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PIONEER

If thou art merry, praise the Lord
with singing, with music, with
dancing, and with a prayer of praise
and thanksgiving.

—D & C 136:28



non-Battalion - Ball, July 1846 -

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PIONEER

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MISSION STATEMENT

The mission of the National Society of the Sons of Utah Pioneers is to preserve the memory and heritage of the early pioneers of the Utah Territory. We honor the pioneers for their faith in God, devotion to family, loyalty to church and country, hard work and service to others, courage in adversity, personal integrity, and unyielding determination.

The society also honors present-day pioneers worldwide in many walks of life who exemplify these same qualities of character. It is further intended to teach these same qualities to the youth who will be tomorrow's pioneers.

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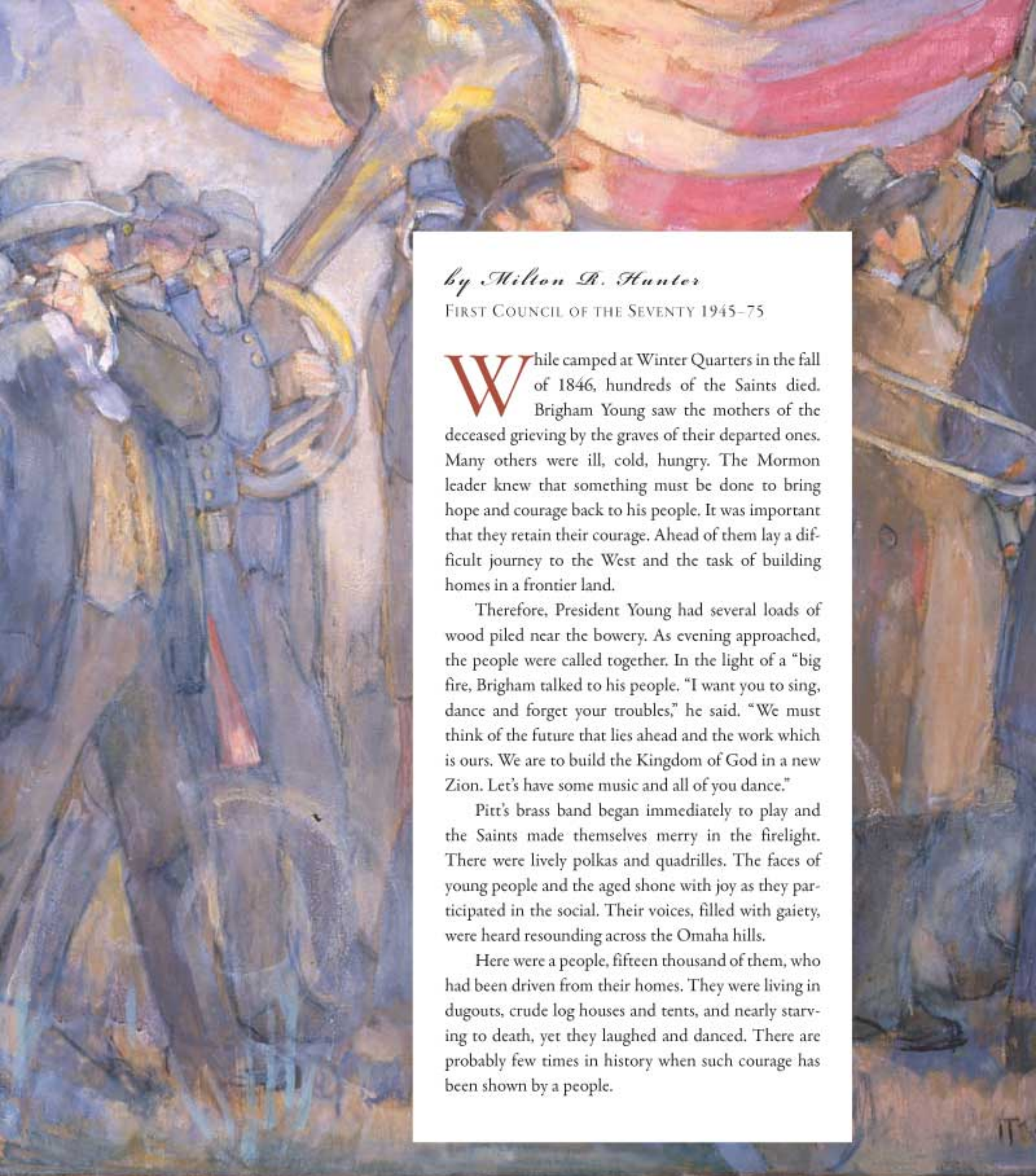
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UTAH PIONEER
— *Social Life* —

