

**JOHN WESLEY KELCHNER, FOUNDER OF THE TEMPLE
RESTORATION MOVEMENT: A FREEMASON’S ATTEMPT
TO BUILD A WORLD CHAIN OF SOLOMON’S
TEMPLES FOR GLOBAL PEACE**

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Abstract

John Wesley Kelchner (1866–1942) was a visionary promoter, elocutionist, and entertainer in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Freemasons regarded him as an authority on sacred space and a leading expert on the architecture and design of the tabernacle of Moses and King Solomon’s temple. An active promoter of American Orientalism, Kelchner began his career as a Seventh-day Adventist minister who spent tens of thousands of dollars to build an elaborate model of the wilderness tabernacle. He traveled throughout the United States of America, attracting thousands of spectators to local churches, art galleries, and World’s Fairs that featured his models, paintings and drawings, and electrical effects shows. After going bankrupt and leaving the Adventist Church, he remerged as the self-proclaimed founder of the “Temple Restoration Movement”—a movement of freemasons who sought to permanently rebuild Solomon’s temple in seven principal cities around the world as symbols of universal peace and religious freedom. Though millions of dollars in funding were secured, large sections of land donated, and architectural plans completed, Kelchner’s temples were never built. Nevertheless, his work was promoted in numerous publications, including a number of Masonic Bibles, and he continues to influence numerous people (especially freemasons) to this day. This microhistory is focused on Kelchner’s life and work, but also contributes to broader studies on American religion, freemasonry, American Orientalism, Seventh-day Adventism, world peace movements, biblical model-building, and temple restoration.

Keywords: Christianity, Protestantism, Seventh-day Adventism, Freemasonry, Fraternalism, Orientalism, World Peace, Religious Liberty, King Solomon, Moses, Sanctuary, Tabernacle, Temple, John Wesley Kelchner

Introduction

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, a freemason named John Wesley Kelchner (“pronounced Kelkner”¹) recognized the power associated with Jerusalem and its prominence as a sacred center for the world’s monotheistic religions. Inspired by the Holy City and its historical significance, Kelchner sought to establish world peace and religious freedom by building Solomon’s temple outside of Jerusalem through a worldwide temple restoration project.² He began his career as a Seventh-day Adventist minister who made an elaborate model of the wilderness sanctuary using the same materials as Moses—gold, silver, bronze, and acacia wood. This work prepared Kelchner for his role as a temple restorationist after he left the denomination. This more elaborate project never materialized, but he successfully implanted his vision within the American consciousness and impacted many people (freemasons most directly) during his lifetime and into the present. His work inspired several twentieth century architects to include his ideas in their “architectural” or “completed” structures. Many of his models, drawings, and paintings are on display in museums, private collections, and archives, and the images he created were included in numerous periodicals, books, and Masonic Bibles—some of which remain in print. As William D. Moore has stated, “Kelchner’s temple, although a house never built with hands, has assumed a very real form within the imagination of the fraternity.”³ Beyond freemasonry, Kelchner is the ideological forefather of present-day temple restorationists who have built, or plan to build, Solomon’s temple outside of Jerusalem.

This article is primarily biographical, but it provides a window into the world beyond. It illustrates the Orientalist mindset that many Americans had prior to World War II and some of their creative attempts to reimagine the Holy Land as a place of peace. Naomi Rosenblatt states, “It is inaccurate to assume that the United States was completely removed from all involvement with the Middle East, and that it was untouched by Orientalist thinking.” Rather, by the mid-nineteenth century “a material Orientalism,” inspired by “the Arab lands of the Middle East,” had begun “to emerge as a distinct

¹ “The Boys Were Ready for Him,” *Topeka (KS) Daily Capital* 12.91 (6 April 1890): 2, col. 6.

² Kelchner’s worldwide temple restoration project differs from Zionism in several ways. First, Jews and Christians have desired for centuries that the Third Temple be built in Jerusalem, but Zionists have not sought to build Solomon’s temple elsewhere. Second, Zionists do not advocate the same type of world peace and religious freedom that Kelchner imagined.

³ William D. Moore, “Solomon’s Temple in America? Biblical Scholar’s Dream was to Build a Full-scale Replica at Philadelphia in 1926,” *The Northern Light* 24.3 (1993): 9.

aesthetic” promoted in American retail.⁴ In addition, David Weir suggests that “the ‘Oriental’ becomes the fantasy mechanism” that enables Americans to “overcome something objectionable—either in themselves or in the American culture of which they are a part—in order to attain some freer, more genuine form of artistic expression.” Weir argues that “the Orient Other of the American imagination, then, is a source not so much of exoticism as of authenticity.” This “reaction formation,” according to Weir, was limited to the Far East. “The Near East,” he wrote, “could never offer the kind of spiritual and aesthetic satisfaction that came to be associated with the Far East, for the very good reason that the Near East was overrun by pagan infidels.”⁵ Kelchner, however, did not view the Near East as reprehensible. Rather, his life and work illustrate that the Middle East also provided a “fantasy mechanism” for many Americans prior to World War II. Kelchner himself used this “mechanism” in his worldwide temple restoration project as a means to “overcome something objectionable” in his own past—his multiple failed business ventures and tainted reputation.

Kelchner has not yet received much scholarly attention, but some authors have briefly acknowledged him in their publications since the 1970s.⁶ Though several writers have recognized that Kelchner was an influential person, his life and work have never been reconstructed and this article addresses many unanswered questions about his elaborate sanctuary model and temple-building plan for world peace and religious tolerance.

This article is primarily based upon sources written during Kelchner’s lifetime. I have utilized letters and manuscripts found in archives, genealogical records from online repositories, numerous articles in newspapers and journals, tracts and booklets, and materials only available in private collections. Secondary materials are also used when possible and I have relied on the work of several current historians for the purpose of situating Kelchner and his temple building scheme in historical context. Though it would be worthwhile, I have not thoroughly examined or analyzed the numerous blueprints

⁴ Naomi Rosenblatt, “Orientalism in American Popular Culture,” *Penn History Review* 16.2 (2009): 52–53.

⁵ David Weir, *American Orient: Imagining the East from the Colonial Era through the Twentieth Century* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2011), 4.

⁶ Alison Sky and Michelle Stone, *Unbuilt America: Forgotten Architecture in the United States from Thomas Jefferson to the Space Age* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976; repr., New York: Abbeville, 1983), 128–131; John E. Tuhy, *Sam Hill: The Prince of Castle Nowhere* (Portland, OR: Timber, 1983; repr., Goldendale, WA: Maryhill Museum of Art, 1991), 257–258; Moore, “Solomon’s Temple in America?,” 8–9; Robert M. Craig, *Atlanta Architecture: Art Deco to Modern Classic, 1929–1959* (Gretna, LA: Pelican, 1995), 68–69; David M. Hamilton, “Tabernacle Model,” Mishkan Ministries, <http://www.mishkanministries.org/1904worldfair.php>.

and architectural drawings that are available.⁷ Finally, this article sets the stage for further comparative work between Kelchner and others who constructed models of the Mosaic tabernacle and attempted to build (some with success) Solomon's temple in various locations.

Early Life and Inspiration: 1866–1892

John Wesley Kelchner, the fourth of ten children, was born on 3 August 1866, in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, to John H. Kelchner and Christina Whitmeyer.⁸ J. H. Kelchner owned a modest farm, but transitioned into the meat business as a butcher around 1880.⁹ John Wesley was about fourteen at this time and he continued to work in this profession with his father and brothers for nearly a decade.¹⁰ The Kelchners were devout Christians and members of the Church of the United Brethren in Christ.¹¹ As a youth, John Wesley was enamored with the Bible and when he was a young teenager he “spent

⁷ Photographs, Reproductions, and Blueprints of Architectural Designs and Plans for Buildings and Other Structures [191 items], Unprocessed in PR 06 CN 033 [P&P], Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Photocopies of paintings, elevation drawings, models, and floor plans depicting the theoretical restoration of the Temple of Solomon in Jerusalem and the Tabernacle of Israel before Mt. Sinai [37 photographic prints], LOT 4668 (F) [P&P], Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, Washington, DC; Albert E. Flanagan Architectural Drawings and Art, 1913–1950 [39 prints; 32 drawings; 11 photographs; 1 printed article; 1 sketchbook], Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University, New York, New York.

⁸ U.S. Passport Applications, 2 January 1906–31 March 1925, Issued 22 March 1912, Certificate 68627 (stamped), John W. Kelchner, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/1174/USM1490_155-0331/990376;

Pennsylvania Death Certificates, 1906–1964, Filed 24 August 1934, File No. 75135 (stamped), Christanna [sic] Kelchner, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/5164/42342_1220705235_0646-03077/3478476; O. H. Bentley, ed., *History of Wichita and Sedgwick County Kansas, Past and Present: Including an Account of the Cities, Towns and Villages of the County*, 2 vols. (Chicago: Cooper, 1910), 2:821.

⁹ 1870 U.S. Census, Dauphin County, Pennsylvania, town of Upper Swatara, 12 (penned), line 36, John Kelchner, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7163/4278555_00498/9907917; 1880 U.S. Census, Lebanon County, Pennsylvania, town of Londonderry, 44 (penned), line 10, John Kelchner, <https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/6742/4244372-00513/37365864>; Bentley, *History of Wichita*, 2:821; “Palmyra Items,” *Lebanon (PA) Courier and Semi-Weekly Report* 68.33 (12 November 1902): 5, col. 7.

¹⁰ Cf. “A Runaway and Upset,” *Lebanon (PA) Daily News* 17.59 (16 November 1888): 1, col. 7.

¹¹ “Deaths: John Kelchner,” *Lebanon (PA) Daily News* 31.43 (3 November 1902): 4, col. 1; “Church Directory: Adventists,” *Salt Lake City (UT) Herald* (28 August 1892): 3, col. 2.

an entire evening with the Second Book of Chronicles.” He awoke the next morning with his “head full of the Temple and its wonders.” During a break from work the next day he took a nap and had a remarkable dream. He later recalled,

I could see it in all its glory, rising terrace on terrace, with its gold, silver and brass flashing in the sunlight . . . So compelling was the vision that I could hardly wake when my father’s hand shook me. That was the beginning of my quest for the Temple. All that afternoon, under the hot sun of the hayfield, I thought about my dream and what it might mean. By the time the sun set that evening I had made up my mind. I decided that I would give my life to securing a complete restoration of the Temple. How or where I could not then say, but from that time on I had only one object in life.¹²

Though Kelchner might have embellished this experience, surviving documentation demonstrates that he spent most of his life attempting to reconstruct Solomon’s temple.

Kelchner’s dream was also a product of pre–World War II American Orientalism. Sumiko Higashi notes that, “During the second half of the nineteenth century, Americans expressed a fascination with travel in their enthusiasm for museum and world’s fair exhibits, postal cards, magic lantern slides, stereographs, panoramas and dioramas, Hale’s Tours, actuality footage, and so forth.”¹³ The Holy Land also inspired architectural projects and in the “age of burgeoning consumerism, American vendors and businessmen took advantage of the aesthetics of Orientalism in order to encourage consumer spending and indulgence.”¹⁴ As a young boy, Kelchner viewed and/or purchased many of these material objects, which bolstered his fascination with biblical descriptions of sacred spaces.

Kelchner did not lose sight of his dream. In 1887, he moved with three of his brothers from the culturally rich northeast to settle in the budding Midwest. The brothers put down stakes in the booming town of Wichita, Kansas, and opened a meat market in the city center.¹⁵ Though Kelchner’s

¹² Rose Lee, “Solomon’s Temple to Rise in New Glory: Will be Erected at the Philadelphia Exposition, Fulfilling the Vision of a Student of Its Architecture,” *New York Times, Magazine Section* 64.24697 (6 September 1925): SM4–SM5; cf. “Solomon’s Temple Sesquicentennial Exhibit Feature: Reproduction at Philadelphia Exposition Is Realization of Architect’s Boyhood Dream,” *Newark (NJ) Jewish Chronicle* 10.6 (13 November 1925): 5, col. 1.

¹³ Sumiko Higashi, *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 90.

¹⁴ Rosenblatt, “Orientalism,” 51.

¹⁵ Bentley, *History of Wichita*, 2:821; F. A. North, *Third Annual Directory of the City of Wichita for 1887 Including a List of Fourteen Thousand Five Hundred Names of the Inhabitants, together with a List of the House Numbers of Householders, Classified Business Directory, Church and Society Directory and Map of Wichita* (Wichita, KS:

work remained the same, this period was transformative. Along with his older brother, William, Kelchner was probably initiated into the freemason fraternity in the late 1880s or early 1890s.¹⁶ He enrolled in a four-year program at Fairmount College (now Wichita State University) apparently as a student of theology. Though he knew German beforehand, he reportedly took courses in “Hebrew, Latin, Greek and modern languages in order that he might be able to study in the original what had been written regarding the Temple.”¹⁷

Kelchner’s dream also guided his extra-curricular activities. He was a member of the musical department and the Hesperian Literary Society and he strengthened his presentation skills as he engaged in debates, delivered lectures, read essays, and performed in comic operettas and a male quartet.¹⁸ Kelchner recognized the importance of pageantry in reimagining biblical life. While attending college, he emerged as an independent entertainer and developed skills that enabled him to envision elaborate reenactments. By this time, he had risen to his full stature of 5 feet, 4.5 inches, but with his slicked-back brown hair, bluish-grey eyes, stylish suits, wit, and charisma,¹⁹ Kelchner rose to greater heights.

Eagle Job Office and Bindery, 1887), 214; “Real Estate Transfers,” *Wichita (KS) Daily Beacon* 8.48 (19 May 1887): 4, col. 2.

¹⁶ “The Churches,” *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle* 11.96 (7 September 1889): 8, col. 3; cf. Bentley, *History of Wichita*, 2:821–822. Kelchner was familiar with fraternities from childhood. His father, John H. Kelchner, was a charter member and officer of the Kittatinning Lodge of the Ancient Order of United Workmen. “Lebanon Twenty Years Ago: Events Which Transpired in this Town in 1875,” *Lebanon (PA) Daily News* 23.115 (23 January 1895): 1, col. 7.

¹⁷ Lee, “Solomon’s Temple,” 4–5.

¹⁸ See “[The Hesperian Society],” *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle* 11.121 (6 October 1889): 6, col. 2; “[The Hesperian Society],” *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle* 12.19 (8 December 1889): 6, col. 4; “Wichita University Literary,” *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle* 11.139 (27 October 1889): 5, col. 2; “[Musical Department Program],” *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle* 12.97 (9 March 1890): 6, col. 3; “Wichita University,” *Wichita (KS) Daily Eagle* 13.19 (10 June 1890): 5, col. 3.

