

Interview of George Tripp

2005

Interviewer: Susan Whittaker
with assistance from Layne Whittaker

George: I'm George F. Tripp. I was born August 23rd 1926. I moved to Lehi in 1942 to go to high school.

Layne: And who were your parents?

George: My parents are George W. Tripp who was born in 1870 in Salt Lake City and homesteaded at Calleo, Utah. My Mother was from Washington in Washington County. They moved to Hinckley when she was four years old. They moved to the ranch and raised their family out there. My Dad was 47 when they were married and my Mother was 23. They thought if they wanted to have a family, they both did want a large family, they had better get started right away so they had their children quite fast. There were 13 of them. I was number six. I had seven sisters and there were six of us boys. That's all I know. I really don't think you should interview me. I don't have anything to contribute.

Susan: I'm not looking for that era. I'm looking for how the city was when you were mayor and what kinds of things were accomplished during that time and the years.

George: I see.

Susan: When were you voted in as mayor?

George: I took office on January 7, the first Monday in 1984.

Susan: Describe Lehi.

George: Lehi was a small farming community. Most of the people worked either at Geneva Steel or Deseret Chemical. A few commuted to Salt Lake. The population was just under 8,000 people. There were five wards and one stake here. It stayed that way for quite a few years. I came to Lehi in 1942 to go to High School. I stayed with my sister after World War II and I've been here ever since. I've been involved in the

things going on in Lehi ever since I have lived here. I was married in 1948 to Shirley Jean Peterson. We made our home in Lehi and lived here ever since. We had six children, one son and five daughters. They are all members of the LDS church and are active where ever they live.

Susan: What were some of the projects accomplished during your term?

George: After I took office, I became aware right away, that Lehi had a problem with their culinary water. In fact our water got so low that we would only have six inches of water in our settling tanks. If we had ever had a big fire, we would had let everything burn because we didn't have enough water to fight the fire.

Susan: Did the only water that you had come from Alpine?

George: Alpine, and we had a culinary well. We determined that if Lehi was going to grow, we had to furnish more water and to keep us from burning down also. We had the engineer, that was Lauren Powell at that time, do a study. We determined that we needed to provide more water. So what we did, we put in an entirely new irrigation system. Well, we turned the old culinary system into a pressurized irrigation system and put in a new potable water system. At that time, we had a lot of old wooden pipes. Metal pipes that had lead sealings and people were going to the state with samples of water saying they were getting poisoned all the time. It was still good water. So we decided to turn the old system into a pressurized system, upgrade it where it needed to be and put in the culinary system, which we did. That provided us with the ability to expand and grow. Immediately after that happened, we had a new water system in that it made it possible to use the irrigation water for the pressurized system. Saving all the potable water that

comes from the springs and the culinary wells for potable water use.

Susan: Is that same situation here today?

George: We have a new culinary system and all of the water in the old system was turned into a pressurized system and the untreated water that we used to use for irrigation.

Susan: So are the old pipes still there?

George: The old system is in use for the pressurized system. All of the old wooden pipes was taken out and upgraded. The lead pipes are still there but they are only used for irrigation so they are not a health hazard anymore.

Susan: How did they make the wooden pipes?

George: They put the wood together into a round pipe and then bound them with steel.

Susan: Who did that?

George: Some company that made them. I don't know who it was.

Susan: So do you know when that was system was originally put in?

George: That was the first culinary system that was put in Lehi.

Susan: Do you know the year?

George: No, I don't.

Susan: We talked about, a little bit before, that your occupation was stucco construction.

George: Before they had sheetrock like they use now for the interior walls, we used mud. We just plastered the walls on the inside. They used wooden lathes and just fixed up the mud and plastered it. We put a scratch coat on and we would back it up with a second mud coat and finish it off with a lime finish. When kids would watch us do it, I told them that we could make it so slick that flies had to have spurs to stay on the wall. You could make them pretty slick.

Susan: We had a gentleman tell us that he started out with an adobe house here and put stucco over the top of it. Was that a common practice?