Beasley Band by Minerva Teichert, © by Intellectual Reserve, Inc. Courtesy of the Church History Museum.



by Milton R. Hunter

FIRST COUNCIL OF THE SEVENTY 1945-75

While camped at Winter Quarters in the fall of 1846, hundreds of the Saints died. Brigham Young saw the mothers of the deceased grieving by the graves of their departed ones. Many others were ill, cold, hungry. The Mormon leader knew that something must be done to bring hope and courage back to his people. It was important that they retain their courage. Ahead of them lay a difficult journey to the West and the task of building homes in a frontier land.

Therefore, President Young had several loads of wood piled near the bowery. As evening approached, the people were called together. In the light of a "big fire, Brigham talked to his people. "I want you to sing, dance and forget your troubles," he said. "We must think of the future that lies ahead and the work which is ours. We are to build the Kingdom of God in a new Zion. Let's have some music and all of you dance."

Pitt's brass band began immediately to play and the Saints made themselves merry in the firelight. There were lively polkas and quadrilles. The faces of young people and the aged shone with joy as they participated in the social. Their voices, filled with gaiety, were heard resounding across the Omaha hills.

Here were a people, fifteen thousand of them, who had been driven from their homes. They were living in dugouts, crude log houses and tents, and nearly starving to death, yet they laughed and danced. There are probably few times in history when such courage has been shown by a people.

And during the following years, as group after group of Mormon immigrants crossed the plains to Utah they continued to dance. Music was furnished them by brass bands, the violin or the accordion. Quadrilles and minuets were danced on the hard ground around the camp-fires. In fact, this activity was probably the most common amusement of the founders of our State, being enjoyed in every city, town and hamlet in Utah.

MUSIC AND DRAMA

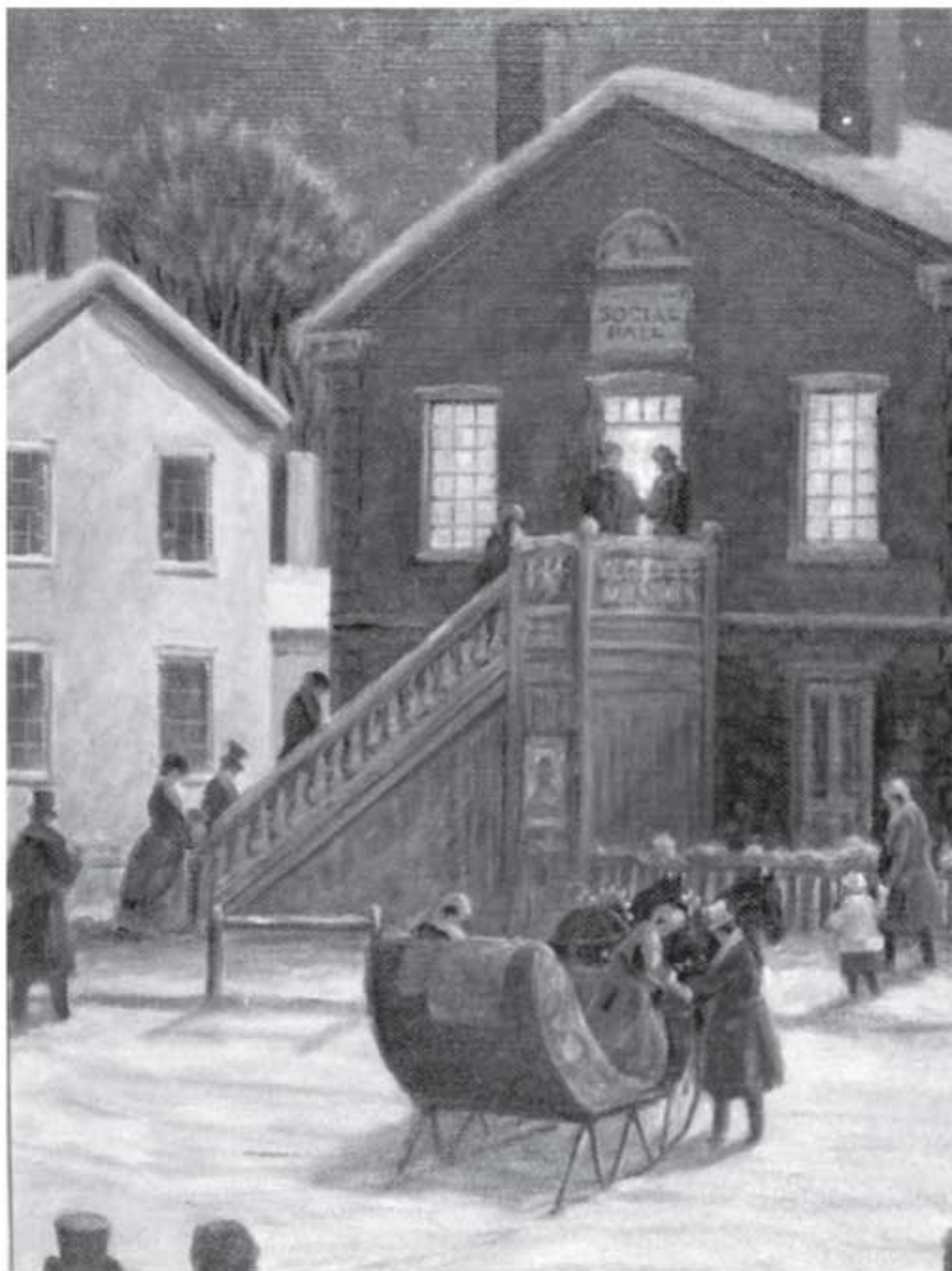
Most of the early settlers of Utah were accustomed to the refinements of a civilized and cultured life. Music and drama were encouraged not only in Salt Lake City, but every new community that came into existence developed those arts in some form. We can look with pride upon the achievements of the founders of Utah in music and drama.