¹⁹ U.S. Passport Applications, Issued 22 March 1912, Certificate 68627 (stamped), John W. Kelchner; U.S. Passport Applications, 2 January 1906–31 March 1925, Issued 14 December 1914, Certificate 45881 (stamped), John W. Kelchner, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/1174/USM1490_229-0046/1588823.



Figure 1. John Wesley Kelchner, circa 1896
(Photo Credit: Missouri History Museum)

Promotion was key to his success. In March 1890, Kelchner was presented to the public as “[t]he celebrated elocutionist”²⁰ and praised by “many flattering testimonials of success.”²¹ He was later criticized, however, because he “failed to materialize” at a performance in Medicine Lodge, Kansas. One paper therefore demeaned him as the “alleged elocutionist and reader.”²² Such criticism foreshadowed the complexity of his career as an entertainer and promoter.

Kelchner matriculated from Fairmount College in about 1892. Around this time he became a member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.²³ He

²⁰ “J. Wesley Kelchner,” *Medicine Lodge (KS) Cresset* 12.3 (21 March 1890): 3, col. 3.

²¹ “[Mr. J. W. Kelchner],” *McPherson (KS) Daily Republican* 4.40 (25 March 1890): 3, col. 1.

²² “[J. Wesley Kelchner],” *Medicine Lodge (KS) Barber County Index* 10.44 (26 March 1890): 3, col. 2; “[J. Wesley Kelchner],” *Medicine Lodge (KS) Cresset* 12.4 (28 March 1890): 3, col. 2; cf. “The Boys Were Ready,” 2, col. 6.

²³ The date and circumstances of Kelchner’s conversion are unknown. In August 1892, he is referred to as “Rev. J. Wesley Kelchner . . . of the U. B. church in Christ,” but is preaching “in the Adventist tent” in Salt Lake City, Utah (“Church Directory: Adventists,” 3, col. 2). Over the next three months Kelchner preached exclusively in Adventist churches, yet is not specifically referred to as a member until December

acquired the title of “reverend” for his preaching and between 1892 and 1896 he served as an itinerant minister in Utah, Nevada, California, Georgia, Michigan, and Iowa.²⁴ At the beginning of this period, on 18 January 1893, Kelchner married Mae Evelyn Irwin,²⁵ and between 1894 and 1897 three children were added to the family: Myrtle Ruelle Kelchner (born 1894), John W. Kelchner (born 1895), and Irene R. Kelchner (born 1897).

Kelchner was an instant success as a preacher. In September 1892, he began to lecture in the Reno, Nevada, Adventist church.²⁶ Within less than a month, a local paper praised him as “a thorough master of biblical lore,” capable of handling “his subjects in a manner which is both interesting and instructive.” Attendance “increased every evening”²⁷ and Kelchner’s meeting location was moved to “the corner room of McKissick’s Opera House” so that

1892 (“Free Lecture,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.63 [15 December 1892]: 1, col. 5). Naturally, these newspapers do not provide a reliable account of Kelchner’s conversion and it is certainly possible that Kelchner became an Adventist prior to 1892 (i.e., the Salt Lake City *Herald* could be incorrect). Though the precise circumstances regarding his conversion are unknown, it is likely that Kelchner was attracted to Adventism by the denomination’s unique teaching on the earthly and heavenly sanctuaries. See Richard M. Davidson, “Sanctuary, Doctrine of the,” *The Ellen G. White Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed., 1130–1133.

²⁴ W. H. McKee, “The Atlanta Institute,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 71.9 (27 February 1894) 140; “Field Notes,” *Signs of the Times* 20.15 (12 February 1894): 237; “Field Notes,” *Signs of the Times* 20.31 (11 June 1894): 492; O. A. Olsen, “The Movements of Laborers,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 71.94 (12 June 1894): 379; Matthew Larson, J. W. Kelchner, and Wm. Guthrie, “Iowa,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 71.31 (31 July 1894): 491; M. Larson, J. W. Kelchner, and W. Guthrie, “Iowa,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 71.41 (16 October 1894), 652; E. G. Olsen and C. W. Smouse, “Iowa Conference Proceedings,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 72.28 (9 July 1895), 445; Elder J. W. Kelchner, “The Happy People,” *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 72.37 (10 September 1895), 579–580; Thos. H. Jeys, “Obituary: Hamilton,” *The Workers’ Bulletin* 11.11 (19 September 1899), 43. The following letters are available at the General Conference Archives, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland: Letter, J. W. Kelchner to L. T. Nicola (1 March 1894); Letter, L. T. Nicola to J. W. Kelchner (2 March 1894); Letter, J. W. Kelchner to L. T. Nicola (19 March 1894); Letter, J. W. Kelchner to L. T. Nicola (24 October 1894); Letter, J. W. Kelchner to L. T. Nicola (30 October 1894); Letter, J. W. Kelchner to L. T. Nicola (11 November 1894); Letter, J. W. Kelchner to L. T. Nicola (18 November 1894); Letter, J. W. Kelchner to L. T. Nicola (3 December 1894).

²⁵ “Brevities,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.94 (23 January 1893): 3, col. 3.

²⁶ “Brevities,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 33.144 (19 September 1892): 3, col. 4.

²⁷ “Religious Lectures,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.8 (10 October 1892): 3, col. 3.

more people could attend.²⁸ He preached on a variety of topics in late 1892 and early 1893,²⁹ but two sermons related specifically to his lifework: “The Tabernacle of Israel in the Wilderness” and “The Sanctuary,” (the latter being based on Rev 4 and 5).³⁰

The Model of the Wilderness Tabernacle: 1892–1899

Kelchner began to study the tabernacle of Israel in about 1892³¹ when evangelistic meetings were popularly known as “tabernacle meetings.”³² Simply designating a building a tabernacle had limited significance, however, because these structures and spaces were not reproductions of the Old Testament prototype. The book of Exodus describes some of the architectural details of the earthly tabernacle patterned after the one believed to be present in heaven. Since these specifics are provided in the Bible, numerous Christians have sought to accurately reconstruct miniature (and life-size) models of this sacred space.³³ Kelchner, though not the first, successfully built one of the

²⁸ “Series of Lectures,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.51 (1 December 1892): 1, col. 2.

²⁹ Some of his topics included: “The Church as It Was and as It Is” (“Brevities,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.4 [5 October 1892]: 3, col. 3); “Man’s Nature and Destiny” (“Brevities,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.5 [6 October 1892]: 3, col. 3); “Our Lord’s Great Property” (“Religious Lectures,” 3, col. 3); “Prophetic History of the World” (“Brevities,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.10 [12 October 1892]: 3, col. 3); “Increase of Knowledge” (“Brevities,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.12 [14 October 1892]: 3, col. 3); “Spiritualism” and “Mark of Apostasy” (“Brevities,” *Reno (NV) Gazette-Journal* 34.13 [15 October 1892]: 3, col. 4); “A Remarkable Symbol” (“Brevities,” *Weekly Reno Nevada State Journal* 22.47 [15 October 1892]: 6, col. 5); “The Fiery Ordeal” (“Brevities,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.61 [13 December 1892]: 6, col. 3); “Traveler’s Tale, or ‘The Pitcairn’” (“Free Lecture,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.63 [15 December 1892]: 1, col. 5); and “Present Truth” (“‘Present Truth,’” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.75 [30 December 1892]: 3, col. 2).

³⁰ “Brevities,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.3 [4 October 1892]: 3, col. 3; “Lecture,” *Reno (NV) Evening Gazette* 34.134 [10 March 1893]: 1, col. 5.

³¹ “Like the Tabernacle: A Costly Reproduction of the Children of Israel’s Famous Creation: Kelchner’s Four Years’ Work: An Elaborate Model of the Remarkable Structure That Was Put Together in Sinai,” *San Francisco (CA) Call* 79.154 (2 May 1896): 16, col. 3.

³² Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 238.

³³ Some of the most well known include: William Whiston (Steven C. Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood: Freemasonry and the Transformation of the American Social Order, 1730–1840* [Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996], 20); Philip Whyman (“Model of the Tabernacle,” *Sydney [Australia] Morning Herald* 54.8902 [3 December 1866]: 5, col. 1); Conrad Schick (“Art Notes,” *New York Herald* 37.295

most impressive models of the tabernacle ever produced.³⁴ This enabled him to present himself as a second Moses.³⁵

Though the Bible provided an inspirational blueprint, Kelchner also relied upon James Strong's recently published, *The Tabernacle of Israel in the Desert*.³⁶ During the early 1890s, Kelchner sought to take "advantage of the criticisms passed on his work" and resolved "to spare neither time nor money" to build a one-eleventh scale model of the tabernacle. He experimented with different dyes to get the cloth to be the precise shade he wanted. He also consulted several of "the leading architects and painters in the East . . . in order to secure perfect harmony of detail in the construction." He used the same materials that Moses used, and while it was easy to acquire the gold, silver, brass, and acacia wood, other items were difficult to procure. Kelchner apparently "sent minute instructions to the Orient," along with "paintings and sketches . . . made by artists in Chicago and New York," and upon receiving these instructions, "Arabian women wove the rugs and the curtains, and their skilled fingers traced out the embroideries, which, being only one-eleventh of the original size, were almost infinitesimal." Kelchner employed expert ivory carvers and woodworkers to produce the tabernacle pieces and hired professional jewelers to overlay the objects with gold and silver.³⁷ In total, Kelchner's model was 16 feet long, 8 feet wide, and 30 inches tall, weighed at least 800 pounds (with added accompaniments, the total weight reached one ton), and

[21 October 1872]: 18, col. 5); J. S. Ostrander ("Rev. J. S. Ostrander on Sunday-school Teaching," *Nashville [TN] Daily American* 2.498 [4 April 1877]: 4, col. 3); W. W. Wythe (Burke O. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land: Maps, Models, and Fantasy Travels* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003], 19); H. P. Welton ("The Jewish Tabernacle: Explained by Rev. H. P. Welton as the Type of Christianity," *Rochester [NY] Democrat and Chronicle* 48.210 [28 July 1880]: 4, col. 5); W. E. Stephens ("Religious Notes," *St. Louis [MO] Post-Dispatch* 30.135 [5 November 1881]: 6, col. 4); and Carlos A. Butler ("City News," *Indianapolis [IN] News* 18.154 [6 June 1887]: 4, col. 2).

³⁴ Many of Kelchner's contemporaries praised his work and made statements such as: "This is the most elaborate, large and costly model of the tabernacle ever constructed" ("Like the Tabernacle," 16, col. 3).

³⁵ Cf. A. J. Holman Co., "King Solomon's Temple and Citadel," n.p., n.d., [1], Box 556, Folder 10, Collection 2233, New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated Records: 1935–1945, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, New York, New York.

³⁶ James Strong, *The Tabernacle of Israel in the Desert: A Companion Volume to the Portfolio of Plates* (Providence, RI: Harris & Jones, 1888), 1–2.

³⁷ "Just as Moses Made It: A Seventh-Day Adventist Preacher Reconstructs the Tabernacle: Overlaid with Pure Gold: Tapestries and Drinking-Cups Made in Arabia—One-Eleventh the Original Size," *San Francisco (CA) Call* 79.132 (10 April 1896): 9, col. 1.

was reportedly built by some thirty-six artisans. (The number rising to fifty after some repairs were made in mid-1897). The 1,700 handcrafted pieces³⁸ included large items such as the altar of burnt offering, the laver, the seven golden candlesticks, the table of showbread, the altar of incense, and the ark of the covenant with the ten commandments tucked away inside, as well as all of the smaller vessels, such as “flesh-hooks, knives, bowls, shovels and baskets for offering”³⁹ and priestly garments.⁴⁰

Kelchner went to greater lengths to recreate the authentic setting. Though his model was completed in the spring of 1896, he packed it up and travelled to California to meet with Wilbur A. Reasor, a respected “portrait and figure painter” known for being “[w]holly realistic in subject and in treatment.”⁴¹ Reasor had “devoted three years of work abroad to studying Scriptural painting” and Kelchner believed that he could successfully paint a panoramic backdrop for his model that featured Mount Sinai with the multitude of Israel camped around it. In April, Reasor completed his painting “from photographs made in the Holy Land.”⁴² The final product was 12 feet tall and 32 feet long⁴³ and blended proportionally with Kelchner’s physical model. Kelchner added stones for texture at its base so that when the painting was situated behind the model, it was difficult to determine where the two-dimensional painting ended and the three-dimensional tabernacle began. This illusion created a viable snapshot of historical imagination in miniature form.

³⁸ *Kelchner’s Celebrated Model* [Exhibition Circular] (Battle Creek, MI: Review & Herald, 1897), 1; identifier: A2401, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis, Missouri; “Like the Tabernacle,” 16, col. 3; “The Endeavorers Exhibition of Professor Kelchner’s Model Last Evening for the Benefit of the Organization,” *San Francisco (CA) Call* 80.31 (1 July 1896): 16, col. 2.

³⁹ “Pacific Grove Assembly: Dr. Kelchner Lectures on ‘The Tabernacle of Israel’ to Chautauquans: Exhibits a True Reproduction of the Sacred Structure of the Holy Land,” *San Francisco (CA) Call* 80.44 (14 July 1896): 4, col. 5.

⁴⁰ *Kelchner’s Celebrated Model*, 1.

⁴¹ Calista Halsey Patchin, “The Art Collection of the Des Moines Women’s Club,” *The Midwestern* 3.8 (April 1909): 54; “The National Academy of Design’s Spring Exhibition,” *The Month* 1.5 (May 1897): 526.

⁴² “Just as Moses,” 9, col. 1. One of Reasor’s paintings, “Old Man and Sleeping Child,” is on display at the Des Moines Women’s Club, 1501 Woodland Ave., Des Moines, Iowa, 50309.

⁴³ “Israel’s Tabernacle: Professor Kelchner’s Interesting Exhibition Last Night,” *Sacramento (CA) Record-Union* 92.81 (10 November 1896): 4, col. 3.

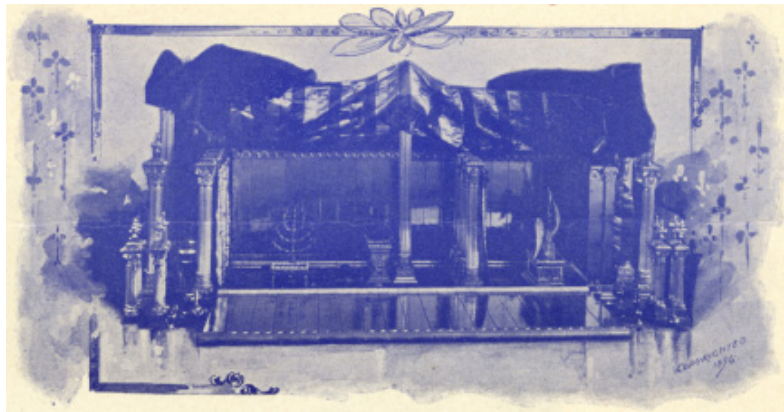


Figure 2. An interior view of John Wesley Kelchner's "Mosaic Tabernacle of Israel" (Photo Credit: Missouri History Museum).



