Unable to resist the opportunity of engaging in the popular sport of lambasting Mormon life and culture, an architectural correspondent for the *Western Architect and Building News* (14 July 1890) delivered an unjustifiably cruel and biased evaluation of what was essentially Mormon architecture:

Whatever may be said of attractions of Salt Lake City, in many respects it must be acknowledged that architecturally
the place is woefully behind the age, and the weather-beaten and crumbling adobes present an appearance that does not accord with the ideas of modern civilization. Only to the antiquarian in his studies and researches of primitive inhabitation of many can they be of interest.

Even after 43 years of constant development and refining of the architectural profession in the Mormon Corridor, the myth of a spiritually and materially impoverished people living in rustic adobe buildings under the rule of despotic leadership which suppressed individual expression still persisted among the uninformed. Yet in fact there were probably few western cities in the region better prepared to execute architectural designs of the finest quality than Salt Lake City in its pioneers days. To be sure, the predominant style of building for the first few decades consisted of vernacular forms and indigenous materials, but skilled architects and builders were sent to many of the major settlements at an early date, causing a rapid development of building technology and a consequent urban imagery expressing contemporary ideology.

The contribution of early Mormon architects and their architecture has never been adequately explored. Because of the Salt Lake Temple, Tabernacle, Beehive and Lion houses, Salt Lake Theatre, and Council Hall, we know of the fine accomplishments of pioneer architects Truman O. Angell, William H. Folsom, and Henry Grow, but outside of these men, little is known of Utah’s early designers. It is the purpose of this article to illuminate a part of our architectural past by identifying several of Utah’s early designers and discussing their significant works.

The Role of Architects in the Mid-19th Century

The typical architect of 1850 would undoubtedly feel lost in the office of a modern architect, with all its complicated catalogs, drafting machinery, paperwork and, most of all, grand design problems and the complex solutions they demand. But the architect of today would feel no more comfortable in the shoes of the pioneer architect. “Builder/architect” is a more appropriate term for the multi-disciplined designer who usually designed and built his structures and personally worked out every problem. There were few professionally trained architects in 19th-century America. A select few aristocrats received school training at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, but most architects were semi-skilled draftsmen — usually carpenters, masons, or contractors — who also possessed artistic sensitivity and drawing skills. Texts for these self-made designers were limited to a few carpenter’s and builder’s guides and house pattern books. From these the builder/architect would select his favorite Greek or Gothic Revival cornice details, window and door types, moulding and stair patterns, etc. Strict formulas depending on rules of proportion and scale, symmetry, and other principles of art were religiously adhered to by the better designers to insure that their plans and elevations were endowed with the proper correctness, order, and unity. Most plans for major buildings were well drawn, considering the primitive drafting implements available, but usually included little more than exterior elevations, floor plans, and a structural transverse section. There were a few notes on the plans, but a list of specifications written out in longhand, and cost estimates, would be provided if the owner requested them.

Many Mormon architects in pioneer Utah were well acquainted with styles of eastern and midwestern America and Europe, especially Great Britain. Several had worked on the temples in Kirtland and Nauvoo, two ambitious structures which proved that Mormon designers had, if given adequate technology, the ability to create and execute splendid designs. Lagging building technology was the obstacle which prevented other western architects from developing monumental architecture of the type that had grown up in the East. A comparable intermountain city, Denver, Colorado, did not develop its
natural resources during its formative years as rapidly as Salt Lake did and consequently its pre-railroad architecture was less impressive than Salt Lake's. The limitations resulting from primitive technology were removed at an early date for Mormon architects. Mainly because of the Church's desire to establish a permanent and beautiful Kingdom of God, the development of a building industry was a top priority in new Mormon settlements. Public works programs in most cities guaranteed a continual supply of competent craftsmen for major construction projects and rapidly exploited natural resources — i.e., clay for adobes and brick, lime for mortar and plaster, iron for nails and machinery, trees for structural lumber and decorative trim, — giving architects the materials they needed to erect fine buildings. The advantages of well-planned cities, cooperative employment programs, and the inherent skills of craftsmen who came from many parts of the world were utilized by Mormon architects to produce structures which frankly amazed many objective travelers who observed the territory's progress through its architectural maturation.

