

ABOUT THE SUNSTONE

PEGGY FLETCHER



The task of choosing a name for a newly created journal was not an easy one. From mid-August to early November 1974 it was the primary item on the agenda of our weekly and sometimes bi-weekly meetings; that task alone outlasted some of the editors. Amid much laughter we tried *The Vineyard*, *Rough Draft*, *Chrysallis*, *The Mormon Student*, *Stratavarious*, *Whetstone*, *The Nouveau Expositor*, *The Harbinger*, and sundry others. But none seemed to express the something which was an ambiguity in different stages of progression in each mind. Certainly none was one upon which we could all agree.

Then from a rather unexpected source came the name. An early-Sunday-morning phone call came, and *Sunstone* was sleepily chosen to represent the conglomeration. (I'd agree to anything at that hour.) At first few were excited about it — I have to admit that it didn't seem very inspired to me. This may have been because until that time I had no idea of what the sunstone was nor any reason why we should choose it as a symbol.

By doing a little research I discovered some facts about the sunstone.

'The Sunstones formed the capitals of thirty pilasters that ornamented and reinforced the exterior walls [of the Nauvoo Temple] — nine on each side and six at each end. Above each pilaster, around the cornice, was a 'Starstone' and at the base of each was a 'Moonstone.' The Sunstones were by far the largest of the three, being six feet wide at the top, four feet, six inches at the base and also in height, and eighteen inches thick. Each weighed 3,000 pounds and is said to have cost \$3,000.¹

But further, I was interested in the intended symbolism of the architecture. Architect for the Nauvoo Temple, William Weeks,² did not write or say anything which has been recorded about the sunstone's use as a symbol, nor was I able to find any relevant statement by Joseph Smith. In fact, there is even confusion about just what the two hands positioned above the sun are holding, be they horns of plenty or trumpets. Fortunately, a few sources do discuss the symbolism of the sunstone:

The stones representing the sun, earth, moon, and numerous stars are allegorical emblems of the conditions to which the resurrected souls of mankind will be assigned, when all are judged "according to their works" [see I Corinthians 15:40-42 and Revelations 20]. The . . . hands are emblematic of the strong union and brotherly love characteristic of Latter-day Saints, through which they have been enabled to accomplish so much both at home and abroad.³

B. H. Roberts in his *History of the Church* says: "There are thirty capitals [i. e. Sunstones] around the Temple, each one composed of five stones, viz., one base stone, one large stone representing the sun rising just above the clouds, the lower part obscured; the third stone represents two hands each holding a trumpet, and the last two stones form a cap over the trumpet stone, and all these form the capital. . . ."⁴ In *Architecture of the Old Northwest Territory*, they are described as "a sun with human features and a pair of trumpets grasped by heavenly hands."⁵

Yet Talmage says in *The House of the Lord* that "each pilaster presented in hewn relief the crescent moon, and

ended above in a capital of cut stone depicting the face of the sun allegorically featured, with a pair of hands holding horns."⁶ If Talmage and other writers who speak of "horns" refer to horns of plenty instead of musical horns or trumpets, then the imagery of the Sunstone alters drastically. However, similar architectural symbolism is found on New England gravestones dating to late 18th century and early 19th century and the figure was always a trumpet with its apocalyptic referent, the trumpeting in of the end.⁷

The three remaining pilasters — one on the ground of the Nauvoo State Park, one maintained by the Quincy Historical Society, and one owned by the Reorganized Church⁸ — are all that remains of the Nauvoo Temple. Thus the sunstone, perhaps Mormonism's only true iconographic symbol, becomes representative of that which has lasted from the early days of the Church down to the present time.

Therefore, as a symbol to represent our journal, the sunstone has many possible meanings. Let me suggest a few. In terms of Mormon theology the sunstone is obviously a symbol of the divinity of Jesus Christ, the light of the world, the Sun-Son (a parallelism also made by many pagan religions), and of His gospel of peace which is shed forth upon all men. The sun is also an explicit symbol for the dwelling place of celestial beings (see D&C 76) and may therefore represent the quest for perfection, the belief in the exalting power of "light and truth" and intelligence which is the glory of God, and a firm commitment to purity and honesty symbolized by the teaching that God does nothing in darkness.

By its very existence as a physical object that is representative of spiritual reality, the sunstone sym-

bolizes the union of matter and spirit, a representation of the fact that "all things are both temporal and spiritual." In this sense it may also represent Mormonism's commitment to both worldly and other-worldly concerns. In this sphere of existence the sun is the focus and symbol of creation, regeneration, and the joy of life. Thus the sunstone may suggest our belief in the goodness and eternal nature of the human body, all other forms of life and matter — a strong affirmation of the conviction that "man is that he might have joy" in this existence as well as in the life to come.

As an artifact of our cultural past, the sunstone not only stands as a historical link between our generation and a former one and as a symbol of the continuity of Truth, but it also represents the integral nature of artistic expression and religious sentiment. The stone is, itself, an artistic statement on the nature of life and the glory of God. Perhaps most importantly, because of the multiple levels of symbolism suggested by the sunstone, it can lend itself to individual interpretation and become an ensign of many things to many people.

These two years since the inception of the idea have been years of chronic crises and disasters, imminent financial ruin, taxing interpersonal relationships, constant turnover of editors, delayed mailing and postal problems, tax traumas, unceasing correspondence, and the daily headache of unexpected details. I wish that *Sunstone* had a dollar for every attempt to dissuade me from continued participation in the project — perhaps some of the above problems could have been aborted.

Nonetheless, *Sunstone* is now an active two-year-old, busily growing into its name. The journal's creators

have continued to discover and be amazed by the diversity and complexity of the Mormon consciousness, personal and collective. Much like a look into the face of the enigmatic sunstone, each glance into the Mormon experience reveals a new understanding and a new suspicion

no longer content with that understanding. More than anything else, the sunstone may best represent the often paradoxical relationship of those who manage, contribute to, and read the journal.

-
1. Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society (Springfield, Ill. Spring, 1957), pp. 99-100.
 2. Carl McGavin *The Nauvoo Temple* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1962), p. 125.
 3. D. M. McAllister, *The Great Temple and a Statement Concerning the Purposes for Which It Has Been Built* (Salt Lake City: Bureau of Information, 1925), p. 10.
 4. Period II, Vol VII, p. 323.
 5. Rexford Newcomb (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1956), p. 153.
 6. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1974), p. 111.
 7. Mrs. Jane Dillenberger expert on religious art in America, in conversation with editor.
 8. Calvin J. Sumision, "A Word About The Cover," *Dialogue*, Vol. VII, no. 4, (Winter 1972), p. 112.
-

A Song of Celebration

RICHARD ELLIS TICE

Sunrise strikes the fronds with fire,
 Fills the pale green palms with yellow flame —
 Furious the whipping wind stirs higher
 Golden-green the burning frame
 Of leaves, till light that blazing
 Through the saffron tree explodes the gold-
 Studded sun, the fiery sparkles edging
 Amber glow with iridescent emerald.

So celebrate, come celebrate the light,
 Before the fires abate, come celebrate;
 And when the even eases into night,
 And streaming shadows on the fronds create
 A crimson taint, still celebrate the hour,
 The pastel glow the dusk cannot devour.