Figure 3. John Wesley Kelchner's "Mosaic Tabernacle of Israel" standing before Wilbur A. Reasor's "Panorama of the Encampment of Israel at Sinai" (Photo Credit: Missouri History Museum).

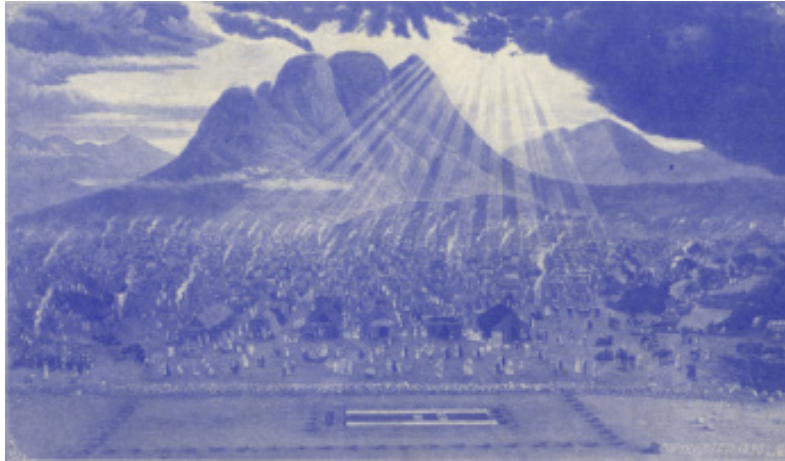


Figure 4. Wilbur A. Reasor's painting, "Mt. Sinai and the Millions of Israel in Camp." (Photo Credit: Missouri History Museum).



Figure 5. Close-up of some objects and vessels from John Wesley Kelchner's sanctuary standing before Wilbur A. Reasor's painting. You can see the rocks placed at the base of the painting, which make it difficult to distinguish between the 2-dimensional painting and the 3-dimensional objects. (Photo Credit: Kevin Burton)

In mid-to-late 1897, Kelchner added a final special feature to enliven this static snapshot—a grand electrical effects show.⁴⁴ Kelchner hired James Whiting Johnson, an inventor and electrical engineer for the Chicago office of the General Electric Company, to operate a special electrical apparatus that accompanied Kelchner's tabernacle model.⁴⁵ This electrical apparatus provided "wonderful and pleasing effects from the specially designed arc and focusing lamps" that cast "different color lights" upon the tabernacle and painting.⁴⁶ Since electric lights were still a new phenomenon, this tabernacle show was cutting edge.

When Kelchner was on tour he promoted himself as a "professor," despite lacking credentials or higher educational teaching experience. He initially travelled throughout California, Washington, Oregon, and Idaho, but in 1897 he ventured further east, visiting Colorado, Michigan, and Indiana. Kelchner was lauded as a great success at each location and his model was praised for its ostensible authenticity. One "prominent pastor of Seattle" reported, "I was charmed with the accuracy of his [Kelchner's] delineation. The work on close inspection showed the strictest fidelity to the original."⁴⁷ According to the *Los Angeles Herald*, Kelchner's celebrated model was "pronounced by the press and the great Chautauquas as the most magnificent and literal reproduction the world ever saw."⁴⁸

Americans praised Kelchner's model because an authentic reproduction of this caliber possessed transcendental power. Tangible representations of biblical buildings are capacitation tools for religious imagination because "[p]

⁴⁴ It is evident that Kelchner's circular was printed in Battle Creek, Michigan, in the late summer or early fall of 1897 for the following reasons: first, the circular provides a press endorsement from Denver, Colorado (Kelchner was there in late May and early June 1897; see narrative below for sources); second, Kelchner traveled to Battle Creek in August 1897 and presumably arranged to have his circular printed at that time (T. "Our Workers and Their Work," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald* 74.34 [24 August 1897]: 544); third, only the performances after this time refer to Kelchner's electrical effects (cf. "Kelchner's Celebrated Model," *Elkhart [IN] Daily Review* [3 March 1898]: 3, col. 4; "Mt. Sinai and the Israelites: Magnificent Panorama and Instructive Lecture by Prof. Kelchner," *South-Bend (IN) Saturday Tribune* [5 March 1898]: 4, col. 2).

⁴⁵ "In Memoriam: James Whiting Johnson," *General Electric Review* 16.3 (March 1913): 205; James W. Johnson, Pencil-Sharpening Machine, US Patent 564,202, filed 21 May 1895, and issued 21 July 1896.

⁴⁶ *Kelchner's Celebrated Model*, 3.

⁴⁷ "The Tabernacle Tonight: Professor Kelchner Will Explain It at Unity Auditorium," *Olympia (WA) Daily Olympian* 6.293 (9 March 1897): 3, cols. 2–3.

⁴⁸ "A Rare Entertainment: The Celebrated Model of 'the Tabernacle of Israel,'" *Los Angeles (CA) Herald* 26.49 (18 November 1896): 5, cols. 2–3.

hysical models make the invisible visible.”⁴⁹ Models enable viewers to locate themselves in space through “the brain’s perceptual ability to define space through its own method of miniaturization.”⁵⁰ Therefore, though miniature models are too small for physical habitation, they function somewhat like Wayne Szalinski’s shrinking machine: viewers can either shrink themselves down to size to place themselves within the tiny space, or blow the model up so that they can move within it unencumbered by claustrophobia.

Miniature models also enable viewers to transcend time. Ranulph Glanville explains that models of newly conceived structures give the viewers and designers the “apparent ability to time-travel by talking of the as yet unmade as if already built.”⁵¹ Conversely, models that depict historical structures also function like Mr. Peabody’s WABAC Machine by projecting a viewer backward in time, enabling the traveler to become a part of the ancient era in which the structure was originally erected.

Kelchner’s audiences craved such transcendental experiences. One reporter argued that viewing his tabernacle was more worthwhile than traveling to Palestine, which had neither tabernacle nor temple. “A trip to the Holy Land,” he wrote, “affords less instruction and information with regard to this ancient sanctuary of Israel.”⁵² Viewers placed themselves within Kelchner’s model to get beyond the constraints of time and space. A writer for the *Los Angeles Herald* claimed that “the beholder almost felt himself transported to the historic wilderness and standing before the very Sinai itself.”⁵³ Similarly, the *Sacramento Record-Union* claimed that “Professor Kelchner carries his auditors back to the Holy Land and in a most pleasing and instructive manner describes the Temple and the scenes and incidents of its day.”⁵⁴

Though most seemed enamored with Kelchner and his show, some analyzed his creation more critically, particularly the tabernacle’s columns and capitals. Judge Roger S. Greene of Seattle, Washington, stated, “Doubtless where we have no definite description of the parts, he has drawn on his imagi-

⁴⁹ Megan Werner, *Model Making* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2011), 12.

⁵⁰ Karen Lange, “Models and Virtual Space: Imagined Materiality,” in *Proceedings of the 85th ACSA Annual Meeting and Technology Conference: “Architecture: Material and Imagined,”* ed. Lawrence W. Speck (Washington, DC: Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, 1997), 525.

⁵¹ Ranulph Glanville, “Intention and the User,” in *Persistent Modelling: Extending the Role of Architectural Representation*, ed. Phil Ayres (New York: Routledge, 2012), 43.

⁵² “A Rare Entertainment,” 5, cols. 2–3.

⁵³ “Orange County: An Exhibition Interesting to Bible Students—Local Notes,” *Los Angeles (CA) Herald* 26.64 (3 December 1896): 7, col. 2.

⁵⁴ “Israel’s Tabernacle,” 4, col. 3.

nation, such as in the capitals of the columns, etc.” In spite of this, Greene added, “But I think he has been exceedingly accurate.”⁵⁵ Similarly, the *San Francisco Call* wrote, “Mr. Kelchner has been able to get his proportions and plans all right, but the ornamental designs had to be left to the imagination, and that explains the strange presence of Corinthian capitals on columns that were reared some thousands of years before Corinth was.”⁵⁶ Though Kelchner did not make the same mistake in his plans for Solomon’s temple, he likely chose Greek columns for his tabernacle because Isaac Newton claimed that the Greeks borrowed from Jewish architecture via the Egyptians (it was believed that the Israelite slaves in Egypt also designed the buildings they reportedly built). In this sense, “Greek” columns were not considered Greek at all—they were Jewish. Kelchner likely considered Newton an authority since his work was preserved in masonic lore.⁵⁷

Kelchner faced more difficult challenges than nominal criticism. On 5 December 1896, his tabernacle was on display in the First Methodist Episcopal Church in San Diego when an oil heater exploded and set the building on fire. After clearing the room, firemen began to hurriedly remove Kelchner’s model. After this ordeal, Kelchner realized that many pieces from his model were missing or “ruined by the water and rough usage.” In particular, Reasor’s oil painting was “absolutely ruined by the water and smoke.”⁵⁸ Undeterred, Kelchner quickly ordered materials from overseas to repair his model⁵⁹ and found a new artist to replace the destroyed painting. Kelchner wanted the new painting to be bigger and Andrew Putnam Hill produced an oil painting 16 feet in height by 40 feet in length from photographs of Reasor’s original. This 425-pound backdrop was advertised as “One of the Largest and Finest Oil Paintings ever seen in America.”⁶⁰ In spite of this setback, Kelchner was again on tour by mid-January 1897.⁶¹

⁵⁵ “Amusements: Prof. Kelchner’s Lecture,” *Seattle (WA) Post-Intelligencer* 31.168 (2 March 1897): 5, col. 3.

⁵⁶ “Like the Tabernacle,” 16, col. 3.

⁵⁷ Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 20–21.

⁵⁸ “Fire in a San Diego Church,” *San Francisco (CA) Call* 81.6 (6 December 1896): 6, cols. 5–6; “The Tabernacle Scorched: The Model in a Conflagration at San Diego,” *San Bernardino (CA) County Sun* 5.88 (11 December 1896): 3, col. 4.

⁵⁹ “Shipping Intelligence: Consignees,” *San Francisco (CA) Call* 81.10 (10 December 1896): 12, col. 7.

⁶⁰ Kelchner’s Celebrated Model, 4.

⁶¹ “Y.M.C.A. Notes,” *Salem (OR) Daily Capital Journal* 9.25 (19 January 1897): 7, col. 2.



Figure 6. John Wesley Kelchner's "Mosaic Tabernacle of Israel" standing before A. P. Hill's "Mt. Sinai, and the Millions of Israel in Camp." Notice the similarities and differences with Wilbur A. Reasor's original artwork (Photo Credits: Kevin Burton).

Kelchner estimated his losses at USD 5,000, not including lost income from future shows.⁶² His initial estimate of tabernacle construction costs totaled USD 15,000,⁶³ but after he purchased the electrical apparatus the figure rose to USD 19,200 (roughly equivalent to USD 585,000 in 2019).⁶⁴ Kelchner apparently relied upon credit for the necessary capital, and though he was handsomely paid for his performances (in some cases, about USD 50 per day⁶⁵), he did not repay his creditors on time. On 3 June 1897, when the tabernacle was set up in Denver, local law enforcement confiscated it because Kelchner owed D. C. Barker, one of the artisans who worked on the model, "several hundred dollars."⁶⁶ Though Kelchner reclaimed his property a few days later,⁶⁷ he continued to carry a large debt and faced many other angry creditors in the remaining years of his life.

⁶² "The Tabernacle Scorched," 3, col. 4.

⁶³ "The Endeavorers," 16, col. 2.

⁶⁴ Kelchner's Celebrated Model, 1.

⁶⁵ Cf. "The Tabernacle Scorched," 3, col. 4.

⁶⁶ "Tabernacle of Israel," *Denver (CO) Post* (3 June 1897): 5, col. 2.

⁶⁷ "An Interesting Lecture: Prof. Kelchner's Lecture Last Night in the Christian Church—Another to be Given Tonight," *Colorado Springs (CO) Gazette* 26.5972 (8 June 1897): 7, col. 4.

In the spring of 1898, Kelchner approached the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists about his financial predicament. On 4 May, the General Conference Executive Committee discussed Kelchner's tabernacle and some wanted it to "be owned and controlled by the General Conference." The "sanctuary question" was "one of the leading" components of Adventist theology and administrators believed that there was "no better thing to illustrate this subject, and to bring it before the thousands, than by use of this model." However, America faced a financial depression in the 1890s, and the denomination decided that it could not afford the model. Nevertheless, the church officers encouraged Kelchner to organize "a stock company" to help relieve himself from financial embarrassment.⁶⁸

Kelchner did go into business a short time later, though for the Adventist Church rather than himself. He initially returned to his ministerial labors, serving as canvassing supervisor in New York,⁶⁹ but a short time later, on 8 February 1899, he incorporated the Central City Good Health Company in Syracuse, New York, "to sell health foods and products."⁷⁰ Kelchner was president and general manager and within three months he had filled a four-story building (plus a basement) "with an immense stock of foods," a printing press, and had "employed a large force of help."⁷¹ The company was founded upon credit and was immediately in financial trouble. In response to this crisis, Kelchner severed his connections and skipped town "to avoid his creditors." In September, the company was brought to court for failing to pay its debts and was dissolved shortly thereafter.⁷² Shamed among his peers,

⁶⁸ General Conference Committee, "General Conference Committee Minutes for 1898," 424–425, <http://documents.adventistarchives.org/Minutes/GCC/GCC1898.pdf>.

⁶⁹ A. E. Place, "South Onondaga," *The Indicator* 8.30 (27 July 1898): 2; "Our State Agent," *The Indicator* 8.40 (19 October 1898): 2; J. W. Kelchner, "Report of Work," *The Indicator* 8.40 (19 October 1898): 3; "[Note]," *Good Health* 33.11 (November 1898): 749; G. B. Thompson, "State Agent," *The Indicator* 8.43 (9 November 1898): 2; M. M. Pruden, *Bard's & Co.'s Classified Business Directory of Western New York Embracing the following Towns: Buffalo, Rochester, Syracuse, Auburn, Niagara Falls, Dunkirk, Lockport, Brockport, Batavia, Canandaigua, Seneca Falls, Geneva, Erie, PA, Etc., for the Years 1898–1899* (New York: Bards, 1898), 340.

⁷⁰ "Stock Companies: New Certificates of Incorporation Filed a[t] Albany Yesterday," *Rochester (NY) Democrat and Chronicle* (15 February 1899): 5, col. 5.

⁷¹ "Good Health Company: A Seventh Day Adventist Enterprise Makes an Assignment," *Rome (NY) Daily Sentinel* 18 (10 June 1899): 1.