While the relationship of Church and architect was symbiotic, the Church did not go so far as to decree that certain styles be followed (with the possible exception of the temples) in its buildings. Good workmanship, use of the best materials, and practical designs were encouraged, but architects were at liberty to express themselves individually, provided their designs were not above the ability of builders to execute them. The limitations imposed on design were few and many critical writers who predicted the temple would never be completed or the great clear-spanning tabernacle roof would never stand were fortunately disappointed. Excessive designs and those which too strongly suggested a relationship to the apostate liturgy of Catholicism or other iconoclastic of pagan religions were avoided in favor of relatively simple and straightforward forms.

There was no attempt by either the Church or architects themselves to develop a distinct "Mormon" style; thus, except for ubiquitous vernacular styling we find no pronounced regional "high" style and little real uniqueness in mid-19th century Utah architecture. Designs came from Chicago, St. Louis, and Kansas City in the Midwest; Boston, Philadelphia, and New York in the East; and Denver and San Francisco in the West. Even ethnic-dominated towns such as Midway, Spring City, and Millard used American plans, forms, and detailing almost entirely. A major desire seems to have been to divest Utah of its early image as a desert land of scattered villages with log and adobe cabins. While not attempting to create a uniquely Mormon style, it is apparent that the Church and its architect members had a general consciousness of architectural reputation. Many superb buildings served to reflect the Church's presence, strength, taste, and awareness of fashionable styles of the day.

Let us turn now to specific architects, their lives and works. Because they are already well known and have been the subject of numerous articles, Truman O. Angell, William H. Folsom, and Henry Grow will not be discussed at length. Rather, four lesser known, even totally forgotten, architects whose works were important to the development of pioneer architecture throughout early Mormondom will be considered.

Obed Taylor
(died July 30, 1881), Salt Lake City

On 25 July 1855, Elder George A. Smith received a letter from San Francisco which gives us our initial acquaintance with Obed Taylor: "I am at present stopping with a brother Obed Taylor whom Brother Parley (P. Pratt) baptized last spring. He was a Canada acquaintance of my wife Martha, rejoices in the truth, and is extremely arduous to gather."! For some reason Taylor did not "gather" to Zion until about 1871. His death on 30 July 1881 came while the architect was at the height of a bright career which, unfortunately,
ended after only ten years of practice in Utah. During those ten years Obed Taylor produced many of the state’s finest and best-known structures. Taylor was for several years the partner of William H. Folsom. This talented team designed the Deseret National Bank (1875), the original Z.C.M.I. with its famous cast-iron storefront (1876), and the Feramosz Little residences. Taylor’s independent works were no less impressive: Ogden’s Z.C.M.I. and First National Bank Block (1881), the late Salt Lake 18th Ward meeting house, the Salt Lake Assembly Hall, and the large Coalville Tabernacle.

Nothing is known of Taylor’s architectural background in Canada and San Francisco. He was a quiet, retiring man by nature and left no account of his early accomplishments, but was probably well experienced in the Victorian and cast iron modes which dominated late 19th-century architecture in San Francisco. Armed with this knowledge, Taylor capably planned the 100 x 318-foot three-story Z.C.M.I. building. The walls of the building were of ordinary rock and brick, but the front and roof featured marvelous Italianate cast iron. Perhaps receiving impetus from Richard M. Upjohn’s prior First National Bank (1871) on South State Street, Folsom and Taylor produced the largest iron front ever erected in the territory. Due to its modular and precast system, several additions were made to the old front without disturbing the effectiveness of the original design.

The Deseret National Bank and the Z.C.M.I. Building in Ogden were similar in appearance, both calling upon a classical decorative vocabulary for the main ornamental elements. Both buildings were three stories tall, occupied corner lots, and had clipped corners with the main entries facing the street corners at 45 degree angles. The two banks had heavily molded belt courses between the ground and second floors and featured extensive cornices with dentils and paired brackets. Decorative parapets for the inscription plaques sat atop the buildings over the entries. The entries of the two structures were almost identical, with their segmentally arched pediments and banded Corinthian columns. The absence of Greek pediments over the windows of Ogden’s Z.C.M.I. seems to be the major difference in designs of the banks.