The Salt Lake Musical and Dramatic Association was established in 1850. In the Old Bowery on Temple Square in the Mormon Mecca, this company produced "Robert Macaire" and other dramatic performances. Captain William Pitt's orchestra furnished the music and William Clayton, Jacob Hutchinson, George Ward, and David Smith, accompanied by four other men and three women, did the acting. In 1848, "The Triumph of Innocence" was presented in the Old Bowery.

The people sat in the refreshing air with the breezes playing on their faces and in their hair.

THE SOCIAL HALL

The Old Bowery, however, had its disadvantages for dramatic purposes. Hence the Saints had barely completed the planting of their crops and were still



erecting their houses when they built a theatre in the wilderness. This occurred in 1852. The structure was the Social Hall. It is claimed to have been the first theatre west of the Missouri River. For those days it was a good-sized building, its dimensions being forty by eighty feet. On the main floor was an auditorium with a seating capacity of about 300 persons, and an imposing stage.

The basement contained dressing-rooms and a good hall used for banquets and dancing.

The Deseret Dramatic Association was organized about the time of the completion of the Social Hall. Early in 1853 it began presenting plays before packed houses. Its first drama was "The Lady of Lyons." The good taste of our pioneer forefathers is shown in the type of drama presented. Some of them are "Othello," "Damon and Pythias," "She Stoops to Conquer" and "Richard III."

Through the fifties the Social Hall remained the center for amusements in Salt Lake City. The most prominent Easterners on whom the people of the Territory wished to make an impression were entertained there.

The building served its purpose well and was finally torn down in May, 1922.

THE SALT LAKE THEATRE

In 1859, Phil Margetts, who later became one of the best actors in Utah, organized the Mechanics' Dramatic Association. A large private dwelling, owned by Harry E. Bowring, on First South Street was turned into a playhouse. It was called Bowring's Theatre—the first place in Utah to be called a theatre.

On the night of the second performance, only two families were present to enjoy the drama. They were the families of President Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball—ninety persons in all! They crowded the place beyond its limit, but they managed to squeeze in. President Young recognized the need for building a large theatre; therefore, he instructed H. B. Clawson, who was present, to start the work at once, saying: "The people must have amusement as well as religion."

When the Mormon leader decided that a project was to be carried out, it must be done with dispatch. The Salt Lake Theatre



MANY OF THE MOST FAMOUS ACTORS AND ACTRESSES OF THE AMERICAN STAGE APPEARED AT THE SALT LAKE THEATRE.