⁷² "Robinson Accounting: Recalls Good Health Company Failure in 1899," *Syracuse (NY) Journal* 58.131 (2 June 1902): 3, col. 2; "Items," *The Indicator* 9.23 (14 June 1899): 4; "Kelchner Was Too Previous: So It Seems From Allegations Made in a Replevy Action Brought Against Good Health Company," *Syracuse (NY) Evening Telegram* 43.39 (21 September 1899): 8, col. 5.

Kelchner left the Seventh-day Adventist Church at this time.⁷³

*The 1904 World's Fair and First Attempt to Build
Solomon's Temple: 1900–1905*

Between 1900 and 1901, Kelchner moved around as a traveling salesman,⁷⁴ but soon found another opportunity to fulfill his lifelong dream of reconstructing Solomon's temple—the forthcoming 1904 World's Fair in St. Louis. With the aid of financial investors, Kelchner reportedly expended some USD 130,000 (about USD 3.7 million in 2019) on “models, paintings and designs” to be used for the purpose of reconstructing Solomon's temple.⁷⁵ In early 1902, he incorporated a second business, the Oriental Exposition Company and was made general manager. At this time, funds for building masonic temples were often raised through selling bonds,⁷⁶ and Kelchner's business was incorporated for the purpose of raising USD 2,500,000 (about USD 70.6 million in 2019).⁷⁷ According to the *Wilkes-Barre Record*, this new company was “made up mainly of New York capitalists, who have become associated to execute the plans of Professor J. W. Kelchner.”⁷⁸

⁷³ Adventist administrators lost track of Kelchner and tried to locate him, though not necessarily for financial reasons. “[Addresses Wanted],” *The Workers' Bulletin* 12.38 (26 March 1901): 152; Augustin J. Bourdeau, “Addresses Wanted,” *Pacific Union Recorder* 2.14 (12 February 1903): 16.

⁷⁴ 1900 U.S. Census, Middlesex County, Massachusetts, town of Cambridge, 306 (printed), line 43, John Kelchner, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7602/4113842_00463/6140710.

⁷⁵ “Jewish Temple for Fair: New York Syndicate Will Reproduce King Solomon's Structure in Exposition Grounds,” *Omaha (NE) Daily Bee* (12 January 1903): 6, col. 3.

⁷⁶ William D. Moore, *Masonic Temples: Freemasonry, Ritual Architecture, and Masculine Archetypes* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 141.

⁷⁷ “Wanted—Help—Males,” *Brooklyn (NY) Daily Eagle* 62.165 (15 June 1902): 24, col. 3; “New Companies Chartered: New Jersey,” *Philadelphia (PA) Times* 28.9702 (27 April 1902): 16, col. 6; “Prof. J. W. Kelchner, General Manager Oriental Exposition Company,” *World's Fair Bulletin* 4.3 (January 1903): 36. In January 1903, the Oriental Exposition Company was also incorporated in Delaware “with a capital stock of \$1,000,000.” “Certificates of Incorporation: Reproductions of Solomon's Temple and Tabernacle of the Jews to Be Exhibited,” *Wilmington (DE) Evening Journal* 37.27 (31 January 1903): 1, col. 5.

⁷⁸ “King Solomon's Temple: Famous Structure to Be Reproduced at St. Louis Fair,” *Wilkes-Barre (PA) Record* (13 January 1903): 5, col. 6.



Figure 7. John Wesley Kelchner, circa 1903
(Photo Credit: Kevin Burton).

According to the *World's Fair Bulletin*, the Oriental Exposition Company was organized to build “the grandest exhibit at the grandest and largest World’s Fair in the history of the world.”⁷⁹ It would feature seven exhibits, not to mention several Middle Eastern restaurants and oriental factories with Arabian artisans that made and sold their wares or authentic foods from the biblical lands. First, a life-sized replica of Solomon’s temple was to be built. Architect Isaac Stacker Taylor was in charge of designing the building based upon the models, paintings, and designs that Kelchner had commissioned. The building was to be 400 feet by 800 feet and include a 325,000 square-foot great court, as well as a 170-foot tower. This structure would cost about USD 500,000 (roughly equivalent to USD 14,200,000 in 2019).

Second, the main exhibition hall would be 200 feet wide by 300 feet long and would house Kelchner’s model of the tabernacle of Israel. Third, a cyclorama was to be built, 800 feet long and 60 feet high that would depict 6,000,000 Israelites with their tents at the base of Mount Sinai. Kelchner also planned to use electric effects to simulate “the rising and setting of the sun and moon, the shining of the stars and moving clouds,”⁸⁰ and “the transform-

⁷⁹ “The Work of the Oriental Exposition Company,” *World’s Fair Bulletin* 4.3 (January 1903): 38.

⁸⁰ “The Temple of Solomon: The Architectural Glory of Ancient Israel to Be

ing of the pillar of cloud hovering by day over the tabernacle into a pillar of fire by night.”⁸¹ The most spectacular feature was the electric show depicting God’s gift of “the Law on Mt. Sinai, amidst the thundering and lightning, the quaking and burning of the mountain, [and] the over-shadowing clouds and the bright illumination”—a presentation intended to cause the audience to “fear and tremble.”⁸²

A fourth hall would be built with “a mammoth stage” and seating for over 8,000 people. About 500 live actors would be hired to perform “historical spectacles,” dressed in period clothing, and accompanied by a “chorus of 2,000 women and a band of 200 pieces” as they performed plays depicting Abraham’s life in Canaan, Israel enslaved in Egypt, the annihilation of Pharaoh’s army in the Red Sea, the battle of Jericho, King David ruling in Jerusalem, the Queen of Sheba’s visit to King Solomon, and Nebuchadnezzar’s destruction of Jerusalem.

A fifth exhibit would feature Mt. Nebo, which visitors could climb and stand atop to gaze upon “the Promised Land restored in its Edenic beauty.”⁸³ The Mediterranean Sea would be recreated in a sixth exhibit, so that visitors could travel by boat to the place where Jonah was swallowed by a whale. This drama was to be “perfectly illustrated by modern inventions and appliances” so as to form “a complete picture of the actual scenes.” Finally, there would be two galleries featuring paintings and biblical artwork from Genesis through Revelation that would cover a space 800 feet long and 12 feet high.⁸⁴

These grandiose plans never came to fruition due to a lack of time and resources. Though the Oriental Exposition Company failed to deliver, the Jerusalem Exhibit Company successfully recreated Jerusalem in St. Louis. Kelchner had a small exhibit within the walls of the “Holy City” that was comprised of his tabernacle model, large oil painting, and accompanying electrical show, along with several new features, including a model of Solomon’s temple, W. E. Stephen’s ten square-foot replica of the ancient city of Jerusalem, and a cyclorama of Solomon’s temple. These models were brought to life with numerous paintings, drawings, stereopticon pictures, “dissolving views, moving pictures, and lectures [that] illustrated the various customs of the Israelites.”⁸⁵

Reproduced At the World’s Fair,” *Woodville (MS) Republican* 77.34 (17 January 1903): 1, col. 4.

⁸¹ “Progress of the World’s Fair,” *Brick* 18.3 (1 March 1903): 122.

⁸² “Oriental Exposition Company,” 38.

⁸³ “The Temple of Solomon,” 1, col. 4.

⁸⁴ “Oriental Exposition Company,” 39.

⁸⁵ David R. Francis, *The Universal Exposition of 1904* (St. Louis: Louisiana Purchase Exposition Company, 1913), 600–601; *What to See in Jerusalem* [Exhibition

Though Kelchner did not rebuild Solomon's temple in 1904, many of the nearly 20 million patrons of the Louisiana Purchase Exposition⁸⁶ enjoyed his models, sat spellbound through his electrical shows, and were enraptured by his moving pictures—all within the walls of the "Jerusalem, St. Louis, U. S. A." Live actors, furnished by the Jerusalem Exhibit Company, further romanticized the setting, as about 1,000 residents from the real Jerusalem inhabited the "transplanted" city. "Among these people . . . [were] Mohammedans, Jews and Christians, each worshipping after his own fashion and living his own life here in the reproduced city, just as he lives and worships at home."⁸⁷ Though Kelchner did not produce these entertainments, the Jerusalem exhibit recreated a scene and atmosphere so believable that visitors were "carried into the past over three thousand years, to mingle and converse with the ancients." Kelchner was convinced that such an experience appealed "to the religious sentiment of all people, all races, all creeds and all nationalities." His confidence was based upon the assumption that the "believer and atheist, woman or man, the young or the aged, rich or poor, all deeply long to behold with their own eyes the venerable edifices of which they have read in the Bible."⁸⁸ The 1904 World's Fair provided further inspiration for Kelchner, who realized (if he had not beforehand) that Solomon's temple could be marketed as a grand symbol of world peace and religious freedom.⁸⁹

Business Failures and Further Temple Planning: 1906–1919

Kelchner was a poor business manager and the Oriental Exposition Company—like all of his other businesses before and after 1904—ultimately failed. Kelchner lost his tabernacle model after the 1904 World's Fair⁹⁰ and in 1906

Circular], (St. Louis: Jerusalem Exhibit Company, 1904), 4, a copy of this item is located in David M. Hamilton's private collection near Mobile, Alabama; Ruth Kark, "Jerusalem in New England," *Ariel* 69 (1987): 53; Edmund Philibert, diary entry 12 November 1904, identifier: A1212, Philibert Family Papers, 1852–1930, Missouri History Museum Archives, St. Louis, Missouri. Burke O. Long mentions some of these details, but credits David Heagle, one of Kelchner's lecturers, with producing these "unrivaled entertainment[s]." Long, *Imagining the Holy Land*, 52.

⁸⁶ Long, *Imagining the Holy Land*, 49.

⁸⁷ Robertus Love, "Jerusalem Reproduced at the World's Fair," *The Sunday Call Magazine, Supplement to the San Francisco (CA) Call* (10 January 1904): 12, cols. 1–7.

⁸⁸ "Oriental Exposition Company," 38–39.

⁸⁹ Kelchner was already thinking globally at this stage as he advertised that after the World's Fair he would take all of his designs, models, and paintings and display them in "all large cities of the world." "[Advertisement: The Oriental Exposition Company]," *St. Louis (MO) Post-Dispatch* 55.346 (2 August 1903): 33, cols. 1–3.

⁹⁰ According to David M. Hamilton, "After the 1904 Exhibition . . . *The Tabernacle* and *The City of Jerusalem* were allegedly given to Washington University [in St.

the Oriental Exposition Company was voided for “nonpayment of taxes.”⁹¹ Over the next nine years, his management skills did not improve. In the spring of 1907, the Kelchners moved to Rockford, Illinois,⁹² and by the end of the year a local paper reported, “Mr. Kelchner came to Rockford almost a stranger and has started two or three companies, each of which is now on the highway to success.”⁹³ Yet, this assessment was far too optimistic. Kelchner’s business dealings between 1906 and 1915 were quite complex, yet these activities illustrate his career as a businessman and ultimately help explain his failure to build Solomon’s temple.

Kelchner moved to Rockford because he was the largest stockholder of the Pioneer Steel Company. He also served as its vice president and general manager in 1907 and 1908.⁹⁴ In April 1908, he optimistically promised to raise the capital to USD 3,000,000 (nearly USD 85 million in 2019 currency),⁹⁵ but resigned a few months later.⁹⁶ At the same time, Kelchner managed a few other businesses. On 1 August 1907, Kelchner purchased the Rockford Malleable Iron Works from Duncan Forbes & Son.⁹⁷ A few

Louis]. When in 1927, [the models] were presented to Dr. D. Pieper, President of Concordia Seminary at the time, being deemed more practical for a Theological Institution. What remains of the exhibit is now privately owned.” [David M. Hamilton], “The World’s Greatest Fair: A History of the Model,” n.p., n.d., 2. This document is located in David M. Hamilton’s private collection near Mobile, Alabama.

⁹¹ R. M. Smythe, ed., *Obsolete American Securities and Corporations*, vol. 2 (New York: Smythe, 1911), 790.

⁹² “[Note],” *Rockford (IL) Republic* (22 March 1907): 8, col. 6.

⁹³ “Weyburn Company Has Election: Directors and Officers are Chosen at Meeting: R. S. Tuttle President: J. W. Kelchner Who Was in Control of Unincorporated Company Disposes of Interests to New Corporation,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (19 December 1907): 5, col. 4.

⁹⁴ “Pioneer Steel Co. Plant May Be Sold: J. W. Kelchner Has a Very Flattering Offer for Holdings: Says Process Sought: Tests Made at Big Plants Show the Quality of the Home Product Is Superior to Anything of the Kind on Market,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (15 September 1908): 8, col. 2; “Pioneer Steel Co. Dissolves: Certificate of Dissolution Filed by President J. W. Kelchner,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (15 September 1907): 6, col. 3; “Old Officers Re-Elected,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (22 February 1908): 3, col. 3.

⁹⁵ “Pioneer to Have Larger Capital: Soft Center Steel Company Will Increase Business: Kelchner Is Sanguine: Says He Will Make Capital \$3,000,000 and Plant Will Be Enlarged to Care for Demands of the Trade,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (1 April 1908): 6, col. 4.

⁹⁶ “Kelchner Out of Pioneer Steel Co.: Resigns as Manager of Local Corporation—J. B. Whitehead Succeeds Him,” *Rockford (IL) Daily Register-Gazette* (24 September 1908): 3, col. 5.

⁹⁷ “In the Long Ago,” *Rockford (IL) Republic* 28.7406 (1 August 1917): 10, col. 5.

weeks earlier, he also purchased the insolvent L. A. Weyburn Company and added USD 50,000 (about USD 1.5 million in 2019) to the working capital.⁹⁸ Kelchner served as the president and general manager,⁹⁹ but divided the organization into separate entities: one that retained the former name and another that became the Rockford Wholesale Hardware Company.¹⁰⁰ Kelchner soon sold out his shares in the Weyburn Company in December 1907,¹⁰¹ and in February 1908, he sold Rockford Wholesale to Kelly, Maus and Company.¹⁰² Kelchner moved to Chicago and around 1910 worked as a promoter for a mining company (perhaps the Chicago, Wilmington & Vermillion Coal Company).¹⁰³ He moved on to become the treasurer and general manager of East Moline Sash & Door Works in Moline, Illinois,¹⁰⁴ and briefly entered the toy automobile industry in 1911.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁸ "Weyburn Co. is Bought: J. W. Kelchner Had the Wherewithal This Morning with Which to Purchase the Insolvent L. A. Weyburn Shops—\$5,000 to Be Added to the Working Capital and Two Separate Establishments Started," *Rockford (IL) Republic* (24 July 1907): 7, col. 3.