Obed Taylor’s design for Ogden’s Z.C.M.I was realized after his death in 1881. The building stands, though remodeled on the ground floor by J. C. Penny Company.

Obed Taylor and William H. Folsom were partners in the design of the 1876 ZCMI cast iron front. Elias Morris was the builder. The front has been disassembled and replaced on the facade of the new ZCMI Center.
During the late 1870s Obed Taylor was called by the Church to be one of its supervising architects under Truman O. Angell. As a consequence, Taylor was given the opportunity of designing the Assembly Hall on Temple Square. Built of the granite rock not used in the temple, the magnificent late Gothic Revival hall was begun in 1877 and completed and dedicated in 1882. Henry Grow, designer of the Tabernacle roof truss system, was the builder. The relatively unaltered structure measures 68 feet in width and 120 feet in length, and is 130 feet to the top of the tower which rises from the center of the building. The roof has four gables, each surmounted with ornamental spires. Eight octagonal buttresses and eight square pilasters also support handsome Victorian Gothic pinnacles. The masses and decorative elements are wonderfully combined to create one of the most striking buildings for worship in the country.

Complementary to the exterior is Taylor’s awe-inspiring auditorium — a massive open space with a long, sweeping gallery along three walls and pulpits, choir seats, and organ after the same general design as the Tabernacle. The plaster “beams” and exquisite rosettes once served to frame scenes of the Church’s temples and depictions of Christ which were painted on the ceiling. These symbolic scenes have since been covered.

The Salt Lake Assembly Hall was considered so successful a design that it was used as the model for a similar and even more impressive edifice, the Coalville Tabernacle (1879-83). Thomas L. Allen of Coalville was appointed to design a plan for Coalville’s new tabernacle in 1878. ‘He made elevations to show the (Summit Stake building) committee and church
A rare photo of the Coalville Tabernacle interior before the addition of another floor through the chapel at the level of the gallery in 1941. This disrespectful modification sealed the fate of the architectural gem, which was razed during the night in 1971.

officials. Church architect Truman O. Angell and master builder Obed Taylor reviewed and approved the plans.”8 This account seems to indicate that Allen conceived and drew the plans independently of Taylor. It is unlikely, however, that Allen, with his limited architecture background, developed the design alone. The two tabernacles are so similar in concept and detailing that they obviously were inspired from the same source. It is probable that T. L. Allen visited with Taylor in the preliminary planning stages of the Coalville Tabernacle and, using the Assembly Hall as a guide, modified its plans for the newer building.

Several of Obed Taylor’s best works were completed after his death in 1881.9 In addition to the Assembly Hall and Ogden Z. C. M. I. already mentioned, the Salt Lake 18th Ward meetinghouse was also

Salt Lake Eighteenth Ward Meeting House. This recently demolished structure was designed by Obed Taylor in 1880 and initiated the brief trend of single attenuated Gothic-spired churches in Utah. A group of Mormons think so highly of the building that they have arranged for its reconstruction next to the restored Council Hall on North State Street.
completed in 1882. A small (31 x 62 feet) building, it was nevertheless significant for initiating the late Gothic Revival meetinghouse style which became prevalent in larger Mormon communities in the mid-1880s. The 18th Ward chapel was the first regular Mormon meetinghouse to have a tall, engaged tower with a Gothic-styled steeple. Gothic pointed windows and stepped buttresses had been used in earlier buildings but were not included with the central tower and the New England meetinghouse plan until Taylor’s design. The building was also important historically as the home ward meetinghouse for the prophets of the Church, all of whom have lived in the 18th Ward. It is unfortunate that this important edifice was destroyed in favor of four parking stalls and a small patch of grass. Concerned Church members, neighbors, and the State of Utah have recently united on a project which will attempt to reconstruct the chapel next to the old Council Hall. If imitation is truly a form of flattery, then Obed Taylor may have been flattered that the 21st Ward, built over two decades after the 18th Ward chapel, copied his design almost exactly, just as Coalville reflected an earlier Taylor masterpiece. It is lamentable that Taylor came to Utah Territory so late and left so soon, for the legacy of rich architecture he left is too thinly spread to receive the appreciation it is due.