Salt Lake Theatre. Built by Brigham Young.
Salt Lake City, Utah.

For more information on early pioneer theatre, see *Pioneer magazine* [Winter 2003].

was begun on July 1, 1861, and dedicated on the evening of March 6, 1862. It soon became famous, due to its size, structure, and the excellent dramas presented therein.

It was a remarkable building to be erected on the frontier so soon after the arrival of the pioneers in Utah. Mr. Leavitt concluded in his *Fifty Years of the American Stage* that "At the time of its erection it was not surpassed in magnitude, completeness, and equipment by any other existing house. Its stage, 62 feet deep, remains the most conspicuous of any in the country."

The dimensions of the building were 80 by 144 feet and 40 feet high. The exterior was Grecian Doric. Two beautiful columns stood at the south entrance. The interior was handsome, fitted up gorgeously for those times. The total cost of the structure was over \$100,000, which was a large sum for the frontiersmen to invest in a theatre.

Many of the most famous actors and actresses of the American stage appeared at the Salt Lake Theatre. Among them were the beautiful and charming Julia Dean Hayne, the fascinating George Pauncefort and later the incomparable Maude Adams.

At first the music was furnished by William Pitt's orchestra. But he was soon replaced by George Careless, a musical genius who had recently graduated from the Royal Academy in London. Under his direction at the Salt Lake Theatre the members of the orchestra were given full-time pay, the first time such had been the case in Utah. Under this arrangement, outstanding musical talents were developed and the people of the Territory enjoyed the best in orchestra music.

Money was scarce in the Basin during pioneer days, with the result that articles of merchandise were accepted at the ticket window. One pioneer reported that he paid a turkey for his ticket and received a chicken in exchange. If they were both alive, it must have been an interesting experience. Up almost to the end of the Salt Lake Theatre's life, it was one of the finest playhouses in the country. But there came a time when its usefulness ended, and the building was torn down in 1929.



MEMORIAL DAYS

The time is July 24, and the place may be any Utah community. . . . Villagers [assembled] at a point where they could view the procession. . . . All of them were dressed in costumes carefully prepared to represent those worn by the pioneers while crossing the plains. . . .

[Activities included] singing "Come, Come Ye Saints," . . . "The Star Spangled Banner," [and] "Utah We Love Thee." Following a few musical numbers, the orator of the day stood up and rehearsed the history of how the Mormons had escaped their enemies in the East and had found a place of security in the Rocky Mountains. . . .

Early in the afternoon, a children's dance was held. This was followed by a baseball game between the single and married men. Then came the footraces and the horse races, and the picnic in the grove. Of course the celebration was climaxed by a dance in the evening.

The Fourth of July celebration resembled in many respects the one held on the Twenty-fourth. On Independence Day flags were unfurled and long orations given before large crowds, praising the deeds of the leaders and forefathers of our nation. Oftimes the declaration of Independence was read. And the day's

programme usually included a parade, a children's dance, footraces, horse races, picnics, and a dance in the evening for the grown folk.

Two other holidays, which were common to other parts of our country, were also appropriately observed in Utah. These memorial days were Thanksgiving and Christmas. In speaking of the latter, Levi Edgar Young wrote: "In the pioneer homes and towns of Utah, Christmas Day was always fittingly celebrated. But in those fargone days the children were taught to appreciate any little gift. There was no store full of toys, as we have them today. The gift was always an expression of the great love of the giver. Sometimes a man gave a beaver-skin or a buffalo-robe to his wife and children. The gift made all happy. Often the head of a household provided venison and wild fowl for a feast and all shared, and neighbors were invited to partake. There was no selfishness, no envy, no bigotry. People did not hold themselves aloof from others. There was social equality and a regard for one another that was sincere.

"Children did not have every whim satisfied; they were pleased with any little plaything, and the dissatisfaction seen among the young people today was absent from the home and school. There was manifested a joy in living, and when [praying] they felt God's watchful care, when they worked they knew of His helpful presence."¹ ❏

1 Levi Edgar Young, *The Founding of Utah* (New York; Chicago: C. Scribner's Sons, c1923), 331-32.

Excerpts from Milton R. Hunter, "Utah Pioneer Social Life," Utah, the Story of Her People, 1847-1947: A Centennial History of Utah (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1946), 154-63.

Ticket stubs, postcard and children's toys on display at the Daughters of Utah Pioneers Museum.

