

The Lehi Sugar Factory

By Jacob Barlow

The Lehi Factory of the Utah Sugar Company, of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, occupies a pre-eminent place among early sugar mills in America. As historian Leonard Arrington has written: “It was the first sugar-beet factory in the Mountain West, the first to utilize beets grown by irrigation, the first to use American made machinery, the first to use the ‘osmoses process’ of reprocessing molasses, the first to built auxiliary cutting stations and the first to have been established as part of a great social and religious movement.”

The factory was built in 1891 and the first sugar strike was completed on October 15 of that year. During that first growing season 565 farmers planted 1500 acres of sugar beets which processed into 12,500 100-pound bags of sugar. The success of the factory had a dramatic effect on Lehi’s financial well-being.

Between 1890 and 1896 nearly thirty new businesses came into existence. Many local men, with valuable experience gained at this factory, were relocated to other areas and helped establish many additional factories in Utah and Idaho. The Utah Sugar Company eventually became the Utah and Idaho Sugar Company and then the U and I Sugar Company.

During 1899 and 1900 the factory doubled in size. To accommodate the growing demands for sugar during World War I, a huge fourteen-million-pound capacity warehouse was completed along with the 184-foot high smokestack, both of which are still standing in 2008 (and 2014).

The demise of the Lehi Sugar Factory was ultimately caused by two beet maladies: nematodes (round worms) and “curly top” from white fly infection.

Farmers did not plan sufficient acreage in this area to sustain the factory and it closed after the 1924 campaign although beets continued to be grown locally and processed at other factories until the 1960s. The machinery was shipped to new factories in other locations and in 1939 the main buildings of this factory were demolished. Many of the bricks were used to construct the Joseph Smith Memorial Building on the BYU Campus and the Lehi First Ward Chapel.

The large sugar warehouse continually stored sugar from 1914 until the late 1960s. The Utah and Idaho Sugar Company sold the property in 1979 to the Thomas Peck and Sons trucking Company. In 1996 the smokestack was remodeled into a cell phone antenna tower. Until Micron established its Lehi Division during the late 1990s, no single business provided greater financial benefits to the local economy than the Sugar Factory.

<http://jacobbarlow.com/2014/09/19/the-history-of-the-lehi-sugar-factory/>