William Nicol Fife
(1831-1941), Ogden

William N. Fife was the first professional architect in Weber County. As the major form giver, Fife produced such notable works as the original Ogden Tabernacle (1856), Ogden Central School (1880), and the Weber Court House (1871-76). Yet, like many other Mormon architects, his design career was abbreviated due to a series of important Church calls. Indian fighter, city marshall, colonel, personal friend of U. S. Grant and Philip Sheridan, missionary, polygamist, colonist, and explorer, Fife was an extraordinary man of wide experience as well as a skillful architect.

A native of Scotland, William N. Fife was born at Kincardine, Perthshire, on 16 October 1831. William received a good education and at age fifteen was admitted to college, at the same time being

The Feramorz Little mansion — imitative of the more elaborate “Gardo House” designed by Taylor’s partner, William M. Folsom.
William N. Fife arrived in Salt Lake City 20 October 1853, and was immediately employed by President Heber C. Kimball who put him in charge of his building business. Fife was paid $5 a day and worked for Kimball for eighteen months, laboring on numerous houses and public buildings. In the fall of 1856, President Brigham Young called Fife and his young family to move to Ogden and build a tabernacle in that city. Put under contract, Fife took on a partner, architect Walter Thompson, and also contracted with Chauncy W. West and Alberm Allen. Fife had complete charge of the project, however, and did the design work and much of the carpentry himself. The tabernacle was finished in three years and after completion looked much like the old adobe tabernacle built in Salt Lake City in 1851. During construction Fife fell from a scaffold sixty feet above ground and miraculously recovered after a blessing.

The fall did not interrupt his work nearly as much as his participation in the Echo Canyon Indian War and other military activities. Mr. Fife had proven his abilities as a military leader in the previous Indian troubles of 1853, and had risen from corporal to second lieutenant, to first lieutenant and to captain. He went with the Weber and Box Elder militia to head off Colonel Alexander, who was endeavoring to enter Salt Lake City by way of Soda Springs. Returning from “The Move” in 1858, Fife next entered into a building contract to put up government buildings at Camp Floyd. He profited handsomely from his contract and returned to Ogden in 1859 to build a tannery for West and Hammond and stables for Wells, Fargo and Company. In 1860 Fife went to Salt Lake City where he helped to finish the Seventy's Hall and a store for William Jennings. He also built the Chauncy W. West residence in Ogden in 1860.

In April 1862 Mr. Fife was appointed city marshal of Ogden. While marshal, Fife single-handedly captured two dangerous armed robbers and received $1,000 reward. After being re-elected for several succeeding terms, he served as Weber County coroner, pound keeper, president of the local dramatic association, and member of the Weber Stake High Council. He continued to be active and prominent in military matters and organized the first company of militia in Ogden Valley in 1862. In 1866 he was made Colonel of Infantry by Ulysses S. Grant. In 1868 he took a contract to build several miles of the Central Pacific railroad between Promontory and Ogden and was Marshal of the Day when the iron horse made its advent into Ogden. A tireless man, William N. Fife acted as a school trustee and did everything in his power to improve and advance his community.

When smallpox was brought into Ogden in May 1870, Fife personally disinfected every afflicted house, built a special shelter for the sick near isolated Brick Creek, and provided the 89 victims with food, supplies, and medicine for three months. In 1873, after an active civic and professional life, Mr. Fife went on a successful mission to his native Glasgow, Scotland. He returned in 1874 and was architect of most of Ogden’s important buildings constructed through 1880. One of these, the Central School, was considered the finest school building in the Territory at the time, and still stands as the present Elk’s Club Building.

Nervous restlessness seemed to characterize William N. Fife. In November
Considered the finest school in the territory at the time, Ogden's Central School (1880) was designed by pioneer architect William Nicol Fife. The building was later converted into an Elk's lodge and still stands.

