

# History of the Lehi School District

## Lehi Yesteryears

### By Richard Van Wagoner

On February 17, 1854, the Lehi City Council passed an ordinance which created the Lehi School District. Three trustees were empowered to assess and collect taxes for establishing and maintaining schools. Three days later when elections were held in the Log School, Preston Thomas, Daniel Collett, and William Burgess became the town's first school board.

By 1857, the Log School could no longer accommodate all students who wished to attend class. The Tithing Office, which had been built during the summer of 1854 at approximately 344 West Main, served for a time as a classroom for teacher Martha Winn. Sometime in 1857 or 1858, construction of the Ward Meeting House had progressed to a point where the upper story could be used for schoolwork. C.D. Evans, in a letter published in the October 20 1860 "Deseret News," noted that "in the city of Lehi, an excellent tabernacle has been completed, situated over which is a commodious and well finished school room."

Though both the Log School and the Meeting House school room were being used in the fall of 1860, more classroom space was needed. In 1863, school trustees Daniel S. Thomas, Canute Peterson, and Thomas Karren proceeded with construction of a new school building a few feet west of the Meeting House. On 25 March the trustees petitioned the city council for surplus wheat in the city treasury. Thirty bushels were loaned and a sixty-one-foot-long adobe building subsequently called the "Southwest School" was completed for a

city council meeting on January 12, 1864. During the school year of 1872, the old adobe city hall on Main Street, between First and Second West, served as a temporary overflow for growing school needs.

On October 23, 1872, the school board bought a corner lot at 159 East and Fourth North from T.F. Gray and began construction of the Northeast School just three blocks south of the railroad depot. According to the diary of James Kirkham, this one-room wooden school was dedicated on 28 January 1873. The 14 January 1875 Lehi City Council minutes noted that the cost of the building was \$282.95. This structure, still standing today was renamed the “Ross School house” in honor of long-time teacher J. Edgar Ross.

The Northwest (Franklin School) was built by Lehi School District on a triangular piece of property on the west side of Fifth West at State Street. By 1891, Lehi schools had become overextended due to the influx of population connected with the construction of the Lehi Sugar Factory. City school superintendent James M. Anderson in a June 12, 1891 letter in the “Lehi Banner” noted that Lehi’s three school buildings had a seating capacity of 328 students. Yet the third term enrollment alone was 482.

LDS church leaders had allowed the schools to use the two upper rooms in the Meeting House. But Anderson noted that sixty-two students “had to be crowded into windows and corners at the best teachers and pupils could arrange. “Explaining that “authentic authority asserts that 1000 cubic feet of air...must be supplied hourly to every pupil.” Anderson plead for “ample accommodation for our school population the coming year.”

Getting a new school building proved difficult. Although cash from the sugar factory was beginning to flow into the community, city coffers did not have

sufficient monies at the end of the 1890-91 school year to complete the last half of the final quarter. The only financial solution to building another school seemed to be the relatively new concept of bonding. Many oldtimers voiced opposition, feeling that debt should be avoided. Ultimately a compromise was reached for the estimated \$15,000 building costs. Fifty percent of the building's budget was raised through levying an extra tax while the district was bonded for the remaining \$7,500.

The difficult financial position of the Lehi School District was of long-term concern. Lack of funds in 1896 forced schools to close three weeks early. The May 7, 1896 "Banner" commented on this chronic shortfall: "Utah...is differently situated to all the rest of the world in one particular at least and that is the number of children being raised. In the old world you cannot find, generally speaking, more than two or three children in a family, but here they can be found in numbers ranging from six to twelve in a family, hence the children are increasing much faster than the means allowed for their education."

The paper's insightful observations would be similarly accurate in 1993 where Utah schools have the largest pupil/teacher ratio and the second-lowest per pupil expenditure in the nation. In late 1896, this problem seemed further compounded when the state legislature mandated that "All children in this State between the ages of eight and fourteen must attend school at least twenty weeks each year unless they are excused by the school board for some good reason as provided in the law."

To accommodate eighth and ninth grade students in a high school setting, four rooms in the attic of the Central School were finished in late 1898. G.N. Child became the first principal of the Lehi High School at this time.

Other elementary schools erected by the Lehi School District included the Sego Lily (1897), Primary (1905) and Grammar Schools (1910). During 1913, serious debate in Utah focused on school consolidation. Though Lehi citizens had jealously fought administrative centralization, it had become too expensive for each community to have its own school district. In 1914, the Lehi School District, along with many other small units statewide, was abolished by the Utah Legislature. On June 30, 1915 the Lehi school system along with those from Alpine, Cedar Fort, Fairfield, American Fork, Pleasant Grove, and Lincoln (Orem) became the new Alpine School District. As a result of consolidation, the property title of each Lehi school was transferred to the Alpine School District.

The last session of the Lehi District school board was held on 1 July 1915. The final statistical report for the 1914-15 school year counted 887 students (468 male, 419 female). The board had employed six male teachers, whose average monthly salary was \$81.67, and sixteen female teachers who, earning one-third less than their male peers, averaged \$61.40.

Alpine School District's first board, appointed by state commissioners, consisted of the following men: S.E. Bunnell (Lincoln-Orem), Charles G. Johnson (Pleasant Grove), Eli J. Clayson (American Fork), S.I. Goodwin (Lehi) and Alfred Anderson (Alpine, Highland, Cedar Fort and Fairfield). The first public election in the district was held December 6, 1916.