⁹⁹ "New Company Choses [*sic*] Officers: Weyburn Manufacturing Co. Members Meet: Petition for Charter: Capitalization of Company \$200,000—Has Model Plant on Waterpower and Already Has Filled Many Orders—Large Contracts," *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* 13 November 1907): 6, col. 4.

¹⁰⁰ "A Great Jobbing Plant in Rockford: The Growth of the City as a Jobbing Center Demonstrated by the Rockford Wholesale Hardware Company, Whose Warehouses at the Water Power Contain an Immense Stock of Heavy Hardware, Received in Car Load Lots—Expert Knowledge of Hardware and Enterprise in the Management—Remodeling of the Old Forbes Plant for the Weyburn Manufacturing Company," *Rockford (IL) Republic* (17 October 1907): 1, col. 7.

¹⁰¹ "Weyburn Company Has Election," 5, col. 4.

¹⁰² "Wholesale Hardware Co. Sold: J. W. Kelchner Disposes of Big Local Business to Kelly, Maus & Company, One of the Biggest Heavy Hardware Houses in the Country—They Will Increase the Already Large Stock Business," *Rockford (IL) Republic* (4 February 1908): 1, col. 5; cf. "A Monster New Iron Store: J. W. Kelchner Leases His Buildings on South Main Street to the Rockford Iron-Store Company—A Concern Backed by Detroit Capitalists—Will Have an Immense Stock Here within a Few Days," *Rockford (IL) Republic* (7 April 1908): 1, col. 3.

¹⁰³ 1910 U.S. Census, Cook County, Illinois, town of Chicago, 8B (penned), line 87, John W. Kelchner, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7884/31111_4328142-00459/4583325.

¹⁰⁴ R. L. Polk & Co., *R. L. Polk and Co.'s 1911 Moline City Directory, Containing an Alphabetically Arranged List of Business Firms and Private Citizens; Street and Avenue and Householders' Guide; Miscellaneous Directory; City and County Offices; Churches and Religious Societies, Colleges, and Schools; Public Parks and Buildings; Banks, Secret, Benevolent, Trade and Social Organizations, Etc.* (Moline, IL: Polk, 1911), 562.

¹⁰⁵ "Kelchner in Toy Auto Trade: Located in Chicago but May Decide to Find

Kelchner lived a fairly opulent life during this period. He owned an automobile¹⁰⁶ and purchased a gas range stove as the technology became popular in America.¹⁰⁷ He was a member of several fraternities and clubs, including the Rockford Country Club,¹⁰⁸ the Shriners,¹⁰⁹ and the Hamilton Club of Chicago.¹¹⁰ Kelchner also travelled to Europe three times in 1912 alone,¹¹¹ and reportedly hosted numerous “lavish entertainments” for select guests when at home.¹¹²

All of Kelchner’s dubious business dealings and extravagant expenditures soon caught up with him and it was revealed that he was “living on credit.”¹¹³ In March 1914, he fled his Chicago home while his landlords were away in New York. When they returned to collect rent, the landlords found that the apartment had been robbed and was badly damaged. Kelchner had walked off with the “shades, refrigerator, stoves, and a statue of elephants” and left only a few personal effects, such as a picture of himself and a letter from his mother.

Another Site,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (14 September 1911): 2, col. 4.

¹⁰⁶ “J. W. Kelchner, Jr., Killed in Auto Accident on the Bismarck Road Thursday,” *Lebanon (PA) Daily News* 44.368 (8 September 1916): 1, cols. 1–2.

¹⁰⁷ “Is Your Name Here?: About 6000 Families Now Cook with Gas. Below Are the Names of 700 Families Who Bought Gas Ranges This Year. If this Great Number of Your Neighbors Find Fuel Gas So Profitable, Why Isn’t It a Good Thing for You?,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (25 August 1907): 20, col. 5.

¹⁰⁸ “Accept Bid for New Locker House: Board of Directors of Country Club Award Contract: Eleven New Members: Club Is in Flourishing Condition, Thirty Members Having Been Elected This Year—Formal Opening May 18,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (30 April 1907): 5, col. 4.

¹⁰⁹ “Shriners Hosts to Novice Band,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (4 November 1909): 5, cols. 2–5.

¹¹⁰ *Hamilton Club of Chicago* (Chicago: Hamilton Club of Chicago, 1913), 75.

¹¹¹ New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957, Sailing Vessel: S. S. Adriatic, Arrival in New York: 27 April 1912, Passenger: John W. Kelchner, 24 line 8, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7488/NYT715_1848-0444/4011431633; New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957, Sailing Vessel: S. S. Mauretania, Arrival in New York: 28 June 1912, Passenger: John W. Kelchner, 155, line 18, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7488/NYT715_1889-0732/4009207198; New York Passenger Lists, 1820–1957, Sailing Vessel: S. S. Celtic, Arrival in New York: 30 November 1912, Passenger John W. Kelchner, 115, line 17, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/7488/NYT715_1983-0988/4041641156; “Mr. Kelchner in City: Promoter of Steel Industry Returns to Rockford: Pleasure Trip,” *Rockford (IL) Morning Star* (30 July 1912): 5, col. 1.

¹¹² “Pastor-Financier Skips Out: John W. Ketchner [sic] Leaves Rented Residence Partly Wrecked: Lavish Parties Revealed: Letter from Ill Mother Makes a Request for Money,” *Chicago (IL) Daily Tribune* 73.73 (27 March 1914): 3, col. 6.

¹¹³ “\$800,000 Goes in War Deals: Bankrupt Promoter, Living on Credit, Got Only Promises,” *New York (NY) Sun* 83.74 (13 November 1915): 8, col. 2.

The apartment was left in disarray with several broken windows, a cracked ceiling, and damaged fittings.¹¹⁴

Shortly thereafter, Kelchner apparently tried to flee the country. At nearly 48, he was too old to join the military, but after World War I broke out, he found a way of escape through an attempted “war venture.” He became a general agent for the International Ordnance Company (now International Ordnance Technologies) and planned to sell weapons and ammunition in England, France, Italy, Germany, Russia, and Japan.¹¹⁵ Not surprisingly, this plan failed and Kelchner was located and brought to trial by his creditors.¹¹⁶

In the fall of 1915, Kelchner filed for personal bankruptcy, with debts exceeding USD 800,000 (equating to roughly USD 20.1 million in 2019). For several days in November, some “115 creditors, from New Jersey to San Francisco,” including “servants, tradespeople, doctors, lawyers, merchants, club owners, educational institutions, banks, and others” crowded into the courtroom for Kelchner’s hearings. His assets totaled “barely \$100,”¹¹⁷ which indicates that by this time he had relinquished any remaining models, paintings, or drawings that he might still have possessed after the 1904 World’s Fair.

Kelchner disappeared from public life for nearly a decade after going bankrupt. Aside from holding various day jobs,¹¹⁸ he fought to reclaim his lost lifestyle and fulfill his lifelong dream of reconstructing Solomon’s temple. He presumably studied various works on the subject during this period and went through “the archives of the world’s greatest libraries and museums.”¹¹⁹

¹¹⁴ “Pastor-Financier Skips Out,” 3, col. 6; cf. “Bits of News,” *Chicago (IL) Day Book* 3.152 (27 March 1914): 30, col. 2; “Publication Notice,” *Rock Island (IL) Argus and Daily Union* 63.257 (14 August 1914): 11, col. 6.

¹¹⁵ U.S. Passport Applications, 2 January 1906–31 March 1925, Issued 14 December 1914, Certificate 45881 (stamped), John W. Kelchner, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/1174/USM1490_229-0046.

¹¹⁶ Cf. “Publication Notice,” 11, col. 6; “Legal: Publication Notice,” *Rock Island (IL) Argus and Daily Union* 64.34 (27 November 1914): 13, col. 2.

¹¹⁷ “Army of Creditors Across Continent,” *Wilmington (NC) Evening Dispatch* 21 (4 November 1915): 2, col. 4; “\$800,000 Goes in War Deals,” 8, col. 2.

¹¹⁸ In 1916 Kelchner worked as an agent “for the self-starting appliances of the Ford automobile” (“J. W. Kelchner, Jr., Killed,” 1, cols. 1–2). In 1918 he worked as a commercial traveler (*Richmond’s Nineteenth Annual Directory of Yonkers, Westchester County, N. Y., 1918, Containing a General Directory Together with a Complete Business Directory, a Map of the City, Also a Directory of the Streets, Avenues and Parks with an Appendix of Useful Information* [Yonkers, NY: Richmond, 1918], 484).

¹¹⁹ “To Re-Build Solomon’s Temple in America: Grandeur and Magnificence of the Jerusalem of Old Testament Days Now Being Re-Created Here at Cost of \$5,000,000,” *Detroit (MI) Free Press* 89.241 (25 May 1924): 56; “Solomon and Coolidge,” *Brattleboro (VT) Daily Reformer* 13.144 (18 August 1925): 2, cols. 3.

Juan Bautista Villalpando made “the first full-scale reconstruction of the divine archetype” and produced an important Latin work, titled, *Ezechielem Explanations et Apparatus Urbis Templi Hierosolymitani* (1604). Kelchner was apparently aware that Villalpando’s interpretation of the biblical cubit was too large and that his reconstruction exceeded the site on Mt. Moriah.¹²⁰ He attempted to avoid this mistake and “made several trips to Jerusalem”¹²¹ to study “the site of the Temple and its surrounding.”¹²² Kelchner later claimed the title “archaeologist” for his assessment and measurements of the Temple Mount.

Kelchner apparently found Villalpando’s work helpful on at least one point. Isaac Newton accepted Villalpando’s assumption “that Ezekiel’s vision of the Temple was the same plan as Solomon’s Temple.”¹²³ Kelchner accepted this interpretation as well, which explains the central prominence of the 240-foot tall “eleven-tiered ziggurat” in his diagrams that rose from “the main building of temple.”¹²⁴

Though Kelchner relied upon a variety of sources, including the Talmud, he wanted the public to know that “above all the Biblical description of Solomon’s Temple was taken as the authority by which all other information and conjectures were checked and to which they were regarded as only supplementary.”¹²⁵ Though he was motivated by his Christian faith, Kelchner also admitted, “Masonry is one of the several very great factors whose sympathetic attitude has spurred me onward during all these years.”¹²⁶ By 1920, Kelchner had finished his research and was ready to make a second attempt at building Solomon’s temple.

¹²⁰ Tessa Morrison, *Isaac Newton’s Temple of Solomon and His Reconstruction of Sacred Architecture* (Basel, Switzerland: Birkhäuser, 2011), 51.

¹²¹ “Re-Build Solomon’s Temple,” 56.

¹²² Eugene Clute, “Dr. John Wesley Kelchner’s Restoration of King Solomon’s Temple and Citadel, Helmle and Corbett, Architects,” *Pencil Points* 6 (November 1925): 71; cf. “Solomon’s Temple Sesquicentennial,” 1, col. 4; 5, col. 1.

¹²³ Morrison, *Newton’s Temple of Solomon*, 52, 77; “Solomon’s Temple for Philadelphia: \$3,000,000 for Reproduction in Sesqui-Centennial Exposition: J. W. Kelchner Gives 60 Acres for Site,” *Asbury Park (NJ) Press* 39.188 (11 August 1925): 5, col. 1.

¹²⁴ “Solomon’s Temple Sesquicentennial,” 5, col. 1.

¹²⁵ Clute, “Kelchner’s Restoration,” 71; “Solomon’s Temple Sesquicentennial,” 5, col. 1.

¹²⁶ Carrol Baker Dotson, “Kelchner Expects to Finish the Job Begun by King Solomon 3,000 Years Ago: An Interview with the Founder of the Temple Restoration Movement,” *New York Masonic Outlook* 2.2 (October 1925): 52.

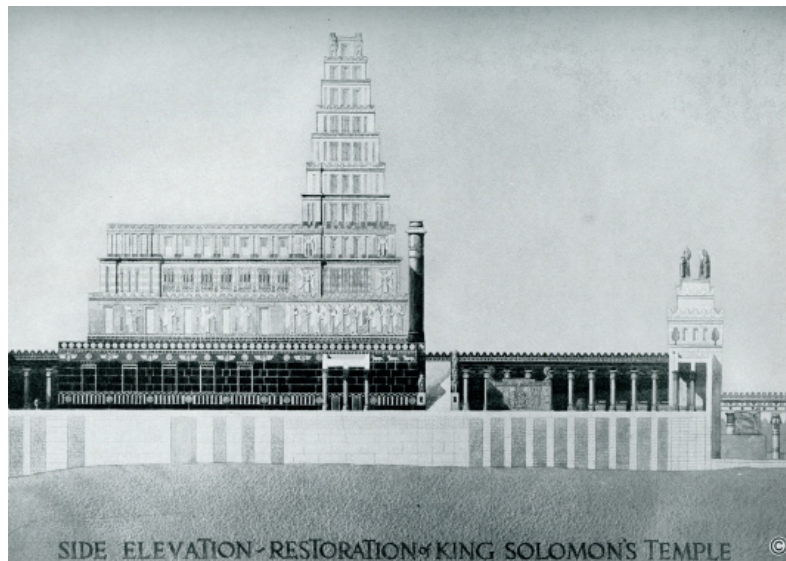


Figure 8. Restoration of King Solomon's Temple by John Wesley Kelchner showing the side elevation of the House of God and Sacred Court. The 240-foot ziggurat pictured here was inspired by the depiction of the temple in Ezekiel (Photo Credit: Kevin Burton)

A World Chain of King Solomon's Temples: 1920–1942

The Roaring Twenties was an ideal decade for Kelchner to attempt constructing a “World Chain of Solomon's Temples.”¹²⁷ The economy was booming and Americans witnessed an age of big business and prosperity.¹²⁸ Freemasons took advantage of the affluent economy. According to Moore, the mid-1920s was “the apex of a sixty-year growth period during which freemasonic structures became ubiquitous features of the built American landscape.”¹²⁹ Kelchner capitalized on this opportune moment and was able to garner support, primarily among his masonic brothers, and organize a small army of crusaders who were inspired by his lifelong dream and who were determined to build temples around the world.

By 1920, Kelchner had risen from his financial bankruptcy and by mid-decade reappeared before the public with a new identity. Identity reformation required calculated effort, however, and Kelchner bent the truth regarding his

¹²⁷ Tuhy, *Sam Hill*, 257.

¹²⁸ Glenn Porter, *The Rise of Big Business, 1860–1920*, 3rd ed., The American History Series (Wheeling, IL: Harlan Davidson, 2006), 93–94.