William Nicol Fife designed the unusually refined Weber County Courthouse (1871-76) in Ogden.
1880 he left Ogden with a view of exploring Arizona and Mexico in behalf of President John Taylor. After many interesting adventures, he settled near Lobley’s logging camp where, during his absence, his first wife Diana was killed by a hostile Mexican. In 1887 Fife assisted Erastus Snow in exploring parts of Mexico and subsequently sent one of his families to reside there. Fife and the remainder of his family returned to Ogden where William died in 1914 at the age of 83.16

It is difficult to comprehend how a man so preoccupied by other weighty concerns could find the time to refine his architectural skills to such a degree of perfection. Fife’s works are those one would expect from a master who had devoted his entire life to the pursuit of architectural excellence. The Central School and County Court House are mature designs and exhibit a skillful knowledge of planning, proportion, scale, unity, variety, balance, and harmony. The forms and massing of Fife’s building are formally arranged but are pleasing. The Classical detailing is rich and appropriate without being gaudy. Fife’s works, though relatively few in number, were of high quality and rank him with Angell and Folsom as one of the premier architects of pioneer Utah.

William Wilson Fife (1857-1897), Ogden

W. W. Fife, the eldest son of pioneer architect William Nicol Fife, was trained by and was partner with his father. He ultimately became Utah’s most important architect outside of Salt Lake City. It may have been difficult to live in the shadow of such an illustrious man as Colonel Fife, but son William seemed equal to the task. Sharing in many of his father’s building experiences, W.W. determined at an early age to follow the architectural profession as his father had done. This proved to be a wise decision as W. W. benefitted greatly from the close contact and special training he received from his very accomplished father.

Born 16 August 1857 in Ogden, W. W. Fife was perhaps Utah’s first native born architect of significance. At age 13 he went to work for his father to learn the trade of builder and architect. A partner at age 15, the enterprising son assumed charge of the drafting department at age 17 and soon after took over the entire architectural business after his father retired to pursue other goals. Fife’s firm was by far the largest in Ogden at the time and subscribed to all of the important architectural publications of the day: American Architecture, Inland Architect, Architect and Builder, and the architect’s and builder’s edition of The Scientific American.17 These popular magazines furthered the young architect’s education after his father left the firm, and introduced him to developing American styles.

The Romanesque Revival created mainly through the efforts of Henry Hobson Richardson in the eastern United States, was particularly appealing to Fife. His earlier works had followed various classical lines, culminating in the exquisite Second Empire Ogden City Hall (1888-89). In the 1880s his Perry’s Block, the Scowcroft Block, and the Utah Territorial Reform School showed his mastery of commercial styles, but by 1890 Fife had fully embraced Richardsonian Romanesque. The Woodmansee Union
The Scowcroft Block (1890) still stands in Ogden in much the same condition as depicted in the architect's rendered elevation.

The completed Utah Loan & Trust Company building in Ogden, designed in 1890 by W. W. Fife.

W. W. Fife's French Second Empire masterpiece, Ogden City Hall (1888-89) was unequaled as an example of this particular style in Utah.
Block (1890) — Ogden’s equivalent to Salt Lake’s Constitution Building — Utah Loan and Trust Co. (1891), and Ogden High School were Romanesque structures excelled by only Salt Lake’s City and County Building (1894), which had been designed by out-of-state architects Bird & Proudfoot.

Richard K. A. Kletting, designer of the State Capitol, was also fond of Richardson’s triumphs in the east and dabbled briefly in designs featuring large Roman arches and rusticated stone, but as one trained in the art of fine stone cutting, Kletting could not divorce himself from the smooth stonework he so admired. It was therefore left to W. W. Fife to lead out in the development of this major American architectural trend in the intermountain West. Fife’s Romanesque-styled buildings became models for many other architects in the region. A list of only Fife’s major works would be too extensive for this account, but it would be accurate to assert that to him goes the greatest credit for giving Ogden its metropolitan appearance.

Like his father, William Nicol, W. W. was involved in numerous adventures in Arizona and Mexico. He was with his father at the time his mother was killed in 1882 and devoted his time and talents to the Church whenever called upon. W. W. died in his fortieth year, proceeding his father in death by seventeen years.

