County, Missouri, on the fringes of civilization, as the zion of the latter days. However, continued persecution in Ohio, in Missouri, and later in Illinois caused the Latter-day Saints to seek a refuge in the Rocky Mountains, farther to the west, where they could worship God and practice their religious beliefs in the absence of religious bigotry, in land claimed by Mexico. To approximately 80,000 LDS pioneers who gathered from many nations and traveled across the great American desert by wagons before the advent in 1869 of the railroad, and to the thousands who followed afterward, the LDS presence in the Salt Lake Valley was compared to a fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy of the latter days, the City of God, established.