¹²⁹ Moore, *Masonic Temples*, xiii.

past in order to transcend it. In October 1925, he claimed that his “early years were devoted to banking” and that he had “succeeded conspicuously.”¹³⁰ In spite of this boast, surviving evidence does not corroborate his claim. Rather, Kelchner worked much of his adult life as a businessman and promoter—moreover, he repeatedly failed in this vocation. Since he reemerged as a world peace advocate, it is not surprising that he did not mention that a weapons manufacturing company had temporarily employed him. Kelchner also bolstered his new identity by taking the title, “doctor,” even though he only received four years of college education.¹³¹ Significantly, none of his contemporaries openly questioned his integrity or called his bluff. Kelchner appropriated the Orient as a fantasy mechanism and overcame his objectionable past by mesmerizing the American public with his utopian dream. He therefore reemerged in the mid-1920s as the “founder of the Temple restoration movement,”¹³² and significantly, at least from the masonic perspective, became a new Solomon.¹³³

Kelchner never aspired to be an architect or builder—he was the visionary mastermind that produced workable plans. In the 1910s, he discussed his plans with various architects, but “most of them regarded the Temple of Solomon as too nearly a myth to be taken seriously.” In about 1920, he met a fellow masonic brother and well-known architect named Harvey Wiley Corbett. After studying Kelchner’s plans for several months, Corbett agreed to help him build a full-size structure.¹³⁴ Corbett was educated at the University of California and the École nationale supérieure des Beaux-Arts in Paris,¹³⁵ had been president of the American Institute of Architects, and currently headed the architecture program at Columbia University. As Moore states, Corbett “was eminently qualified for the undertaking.”¹³⁶

Corbett caught the vision and gathered a team of architects to work

¹³⁰ Dotson, “Kelchner Expects,” 52.

¹³¹ 1940 U.S. Census, Westchester County, New York, town of Greenburgh, 9B (penned), line 44, John Kelchner, accessed May 22, 2017, <https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/2442/m-t0627-02803-00941/12279680>.

¹³² “To Show Glory of Solomon: Temple and Citadel to Be Restored for Sesqui Exposition: Land Presented by Mayor Kendrick,” *Wilmington (DE) Evening Journal* 38.52 (10 August 1925): 8, col. 1.

¹³³ The A. J. Holman Bible Company stated, “Solomon ‘sent and fetched Hiram out of Tyre’ who was filled with wisdom and understanding, and was a cunningly skilled workman, so did John Wesley Kelchner labor with these experts, and together they dropped out of the Twentieth Century back into the years 1011–1004 B.C.” A. J. Holman Co, “King Solomon’s Temple and Citadel,” n.p., n.d., 1.

¹³⁴ Lee, “Solomon’s Temple,” 4–5; Dotson, “Kelchner Expects,” 52.

¹³⁵ Sky and Stone, *Unbuilt America*, 73.

¹³⁶ Moore, “Solomon’s Temple in America?,” 8; Lee, “Solomon’s Temple,” 4–5.

on the project, including Frank Helmle, Birch Burdette Long, Hugh Ferriss, Taber Sears, William Bell Dinsmore, James Monroe Hewlett, and others.¹³⁷ Over the next few years, these men prepared architectural drawings, graphic illustrations, and several large paintings to be used to build Solomon's temple and promote the project. In 1923, Albert Wesley Hilt created a new scale model of Solomon's temple that was about six or seven feet tall so that the full-size structure could be readily visualized in three-dimensional form.¹³⁸

On 7 April 1924, Kelchner hosted a private "dinner conference" and presented these items to Philadelphia Mayor W. Freeland Kendrick and the members of the city council and proposed that Solomon's temple and citadel be rebuilt for the 1926 Sesquicentennial Exposition.¹³⁹ Kelchner wanted to build a temporary temple in Philadelphia¹⁴⁰ because of the forthcoming World's Fair and perhaps because the city also had historical significance to freemasons. The city affirmed the fraternity's chief aim—brotherly love—in its very name and was home to America's first organized masonic lodge¹⁴¹ and the Shriners first mosque.¹⁴²

Before the Philadelphia project progressed, Kelchner moved forward in two other locations. In May 1924, the public learned that New York was also a target city. This was Kelchner's hometown¹⁴³ and the site he chose for the first permanent temple.¹⁴⁴ A year later, Kelchner's team purchased a tract of land in Atlantic City, New Jersey, for USD 2,000,000 (about USD 29.1 million in 2019), but this was not part of Kelchner's worldwide vision for very long and the project in New Jersey was quickly abandoned.¹⁴⁵

¹³⁷ Clute, "Kelchner's Restoration," 69, 71; "Masonic Murals Viewed at Temple: J. Monroe Hewlett Explains Symbolic Paintings to Art Students," *Brooklyn (NY) Daily Eagle* 85.330 (29 November 1925): 18, col. 3.

¹³⁸ "Solomon's Temple Model Displayed at Fair," *The Pennsylvania Freemason* 11.4 (November 1964): 8; Letter, Miss L. T. Wood to World's Fair Committee (23 June 1937), Box 556, Folder 10, Collection 2233, New York World's Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated Records: 1935–1945, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, New York, New York.

¹³⁹ "Dinner Conference on Sesqui Program: J. W. Kelchner, Architect, Is Host to Mayor and Other City Officials: Definite Plans Hoped for by Annual Meeting of Association in May," *Philadelphia (PA) Inquirer* 190.99 (8 April 1924): 6, cols. 4–5.

¹⁴⁰ "Solomon's Temple Sesquicentennial," 5, col. 1.

¹⁴¹ Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 46.

¹⁴² Moore, *Masonic Temples*, 95–96.

¹⁴³ 1930 U.S. Census, New York County, New York, town of New York, 13B (penned), line 85, John W. Kelchner, https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/6224/4638839_00916/42358063.

¹⁴⁴ "Re-Build Solomon's Temple," 56.

¹⁴⁵ "2,000,000 Atlantic City Deal Sets New Record," *Wilmington (DE) Every*

On 10 August 1925, the Philadelphia venture was officially initiated. Mayor Kendrick performed his “first official act as president of the sesqui-Centennial International Exposition” by making a “formal presentation” of 60 acres of land “for the restoration of King Solomon’s Temple and citadel.”¹⁴⁶ Kendrick stated before “hundreds of Philadelphians, including many prominent members of the Masonic fraternity,”¹⁴⁷ that it would be “the most outstanding example of the educational and cultural objectives of the sesqui-centennial.”¹⁴⁸ Judge John M. Patterson accepted the land on behalf of Kelchner (who was sick and unable to attend) and read Kelchner’s acceptance speech, which explained “that the restored Temple would be the expression of a new world peace movement. ‘First built . . . in a time of peace for the purpose of perfecting a peace, this temple is to be re-created in time of peace for the purpose of achieving a permanent concord through more complete understanding.’”¹⁴⁹ As Patterson spoke, “airplanes hovered over the big crowd and dropped greetings” and messages to the crowd below about the “great World Peace Programme.”¹⁵⁰

Though the temple in Philadelphia would rise first, the prime locations for Solomon’s temple were New York, Washington, DC, London, Paris, Berlin, Madrid, and Tokyo. Already in 1925, certain “educators and scientists” who knew of Kelchner’s research had “already made overtures” in London, Paris, and Berlin.¹⁵¹ Since the Philadelphia temple was planned as a temporary structure, a total of seven permanent temples were to rise around the world—a perfect number according to biblical reckoning and, likely, intentional.

According to Kelchner, the primary mission of this movement was to build temples “as world symbols of universal peace—the physical embodiments of a plan of spiritual unity throughout the world—battlements of faith and idealism against war.”¹⁵² The Great War, which had ended less than a

Evening 58.113 (11 May 1925): 13, col. 2.

¹⁴⁶ “Glory of Solomon,” 8, col. 1.

¹⁴⁷ “Huge Sesqui Tract Given to Masons: Big Crowd Present as City Turns Over Land for \$3,000,000 Exhibit: Replica of King Solomon’s Temple to Be Built as Monument to Peace,” *Philadelphia (PA) Inquirer* 193.42 (11 August 1925): 5, col. 1.

¹⁴⁸ “Solomon’s Temple for Philadelphia,” 5, col. 1.

¹⁴⁹ “Glory of Solomon,” 8, col. 1.

¹⁵⁰ “Huge Sesqui Tract,” 3, col. 1.

¹⁵¹ Dotson, “Kelchner Expects,” 52.

¹⁵² “Solomon’s Temple, as Peace Symbol, to Be Reproduced in World Capitals: Movement for Erection of Great Structures, One in Washington, Is Led by Samuel Hill, Associate of Empire Builder in Northwest,” *Washington, D.C. Sunday Star, Magazine Section*, part 5 1084.29825 (27 December 1925): 3, cols. 1–4.

decade earlier, was fought with a sense of optimism—it was also idealistically known as the War to End All Wars. After the war ended in 1918, many freemasons, such as Kelchner, equated the Allied victory with King David's conquests in ancient Palestine. As Kelchner related, "Solomon's Temple was built during the period of peace and prosperity which followed the turbulent days of war under King David and it is fitting that the reconstruction of the Temple at Philadelphia is to stand as a symbol of world peace to all who come to this International Exposition."¹⁵³ Since the world was thought to be at peace, it was time to build temples of peace to prevent "another world war."¹⁵⁴

Kelchner's temples were to be symbols of world peace and sacred spaces that inspired worldwide religious freedom. These buildings were not considered replicas; rather, they were to be a "*reconstruction* of the great Temple which Solomon erected on the heights of Mount Moriah."¹⁵⁵ Kelchner and his team of architects claimed that they had actually reconstructed Solomon's blueprints and could rebuild the temple with all its precise details. Harvey Wiley Corbett stated during the luncheon that followed Mayor Kendrick's presentation of land, "Gentlemen, when we have completed our work, you will behold *exactly* the spectacle that King Solomon gazed upon when he had finished his temple."¹⁵⁶ This was significant for religious reasons, primarily because "the monotheistic principle of one God might be presented with as much majesty as possible to the multitudes of idolatrous believers in polytheism."¹⁵⁷ Kelchner believed that the world was "in exactly the same spiritual condition in which Solomon found the tribes of Israel" and that humanity had degenerated because people had "wandered from the worship of the true God." Degeneracy could be prevented if Solomon's temple was reconstructed in its exact form to show mankind "the loss of their ancient heritage."¹⁵⁸ Notably, the concept of a lost heritage was fundamental to freemasonry: the fraternity originated in the early eighteenth-century in response to the Enlightenment and sought to answer disputes "about the origins of religion and civilization."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ Clute, "Kelchner's Restoration," 71.

¹⁵⁴ "Huge Sesqui Tract," 3, col. 1.

¹⁵⁵ Emphasis is mine. Clute, "Kelchner's Restoration," 71.

¹⁵⁶ Emphasis is mine. Dotson, "Kelchner Expects," 48.

¹⁵⁷ Emphasis is mine. Clute, "Kelchner's Restoration," 71.

¹⁵⁸ "Peace Symbol," 3, cols. 1–4.

¹⁵⁹ Bullock, *Revolutionary Brotherhood*, 19. As with Newton before him, Kelchner and his cohort believed that "the Temple of Solomon, which replicated the Tabernacle of Moses, embodied the perfection of the original religion within its structure, which had been inherited from the time of Noah." Morrison, *Isaac Newton's Temple of Solomon*, 11.

Kelchner's plan was inspired by a blend of freemason and Protestant Christian beliefs, which he made evident through the building architecture and pageantry. Authenticity was absolutely crucial and Kelchner learned from the mistakes he made in his tabernacle design—Greek and Roman elements were not present. According to Corbett, "In the final design there will be found the trace of every type of construction known at the time of King Solomon: influences of Assyria, Babylonia and Egypt all blended into a magnificent and harmonious structure."¹⁶⁰ Kelchner explained the layout as follows:

the temple as a unit consisted of a series of terraces round about Mount Moriah, the highest point of which was crowned by the Great Porch, the Holy and Most Holy Places. The inner court of the temple must have been on the second terrace, in the middle of the western half of the great court. It was about 400 by 200 feet in size, surrounded by a cloistered colonnade supporting a beautiful entablature of cedar beams and stones.¹⁶¹

All of the sacred artifacts would be reproduced in the structure as well, including the bronze altar and sea, the table of showbread, the golden menorah, the altar of incense, and the Ark of the Covenant.

Kelchner also planned to rebuild the ancient city of Jerusalem. His temple would be near King Solomon's Palace, the Queen's Palace, the High Priest's Palace, the House of the Forest of Lebanon, the House of the Captain of the Host, the Porch of Pillars, King David's Tower, Solomon's Pool, the Imperial Harem, and the dwellings of the temple and court attendants. All of these structures would be protected by a high wall that surrounded Mount Moriah and encompassed the "formidable citadel."¹⁶²

¹⁶⁰ "Peace Symbol," 3, cols. 1–4.

¹⁶¹ Lee, "Solomon's Temple," 4–5.

¹⁶² "Solomon's Temple Sesquicentennial" 5, col. 1.

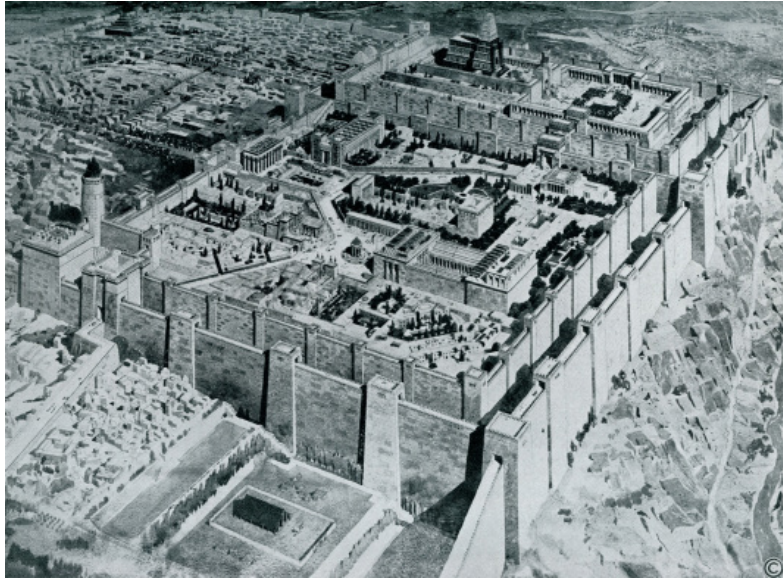


Figure 9. “Bird’s-Eye View” of King Solomon’s Temple, Palace, and Citadel. Restoration by John Wesley Kelchner (Photo Credits: Kevin Burton).