It is truly unfortunate that such a brilliant designer was taken at the zenith of his prolific career.

E.L.T. Harrison was born in Barking, Essex, England, 27 March 1830. He was educated as an architect and became very proficient in the profession. Converted to Mormonism as a youth in the 1840s by Apostle Orson Pratt, Harrison advanced quickly in the Church as is reflected by this series of responsible assignments:

- Head of the church book store and business office in London; contributor to the Millennial Star, the British organ for Mormonism; church emigration agent in Liverpool; and president of the London Missionary Conference.

In England Harrison became a friend of Edward Tullidge, later editor of the Millennial Star, and co-publisher with Harrison of the Peep O’ Day, the intermountain West’s first published magazine. As a result of frequent long discussions on Church doctrine and policy by the two intellectuals, Harrison concluded that the Church should move away from its strong authoritarian and institutionalized orientation in favor of more individualized, “universalistic” religion. His deepening skepticism caused Harrison to seek sympathizers with his movement for Church reform. Eli B. Kelsey, William H. Shearnman, and William S. Godbe, along with Tullidge,
were early allies who united with Harrison to throw off the "suppressive Church control" yoke. After the demise of Peep O' Day, the Utah Magazine, Mormon Tribune, and Salt Lake Tribune followed as organs for what became known as the Godbeite Movement or New Movement.24

In 1868 Harrison and Godbe, one of the territory's ten wealthiest men, traveled to New York on a "business trip" and participated in numerous seances through intermediary Charles Foster, a renowned spiritualist.25 Armed with newly revealed truths, Godbe and Harrison printed revelations which, though more vague than their sermons and editorials, exposed the extent of their apostasy. "The two leaders substituted a pantheistic for a personal God, rejected the Christian atonement, denied the literal resurrection, refused scriptural authority, and declared the notion of Satan dead and buried."26 The Godbeites' opposition eventually moved from passive editorialism to more active, though largely secret, rebellion which ultimately resulted in the 1869 excommunication of Harrison and Godbe for conspiracy.27 The loss of Harrison was regretted by many of the faithful but was justified by Harrison's continued association with the New Movement which, unable to sustain itself through recruitment of new members, disintegrated in the 1870s.

Despite his difficulties with the Church, E.L.T. Harrison was highly respected by the Mormon community as a skillful

The Salt Lake Theatre interior was superlative in its lavish richness and marked a high point in pioneer architecture; designed by E. L. T. Harrison, later excommunicated for conspiracy during his leadership in the Godbeite "New Movement."
architect. His profession, in fact, gave Harrison an outlet to physically demonstrate his disdain for the Church's program of social austerity and simplicity. Harrison rejected the idea that foreign influences and flamboyancy and extravagance in life style were inherently destructive to either Church or individual progress. His architectural works clearly reflected a commitment to the best of "high styles," styles which emphasized ornamental and picturesque qualities of design. Because competent architects were in great demand, and because Harrison was capable of giving the primitive city a richness, a refined and finished appearance which struggling early settlers, immigrants, and gentile visitors alike could relate to and appreciate, Harrison was given important commissions and was encouraged in his work.

Upon arriving from England in 1861, Harrison was immediately charged with designing the interior of the new Salt Lake Theatre, one of Brigham Young's favorite projects. Being a native of London, the Englishman incorporated design motifs from buildings he had been familiar with, and purportedly used the famous Drury Lane Theatre in his hometown as a model. While the two structures were not very similar, the Salt Lake Theatre was highly decorative in the best of contemporary English styling. The richness of the theatre was unparalleled in any other structure of the territory and represented the zenith of architectural accomplishment during the pioneer era. Harrison's designs were well received and were not considered excessive at first. His contributions went beyond those of his private practice. Harrison was apparently the first pioneer to teach formal classes in architecture. An ad in the Deseret News reveals the depth of his working knowledge of the building craft:

In 1863 Harrison was also one of the organizers and teachers in the Deseret Academy of Art, a short-lived and premature organization supported by a range of artists including Charles R. Savage, Daniel Weggeland, George M. H. L. T. Harrison designed several buildings for the Walker Brothers, including Walker's Store and the old Walker Brothers Bank.