Most people apparently believed that Kelchner’s work was highly accurate to their imagination of the biblical descriptions.¹⁶³ There were two important features not shown in any published images, however, that had no biblical origin. First, “an inner shrine in which the Masonic order will meet in convention” would be built in the heart of the temple.¹⁶⁴ Second, Kelchner planned to build a freemasonic lodge “below the Temple” so that all visitors could descend down the steps and behold “the insignia of all the fraternal orders in America.”¹⁶⁵ In America at this time, temples and lodges were typically built above street level to separate the profane from the sacred. By placing a masonic lodge on the ground level, as the foundation to Solomon’s temple, Kelchner likely meant to signify two things: first, that this architectural hierarchy emphasized the pure and eternal sacredness of Solomon’s

¹⁶³ Cf. “The First Authentic Pictures of King Solomon’s Gorgeous Temple and Citadel,” in *The Holy Bible the Great Light in Masonry: Containing the Old and New Testament According to the Authorized or King James’ Version, together with Illuminated Frontispiece, Presentation and Record Pages and Helps to the Masonic Student* (Philadelphia: Holman, 1925), 17; Clute, “Kelchner’s Restoration,” 69; “Our Magazine Review: Pencil Points,” *The Charette* 5.12 (December 1925): 14.

¹⁶⁴ “Huge Sesqui Tract,” 3, col. 1.

¹⁶⁵ Lee, “Solomon’s Temple,” 4–5.

temple—a space even more sacred than the already sacred lodge; and second, that when one climbed up from the lodge room below they would reenact the most sacred masonic myth—the ascent of Hiram Abiff who “climbed to the temple’s sanctum sanctorum each day to pray.”¹⁶⁶

Pageantry was an important part of Kelchner’s agenda. The restored citadel was “to be a theatre of colorful pageantry.”¹⁶⁷ Most prominently, about 2,300 actors would be “dressed in the vestments of Semitic priests,” to perform “their ritual duties in the Holy Place and the Holy of Holies.” Visitors who entered took the roll of worshipers. Guests would “be compelled to remove their shoes before entering, and [would] be given soft sandals, whose tread will not interfere with the chants that will be sung by the priests.”¹⁶⁸ Once inside, visitors would be covered “with gowns thrown over their clothing” so that they could “walk like new Solomons in all their glory through streets lined with magnificent buildings.”¹⁶⁹

The pageantry was meant to be instructive and in its authentic setting was considered “one of the greatest undertakings yet conceived by man to revive a great educational interest in the Bible.”¹⁷⁰ Kelchner believed that biblical history and prophecy pointed toward eventual peace and stated in an interview that each temple would be “a theatre for the promotion of world peace” that would “portray the drama of civilization, from the Ur of the Chaldees down, step by step, to our own times; emphasizing all the way the strides made through peace, and the retarding of progress through strife.”¹⁷¹ Most events were to focus on this theme, including the assemblies of the “Peace Forum.”¹⁷² In these gatherings, activists would replace actors and use the temples as a place to hold meeting for “the prevention of war.” According to Kelchner, Solomon’s temple was “a permanent and tangible symbol of the abstract conception of universal peace” and within this sacred space the world’s leaders would voluntarily perform the ritual act of laying down their arms as a gesture of peace on earth, good will to men.¹⁷³

¹⁶⁶ Moore, *Masonic Temples*, 25–27.

¹⁶⁷ “To Show Glory,” 8, col. 1.

¹⁶⁸ “Solomon’s Temple Sesquicentennial,” 5, col. 1.

¹⁶⁹ “Plans a Reproduction of Solomon’s Temple: Architect Outlines Huge Project to Create Its Magnificence on a 47-Acre Plot,” *New York Times* 77.25500 (18 November 1927): 20, cols. 7–8.

¹⁷⁰ “Re-Build Solomon’s Temple,” 56.

¹⁷¹ Dotson, “Kelchner Expects,” 52.

¹⁷² “Building Plans for Sesqui-Centennial Exposition at Philadelphia Cut Down—Resignation of Two Directing Officials,” *The Commercial and Financial Chronicle* 121.3149 (31 October 1925), 2114.

¹⁷³ “Peace Symbol,” 3, cols. 1–4.

A final performance was reserved for the final day of the Exposition in Philadelphia.¹⁷⁴ A “system of pipes” was to be hidden within the walls of the temple so that the destruction of the temple could be simulated. Once the building was emptied of people, “volumes of gas” would be forced through the pipes, which would “envelope the structure to its full height presenting, in conjunction with other means, an impressive spectacle of the destruction of the Temple.”¹⁷⁵ Yet when the clouds of smoke dissipated, “the building [would] be seen to be miraculously intact, standing as firmly as it will stand” for future generations to behold.¹⁷⁶ This would give viewers the impression that the temple was indestructible—a lasting monument of the kingdom of God described by the prophet Ezekiel.

This colossal undertaking, with its pomp and pageantry, was extremely ambitious and prohibitively expensive. Unlike his tabernacle model, Kelchner realized that it would be impossible to utilize the same materials that Solomon did. Rather, “very inexpensive materials” were to substitute for “the gold and precious stones and rare woods.” Nevertheless, Kelchner’s temple in New York was estimated at about USD 5,000,000 (which was roughly equivalent to USD 72 million in 2019)¹⁷⁷ while the temporary Philadelphia temple would cost about USD 3,000,000 (about USD 43.2 million in 2019).¹⁷⁸ If each temple cost approximately USD 5 million, then that portion of the enterprise alone would require about USD 40 million—well over half a billion dollars in 2019.

When Kelchner first announced that Solomon’s temple would be built in New York, the *Detroit Free Press* cautiously stated, “American millionaires have a long way to go” in building such a structure.¹⁷⁹ Though a “syndicate of New York financiers” underwrote “the first few millions,”¹⁸⁰ Kelchner’s worldwide scheme required more than just a few million. In order to accomplish the Philadelphia project, these men organized a new stock company, known as Temples and Citadels, Incorporated, in 1925, with J. W. Kelchner as presi-

¹⁷⁴ “Solomon’s Temple Sesquicentennial,” 5, col. 1.

¹⁷⁵ Clute, “Kelchner’s Restoration,” 69, 71.

¹⁷⁶ Lee, “Solomon’s Temple,” 4–5.

¹⁷⁷ “Re-Build Solomon’s Temple,” 56.

¹⁷⁸ “To Show Glory,” 8, col. 1.

¹⁷⁹ “Re-Build Solomon’s Temple,” 56. In addition to this skepticism, Kelchner had a few other critics. Some disbelieved the accuracy of his interpretation of biblical measurements, others did not like biblical stories being made a spectacle, and a few wondered if the project would offend the Jews. J. J. D., “Solomon’s Temple,” *New York Times* 75.24720 (29 September 1925): 26, col. 6; Joseph S. Silkman, “Protests Temple as a Show,” *New York Times* 75.24746 (25 October 1925): 14, col. 6.

¹⁸⁰ “Peace Symbol,” 3, cols. 1–4.

dent and Edward E. Powell as treasurer. In September, Kelchner personally invested USD 10,000 (about USD 146,000 in 2019) into this company.¹⁸¹



Figure 10. Temple and Citadel, Inc. stock certificate made out to John W. Kelchner on September 13, 1925, for the purchase of 100 shares. Kelchner is also listed as the corporation's president (Photo Credits: Kevin Burton).

Other fundraising efforts took place. In 1924, Kelchner was writing a book to be titled, “My Dream,” that would be sold to raise money for the project.¹⁸² Though Kelchner never published his autobiography, he did write two influential articles (including sixteen pictures of Solomon’s temple and the Mosaic tabernacle) for a new masonic edition of the King James Bible, which the A. J. Holman Company published in 1925.¹⁸³ This Bible was initially published as a way to raise awareness (and presumably money) for Kelchner’s temple building project. Freemasons revered this Bible as “the great light in Masonry” and a copy of it was sealed within a copper box along

¹⁸¹ Temples and Citadels, Inc. Stock Certificate, 30 September 1925, John W. Kelchner, Certificate Number 36. This item is part of the author’s private collection.

¹⁸² “Re-Build Solomon’s Temple,” 56.

¹⁸³ John Wesley Kelchner, “King Solomon’s Temple Palace and Citadel,” in *The Holy Bible the Great Light in Masonry*, 3–10; John Wesley Kelchner, “The Tabernacle,” in *The Holy Bible the Great Light in Masonry*, 11–16.

with other venerated tokens and placed within the cornerstone of the new Scottish Rite Temple built on Broad and Race streets in downtown Philadelphia in 1925–1926.¹⁸⁴

A building committee comprised of many influential persons supported the temple restoration movement, including Henry C. Walker (former Senator and Lieutenant Governor of New York), David E. Mitchell (former president of the Lebanon Theological Seminary), Colonel John D. Rose, Lieutenant Colonel E. E. Powell, and Ellis Soper (president of the Soper Engineering Company of Chattanooga, Tennessee). Kelchner's primary financier and promoter, however, was multimillionaire and world peace advocate, Samuel Hill. At the end of 1925, Hill was planning "a world pilgrimage, to appeal to the peoples of the earth to join in a world peace conference, to be held in the Philadelphia Temple."¹⁸⁵ Though Hill likely never made this journey, the project did gain a fair amount of international attention.¹⁸⁶

Not surprisingly, Kelchner's temple building movement ultimately failed and he never rebuilt Solomon's temple. In April 1926, it was announced that the Philadelphia temple would not be built because "the directors of the exposition [felt] that the project would be too great for the time at hand."¹⁸⁷ Other reports vaguely stated that "a series of complications developed that made it impossible for the project to go through."¹⁸⁸ The Philadelphia failure did not halt Kelchner, however, and he held onto his worldwide temple building dream until his death.

In November 1927, Corbett lectured at the Roerich Museum and outlined the plan to erect Solomon's temple on a 47-acre plot of land in New

¹⁸⁴ "Masons Lay Stone with Ancient Rite; Rain Halts Turnout," *Philadelphia (PA) Inquirer* 193.117 (25 October 1925): 14, cols. 5–8.

¹⁸⁵ "Peace Symbol," 3, cols. 1–4.

¹⁸⁶ According to one report, "Interest in the restoration of the Temple is international and communications have been received from religious and fraternal organizations in all parts of the world. These realize the importance of the work to all mankind." "King Solomon's Temple to Be Restored in Detail at Philadelphia Exposition," *Kingsport (TN) Times* 10.201 (2 September 1925): 6, cols. 6–7. Several non-American newspapers also wrote about the project in their papers. "King Solomon's Temple," *Sydney (Australia) Hebrew Standard* 29.27 (2 January 1925): 11, col. 1; "Construction Army Waits Springs to Finish \$60,000,000 Wonderland for Sesqui-Centennial Exposition," *Ottawa (Canada) Journal* 41.67 (27 February 1926): 23, cols. 3–6; "Around the World," *Signs of the Times (Australia)* 41.12 (22 March 1926): 16; "Solomon's Temple: Restoration Plan," *Ipswich Queensland (Australia) Times* 67.12757 (11 June 1927): 10, col. 3.

¹⁸⁷ "Solomon's Temple Will Not Be Built," *Milwaukee Wisconsin Jewish Chronicle* 16.5 (9 April 1926): 5, col. 3.

¹⁸⁸ Moore, "Solomon's Temple in America?," 9.

York.¹⁸⁹ This renewed effort never got off the ground, however. In October 1929, the stock market crashed and a decade of great depression began. This financial downturn prohibited Kelchner's next attempt to build Solomon's temple for the 1933–1934 World's Fair in Chicago.¹⁹⁰ He did host an exhibit called King Solomon's Temple, but it was not a reproduction of the temple itself. The façade was decorated as Solomon's temple, but the building's interior functioned as an exhibit hall for the pictures and model of Solomon's temple prepared for full-scale reproduction.¹⁹¹ Kelchner himself lectured on these artifacts "to each group of visitors" as they walked around and admired the items.¹⁹² As an added bonus, a "Freak Animal Show" took place there every day from 11 a.m. to midnight, perhaps illustrating King Solomon's wisdom and ability to speak "of beasts, and of fowl, and of creeping things, and of fishes" (1 Kgs 4:33, KJV).¹⁹³

After 1934, Kelchner made a final attempt to rebuild Solomon's temple. He submitted a proposal for the 1939–1940 New York World's Fair and requested "a plot 200 x 400 ft." for his "Restoration and Exhibit." Kelchner boasted, "I have started a unique and gigantic world movement, ambitious and startling in conception, which will arrest the attention of thoughtful peoples in every nation." He then outlined his proposal and claimed that his reconstruction would "bring about a pleasant atmosphere, making all feel that after all we are one Great Family, preparing the soil of influence for a universal Peace Movement." His proposal was rejected in 1938, however, because his "gigantic world movement" was too small to financially support itself, his

¹⁸⁹ "Reproduction of Solomon's Temple," 20, cols. 7–8.

¹⁹⁰ Cf. Executive Committee of A Century of Progress, "Digest Acts and Doings," Meeting Minutes for 30 September 1930 and 4 December 1931, <http://www.amdigital.co.uk/m-products/product/worlds-fairs/>.

¹⁹¹ A Century of Progress, *Official Guide: Book of the Fair, 1933* (Chicago: A Century of Progress Administration Building, 1933), 208; "Looking Back Thirty Centuries," in *Official World's Fair Weekly: How to Enjoy This Week at the Fair, Week Ending Aug. 5*, ed. Ronald Miller (Chicago: A Century of Progress International Exposition Administration Building, 1933), 6; John Wesley Kelchner, "Restoration of King Solomon's Temple and Citadel," <http://www.amdigital.co.uk/m-products/product/worlds-fairs/>; [John Wesley Kelchner], *Unequalled for 3,000 Years: Reproduction of King Solomon's Temple and Citadel* (Chicago: A Century of Progress Exposition, 1933), 1–16. The last item is available at the University of Chicago Library, Special Collections, Rare Books, Call Number T501.H1U54 1933.

¹⁹² Letter, Miss L. T. Wood to World's Fair Committee (23 June 1937).

¹⁹³ "Promotion Stories: Month of October 1–8 Inc. 1934 Exposition"; "Promotion Stories: Month of October 9–15 Inc. 1934 Exposition"; "Promotion Stories: Month of October 16–24 Inc. 1934 Exposition"; "Promotion Stories: Month of October 25–31 Inc. 1934 Exposition." The following documents are available through Adam Matthew, <http://www.amdigital.co.uk/m-products/product/worlds-fairs/>.

display at the 1933–1934 World’s Fair in Chicago “did not make money,” and the organizers of the World’s Fair saw through his rhetoric and realized that the project was “too ambitious [of an] idea” and “too extravagant.”¹⁹⁴

Kelchner was 73 when this fair began and he spent much of the time in the hospital.¹⁹⁵ He only lived two more years and on 19 May 1942, he passed away virtually unnoticed and was laid to rest in Ferncliff Cemetery in Hartsdale, New York, three days later.¹⁹⁶ Though Kelchner now rested in peace, the world was again at war—an upsetting end for a man who devoted the latter part of his life to promoting world peace.

John Wesley Kelchner’s Influence and Legacy

Kelchner passed away quietly, but he was influential during his lifetime and he was not forgotten after his death. Kelchner’s temple plans inspired other architectural and artistic works to be created. According to Robert M. Craig, some Shriners were inspired by his work and utilized similar architecture designs for several buildings in Los Angeles and Atlanta in the 1920s.¹⁹⁷ Similarly, James Monroe Hewlett painted some murals for the Brooklyn Masonic Temple in the 1920s and acknowledged that he was “greatly aided by the archaeological researches and drawings of Mr. John Wesley Kelchner and Messrs. Helmle and Corbett.”¹⁹⁸ Several publications also featured images or drawings of Kelchner’s wilderness tabernacle, including a volume in Walter Scott Athearn’s popular *Master’s Library* series and numerous Seventh-day Adventist periodicals, tracts, and books—including a *Signs of the Times* article

¹⁹⁴ Letter, John Wesley Kelchner to Department of Concessions, (29 June 1937); Letter, John Wesley Kelchner to All Peoples of this World, (about 1937); Letter, John Krimskey to [Maurice Mermey], (9 December 1937); Letter, John Krimskey to [Maurice Mermey], (4 January 1938); Letter, Maurice Mermey to General Manager, (17 May 1938); Letter, Maurice Mermey to John Wesley Kelchner, (26 May 1938). These letters are located in New York World’s Fair 1939 and 1940 Incorporated Records: 1935–1945, Collection 2233, Box 556, Folder 10, New York Public Library, Manuscripts and Archives Division, Stephen A. Schwarzman Building, New York, New York.

¹⁹⁵ 1940 U.S. Census, Greenburgh County, New York, town of Westchester, 9B (penned), line 44, John Kelchner, <https://www.ancestry.com/interactive/2442/m-t0627-02803-00941>.

¹⁹⁶ “Death Notices: Kelchner,” *Yonkers (NY) Herald Statesman* 62.95 (21 May 1942): 2, col. 1.

¹⁹⁷ Craig, *Atlanta Architecture*, 68–69.

¹⁹⁸ J. Monroe Hewlett, “The Builders: In the Lodge Rooms of the Brooklyn Masonic Temple,” *The American Magazine of Art* 18.6 (June 1927): 296; cf. Amanda Gruen, “The Brooklyn Masonic Temple: Findings Through Research and Analysis,” (2014). http://www.academia.edu/11746924/Brooklyn_Masonic_Temple_Findings_through_Research_and_Analysis.

by church prophetess and co-founder, Ellen G. White.¹⁹⁹

A lantern slide show, titled, “The Evolution and Restoration of King Solomon’s Temple” was created in the mid-1920s in conjunction with Kelchner’s plan to rebuild Solomon’s temple. Several freemasons narrated this show at various lodges in New York during the 1920s and it has been periodically presented ever since that time.²⁰⁰ Grand Treasurer RW Peter A. Flihan, III, narrated the most recent show at the Chancellor Robert R. Livingston Masonic Library of the Grand Lodge of New York on 15 December 2016.²⁰¹

Much of Kelchner’s work has been preserved and displayed. Though he was not alive to witness it, the 1964–1965 New York World’s Fair displayed his model of King Solomon’s temple.²⁰² This model and the magnificent paintings that accompanied it have been preserved and can be viewed in the Masonic Library and Museum of Pennsylvania. Similarly, the Library of Congress and the Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library at Columbia University have collected and preserved the numerous architectural drawings for the temple restoration. David M. Hamilton has restored what remains of Kelchner’s tabernacle model, which can be viewed at his private museum near Mobile, Alabama.

¹⁹⁹ E. G. White, “The Only True Mediator,” *Signs of the Times* 25.26 (28 June 1899): 1; “[Cover Page],” *Signs of the Times* 31.43 (25 October 1905): 1; E. J. Hibbard, “Man’s Sin and Saviour,” *Signs of the Times* 37.34 (30 August 1910): 3; Loretta V. Robinson, “The Gospel in Type and Antitype,” *Signs of the Times* 38.24 (20 June 1911): 3; Loretta V. Robinson, “The Gospel in Type and Antitype,” *Signs of the Times*, 38.25 (27 June 1911): 3; Walter Scott Athearn, ed. *Everyday Life in Old Judea*, The Master Library 6 (Cleveland: Foundation Press, 1923), 415; Alonzo L. Baker, *All the World Under One Flag: A Study of Ch. 2, 7, 8, and 9 of the Book of the Prophet Daniel in the Light of the Present Conditions of Human History* (Warburton, Victoria, Australia: Signs Publishing Company, 1930), 72.

²⁰⁰ “With Brooklyn Masons,” *The Brooklyn (NY) Daily Eagle* 87.133 (14 May 1927): 11, col. 1; “With Brooklyn Masons,” *The Brooklyn (NY) Daily Eagle* 87.154 (4 June 1927): 4, col. 2; “With Brooklyn Masons,” *The Brooklyn (NY) Daily Eagle* 88.132 (12 May 1928): 9, col. 2.

²⁰¹ “‘Restoration of King Solomon’s Temple,’” *The Magpie Mason*, (19 November 2016), <http://themagpiemason.blogspot.com/2016/11/restoration-of-king-solomons-temple.html>. Flihan’s presentation of the 1926 lantern slide show can be viewed on YouTube.com: “The Restoration of King Solomon’s Temple: A Magic Lantern Show,” (31 October 2017), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rfMcCI9FKQA>.

²⁰² “Solomon’s Temple Model Displayed at Fair,” 8.



Figure 11. Kelchner's "Mosaic Tabernacle of Israel" as it appears today in David M. Hamilton's private collection. None of the textiles have survived and many of the sanctuary objects are no longer extant. The items that did survive were badly damaged and Hamilton restored the remaining objects (Photo Credit: Kevin Burton)

A number of popular books, websites, and blogs acknowledge Kelchner and his work. Masonic sources pay tribute to a beloved brother from yesteryear, while anti-freemason and conspiracy theory writings present him as a prime exemplar of the fraternity's supposed dubiousness.²⁰³ Most of these websites

²⁰³ Here is a representative sampling.

Books: Tim Dedopulos, *La Hermandad: Claves y Secretos de la Masonería* (Barcelona: Robin, 2006), 62; Stanislaus von Moos, *Le Corbusier: Elements of a Synthesis* (Rotterdam: 010, 2009), 345n12; Michael Haag, *The Rough Guide to the Lost Symbol* (London: Rough Guides, 2009), 42; Wilhelm Hofmann, ed., *Stadt als Erfahrungsraum der Politik: Beiträge zur kulturellen Konstruktion urbaner Politik* (Münster: LIT, 2011), 299; David W. Daniels, *Should a Christian Be a Mason?* (Ontario: Chick, 2011), 20; Adam Parfrey and Craig Heimbichner, *Ritual America: Secret Brotherhoods and Their Influence on American Society: A Visual Guide* (Los Angeles: Feral House, 2012), 109; Leo Lyon Zagami, *Confessions of an Illuminati: The Time of Revelation and Tribulation Leading up to 2020*, vol. 2 (San Francisco: Consortium of Collective Consciousness, 2016), 19.

Websites and blogs: "Uni-Church," *Mystery of Iniquity*, <https://mysteryoftheiniquity.wordpress.com/2014/08/01/uni-church/>; "Freemasons, the Third Temple, and the Antichrist," *His Heavenly Armies*, 1 January 2015, <http://hisheavenlyarmies.com/freemasons-the-third-temple-and-the-antichrist/>; "King Solomon's Temple," *Grand Lodge of British Columbia and Yukon*, 30 October 2007, <http://freemasonry.bcy.ca/>

cite Kelchner's work in the 1925 A. J. Holman masonic edition of the King James Bible, known by its alternate title, *The Great Light in Masonry*. Kelchner has influenced thousands of Americans through his articles and images published in this Bible, which remained in print at least into the 1980s.²⁰⁴ Several other Bibles included Kelchner's work as well. In 1932, the A. J. Holman Company published an updated *Self-Pronouncing Edition* of the King James Bible, which featured an article about Kelchner, titled, "The First Authentic Restoration of King Solomon's Temple and Citadel," as well as the images and drawings he commissioned. This family-size Bible was reprinted several times.²⁰⁵ A. J. Holman also published a pocket-sized "Kelchner version" of the *Eastern Star Bible*, with Kelchner's name embossed in gold on the spine beneath the words, "Holy Bible."²⁰⁶ More recently, Heirloom Bible Publishers produced the *Masonic Deluxe Edition* of the King James Bible in 1994. This Bible also features Kelchner's temple and tabernacle illustrations and is still in print. These Bibles are a testament to Kelchner's lasting influence, especially within his fraternity.

history/temple/kelchner.html; "Biblical History of King Solomon's Temple: The Origin of the Phoenix as a Symbol of Phoenixmasonry," Phoenix Masonry, <http://www.phoenixmasonry.org/historypage.htm>; "Babylon Rising," The Jesuit Vatican New World Order, 14 December 2012, <http://vaticannewworldorder.blogspot.com/2012/12/babylon-rising-joseph-herrin-02-04-2012.html>; "Fervent Masonic Desire to Rebuild Solomon's Temple Is the Driving Force Behind the Events of the Mid-East Today. Once Completed, End Times' Prophecy Will Be Fulfilled!," Cutting Edge, <http://www.cuttingedge.org/news/n1643.cfm>; "Dragon Flood – Part Three – A History of Deception," Parables, 10 September 2012, <http://parablesblog.blogspot.com/2012/09/dragon-flood-part-three-history-of.html>.

²⁰⁴ The Bible itself received its first copyright in 1924, but the first edition to include Kelchner's work was the 1925 edition. The Bible was revised several times and many new copyrights were issued between 1929 and 1968. All editions of these Bibles include a presentation page with a blank area to write in the person's initiation date. I have seen dozens of copies of these Bibles on ebay.com, amazon.com, and abebooks.com with this page filled out, from the 1920s through the 1980s. It is possible that these Bibles were sold beyond that time, but I have not found any with filled-in presentation pages after the 1980s.

²⁰⁵ "The First Authentic Restoration of King Solomon's Temple and Citadel" in *Self-Pronouncing Edition [of] the Holy Bible Containing Old and New Testaments Translated out of the Original Tongues with Marginal References* (Philadelphia: Holman, 1932), 16–48; Library of Congress Copyright Office, *Catalogue of Copyright Entries, Part 1, Books, Group 1, for the Year 1932*, vol. 29 (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1933), 2243. The author has a copy of this Bible published in the late 1940s in his personal collection. The 1932 edition is available in the Mack Library Special Collections at Bob Jones University, call number: 220.5203 B471m.

²⁰⁶ The author has a copy of this Bible in his collection.



Figure 12. Advertisement for A. J. Holman Co. “The Great Light in Masonry” King James Version Bible, circa 1940s. This document is part of the author’s private collection (Photo Credit: Kevin Burton).

Conclusion

John Wesley Kelchner was an energetic visionary, inspired by his Christian and masonic beliefs. Though he was highly creative, he was not a skilled businessman. In spite of his shortcomings, Kelchner intuitively tapped into a deep longing that many Americans had for an imagined Holy Land of peace. He believed that Solomon’s temple was the perfect representation of this place—a holy temple, situated in a holy city, governed by a holy king, loyal to a holy

God. Apparently, numerous Americans—predominantly freemasons—agreed with Kelchner and were willing to support his unique vision in spirit and in finance.

Kelchner presented himself as a Bible scholar, and that is how freemasons continue to imagine the man.²⁰⁷ It is evident, however, that Kelchner was influenced by other sources in addition to the Bible. He was enraptured by the founding myth of his brotherhood—the building of Solomon’s temple as told in masonic lore—and sought to rise through the ranks of his fraternity to acquire the coveted status of a new Solomon. Kelchner overcame his objectionable past by surrounding himself with numerous architects that took on the role of a new Hiram of Tyre, ready and able to reconstruct Solomon’s long-lost temple. His new identity was affirmed in all of the drawings and paintings shown in various masonic Bibles, which include the following caption: “Restoration by John Wesley Kelchner.” In this way Kelchner transcended his undesired past and reinvented himself as an idolized masonic exemplar.

Perceived authenticity was key to Kelchner’s success and in a sense, he created a form of time travel. To build a historical model is to create an “imagination station” that projects someone backward in time, or forward into the future. Numerous observers commented on Kelchner’s models in this manner, which demonstrates their joy in mental transportations that enabled them to connect with a spiritual heritage interwoven with a chain of biblical events that began with an ancient past.²⁰⁸

Kelchner fought to establish peace and tranquility on earth. His peace agenda, however lofty, was characteristic of early twentieth-century American life and his imagination was influenced by nationalist ideals. One source specified that the Philadelphia temple was to open on 4 July 1926—the one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of the most sacred day on an American calendar.²⁰⁹ Motivated by conceptions of sacred and patriotic time and space, Kelchner’s peace temples were to favor American fraternities—the insignia of each order was to be displayed in the very lodge built into the temples’ foundations. Like the reconstruction in St. Louis in 1904, Kelchner wanted Jerusalem to be made in America, governed by democracy and freedom.

Kelchner conceived of religious freedom in a manner inclusive of the monotheistic religions of the world—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Those who did not believe in the existence of God and those who had faith in a plurality of gods were necessarily excluded. Christianity was also privileged as the fullest embodiment of true religion and it is within this hierarchical arrangement that Kelchner desired religious liberty.

Many have followed in Kelchner’s footsteps and have dreamed and/or

²⁰⁷ Moore, “Solomon’s Temple in America?,” 8–9.

²⁰⁸ Cf. Long, *Imagining the Holy Land*, 32.

²⁰⁹ “Solomon’s Temple Sesquicentennial,” 1, col. 4.

erected models and full-scale replicas of sacred artifacts and places in the Bible. Visitors flock to the Creation Museum in Petersburg, Kentucky, to see Noah's Ark or to Eureka Springs, Arkansas, to travel through the recreated Holy Land. Others have successfully erected Solomon's temple. It was rebuilt in the Holy Land Experience theme park in Orlando, Florida, which opened in 2001, and in 2014 the Temple of Solomon was inaugurated in São Paulo, Brazil, as the headquarters of the evangelical Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG). The UCKG, founded in 1977, now claims over 8 million members in 180 countries worldwide and is currently raising money to erect a second Solomon's Temple in New Zealand.²¹⁰ Though these dreamers and builders may not have been directly influenced by Kelchner, he was their ideological forefather with the vision to rebuild Solomon's temple outside of Jerusalem.

²¹⁰ Cinthia Meibach, "Temple of Solomon," Universal Church of the Kingdom of God (UCKG), <http://www.uckg.co.nz/templo-of-solamon.aspx>.