The Godbeit Pitts Company store was one of the first prominent commercial structures in Salt Lake City.
Ottinger, and William H. Folsom.  

All of Harrison’s achievements notwithstanding, being cut off from the Church changed the members view of him and affected his architectural career. Members were directed not to associate with apostates either as friends or in business dealings. Brigham Young had once exclaimed, “I want to make a wall so thick and so high around the territory that it would be impossible for the gentiles to get over or through it.” Harrison had tried to put holes in the adobe curtain but in so doing found himself cast outside the wall. Fortunately for Harrison there were adequate clients among the gentiles, apostates, and condescending Mormons to support the architect’s career.

Although there is no direct evidence to support the idea, it is thought that the Walker Brothers gave Harrison the commission for their famous bank. Stylistically it is similar to the Godbe-Pitts Co. building, a known Harrison design. The Walker Brothers were disenchanted Mormons who, as friends of Godbe and Harrison, financially supported the pair’s various publications. Due to their close relationship and the absence of other non-Mormon designers at the time, it is likely that Harrison obtained the Walker Brothers job. The Walker Brothers Bank and Godbe-Pitts Co. store were, along with William Paul’s Eagle Emporium, the most prominent commercial structures in early Salt Lake City. All three buildings were quite classical in their designs and depended on symmetry, Roman-arched bays on the upper floors, pilasters, Greek pedimented parapet walls, and Greek and Roman ornamental vocabularies. Harrison’s designs were striking and, in a city of largely one-story adobe and frame structures, comparatively monumental.

The one building that best symbolized the philosophy of the New Movement was Harrison’s design for the William S. Godbe residence, built in the mid-1880s. The unbelievably elaborate Gothic Revival house was essentially a one-and-a-half story U-shaped adobe building enhanced by intricate wood carving on the entire surface of the home. It was pioneer vernacular as to basic materials, house pattern book as to plan, and Victorian as to overall effect. The Godbe house perhaps reflected what might have been, had the basic Church been “enlightened” to higher and more worthy aspirations as envisioned by the New Movement. One writer has described the movement as being “supernatural and Gothic,” the Godbe house most perfectly characterized those qualities.

For most of Harrison’s nearly forty years of practice in Utah the spirited architect designed independently. However, as the “building boom developed in 1889, E.L.T. saw the need to take on a partner to assist with the growing work load. In 1890 H. W. Nichols, originally a merchant of groceries and fruit, and later a builder/architect, joined forces with Harrison. Together the firm designed such notable structures as the Central Block for J.K. and M.H. Walker, the Market Block for H. W. Lawrence (another Godbeite dissenter), the Phipps Block, Whittemore Hotel, T.C. Armstrong, Jr., Block, Tribune Block, Ellerbeck Block, and many others. They also submitted three designs for the Chamber of Commerce building competition which was won by Richard K. A. Kletting. The partnership was dissolved after the end of the “boom” in 1893 and both architects reestablished independent practices. Other significant works by Harrison included the Grand Opera House and Alta Block and the Sarah Daft Block.

As an independent or as a partner, and through the rages of changing styles and building trends, Harrison always maintained a highly decorative, expressionistic philosophy. One glowing account credits C.I.T. Harrison with being “the pioneer of architectural progress in Salt Lake City”:

"Arriving in that city in the days of pole fences and adobe structures, architecture was yet an unapplied art, and a knowledge of its principles a somewhat useless acquisition."
The walls of Salt Lake theater were, however, just about at that time going up, and he found temporary but congenial employment in designing its fine proscenium, handsome stage-boxes, and galleries, which features, associated with the generally ample proportions of the building, have gained for it the reputation of being one of the handsomest theaters on the continent. Progress in reference to dwelling-houses in that city was delayed many years in consequence of a lack of building material, even common brick being for a long time unobtainable. Under these difficult circumstances the only buildings legitimately entitled to the title of villa residences were designed by himself. When the manufacture of brick at last commenced, it fell to his lot to design and superintend the erection of the first buildings uniting the features of store and office buildings in one structure, as in the case of the "Ellerbeck," and "Tribune" blocks; also of introducing the first buildings in which St. Louis and Philadelphia brick, and terra cotta, were ever used, as in the case of the Large "Union" and "Alta" blocks. A decade or two after the erection of the theater, the second theatrical building in Salt Lake City — the Walker Grand Opera-house — was placed under his supervision, every detail (including those of its highly ornamental interior), being furnished by himself. These buildings familiarized the public mind with modern styles, and made possible the class of buildings now being introduced. Happily, a door is now opened wide to architecture in Utah, and it no longer needs the services of any special patron or professor of the art to carry its banner.33

There were obviously many pioneers of architecture, but E.L.T. Harrison surely stands as one of the most significant. Not content with the slow and mediocre development of Utah's architecture, Harrison continually attempted to advance the standards of his profession and of all of life's pursuits generally.

E.L.T. Harrison died of paralysis in 1900, three years after retiring from the active practice of his occupation.34 A Mormon writer penned his obituary and described a man "of high character, small stature, massive head, a brain active and heart tender . . . not a bitter opponent,"35 undoubtedly an appropriate summary of a dedicated thinker and fine architect.

The story of Utah's lesser known pioneer architects does not end here. This brief study not only suffices to dispel the myth of architectural primitivism in early Utah history, but it suggests that a broader base of concern and expertise existed than is commonly believed. Moreover, the lives of Obed Taylor, William Nicole Fife, William Wilson Fife, and E.L. Harrison reflect the fascinating and often difficult symiosis that evolved between aesthetics, pragmatism, and religion on the frontier. There are more names that must be added to this initial listing, and hopefully the future will see the creation of a more complete history.
James A. Little, "Biographical Sketch of Feramorz Little," 1890. Taylor is specifically credited with the design (see Alice Merrill Horne’s Devoises and their Shrines, p. 22).


Deseret News Weekly, July 26, 1882.


In the Shadow of Moroni, Selections from Magazines, SLC, date unknown, p. 34.

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George B. Pratt, Ogden City, Utah, Picturesque and Descriptive, Art Publishing Company, Neenah, Wisconsin, 1889, pp. 116-117.

Deseret News, July 30, 1881.


Utahn, 74, Tells of Thrilling Early Days, newspaper article — source unknown.

The Ogden Standard, Oct. 22, 1914.

Hanly & Littoral, Utah, Her Cities, Towns, and Resources, W. B. Conkley Co., Chicago, 1904, pp. 153-4, 170-71, 177, 182 (lists works and includes several photos and architect’s drawings of Fife’s buildings).


Utahn, 74, Tells of Thrilling Early Days,

newspaper article — source unknown.

The Ogden Standard, Sept. 1, 1897.

Various Ogden City directories from 1878 through 1897 list Fife as “carpenter,” “contractor and builder” and “architect” respectively. At the time of his death in 1897, Fife was listed as an architect (Polk’s Ogden City Business Directory for 1897-8). Three years prior to his death Fife had been stricken with paralysis — a result of shock received upon learning of the death of his mother. Other losses of close family members were accompanied by serious strokes which eventually deprived the architect of much of his sight, and his mobility. Nevertheless, he had nearly finished the design for the George Tribe Block when he suffered a fatal stroke while eating dinner.


“A Real Representative of the Most High,” Millennial Star 20:641-644 (see, e.g., E.L.T. Harrison’s).

Edward W. Tullidge, History of Salt Lake City, Star Printing Co., Salt Lake City, 1886, pp. 400-01.

Deseret News, May 22, 1900.


Deseret News, Feb. 5, 1862.


Bancroft, History of Utah, p. 647.

Western Architect and Building News: Sept. 1889.

Salt Lake ("Christmas") Herald, December 25, 1890.

“Picturesque Salt Lake City” (photo book), Salt Lake City, 1889, pp. 50-51.

Various Salt Lake City directories. Harrison was listed as an architect from 1867 through 1896.