George: Yes, it was. Some of the old houses along the Wasatch Front here, especially in Pleasant Grove and Orem were rock houses. We used

to stucco those. What we would generally do on an adobe house, we would stretch chicken wire around it and nail it to the adobe. We would then put a scratch coat on the outside and then a brown coat on that and then some kind of finish on outside. Sometimes it would be a Spanish Dash or whatever the people wanted. That was an adobe coat.

Layne: When you say mud, was it adobe or brick or what?

George: Sand and cement.

Susan: So what is this building made out of? (Memorial Building)

George: This has a stucco coat on the outside. It has adobe walls. It was built out of sand and cement and then the finish coat would have some lime in it and sand. And then they would float it off with a rubber float. This has a kind of Spanish Dash on it. In fact, when they just got through stuccoing it, it was painted. After all this was put on, eventually when they redid it, they didn't put any wire on it or anything. They just stuccoed over the painted walls. In my past experience, there is nothing making it adhere to it. When you put the first scratch coat on you make it really rough, then it is something for the brown coat to stick to. But when they did this they didn't do that. I wonder how permanent it will be.

Susan: Where was the adobe brick brought from?

George: They made it locally. They had the brick molds and made the brick and put straw or something like that to hold it together.

Susan: So you know where that was done in town?

George: They tell me it was made locally here on the grounds and that's all I know.

Susan: What other projects did you do while you were mayor?

George: Well, that was the best one, to put pressurized irrigation in. Another one is that we moved out of this old building. And built a new city office building, a new public safety building, and bought all of the property that was school property. These two blocks here and the one over there came from the Alpine School District.

We bought it all for \$180,000. I thought it was a good price because when I researched the title, the city really only owned 40 feet of this building. The rest of the building was sitting on school property. We really didn't own the building, only 40 feet of it. I felt good at being able to acquire all the property including the property that this old Memorial Building was sitting on.

Susan: How involved were the citizens at that time in the government? Was there an active involvement within the population? How many employees did you have?

George: We didn't have many employees. In fact, when I came to work for Lehi City, Lehi City owned their own generating plants. They had two diesel plants over here next to 5th West on 3rd North. In that old building we generated our own electricity. Lehi City had about half of Lehi's citizens as their customers. The rest of them were serviced by Utah Power and Light, so there were two sets of lines going down every street. When I went to work with the city, they had just traded Utah Power and Light their two generators for their lines and we took over all the customers. They did that because Lehi was buying power to light Main Street from Utah Power and Light and they raised the rates so much that we couldn't afford to light Main Street. We made an exchange and took over their distribution system in exchange for our two generators, which were getting old and unreliable anyway.

When I went to work for the city, Charlie Brooks was the superintendent and I was a big crew of one. He didn't climb anymore. He was getting older and he said he had a bad heart, so I did all the climbing. We rebuilt all of the lines in Lehi. We would put a new line in and then tear down the two old lines that were there. Some of them had spans of 300 feet on two foot cross arms, and every time the wind blows it would bang the wire together and blow a fuse. The first year I worked for the city in the Power Department and I was out every night for the first year. I was on call, and there wasn't any overtime or anything. I worked for \$235 a month. I was on constant call and couldn't leave my house. When something would go wrong, they would call my house and I would have to go out on call. So I didn't get rich but I gained a lot of experience.

Susan: Keep going.

George: Down on Main Street and 5th West, where the roundabout is now, it looked like a forest. When we built one line through there, we took out 22 poles. It looked like a forest of poles so you could imagine what a mess it was. We had a lot of work to do to get the system. We didn't have any equipment, all we had were some pikes, some shovels, and spoons to dig the holes with. We got the city to let us buy an old flatbed Dodge truck. We built an A frame on it and put a winch on it and that was our equipment.

Susan: What year was this?

George: 1948 and 1949.

Susan: Was that the beginning of Lehi having its own power system?

George: They had their own distribution system and generators before that. At that time Utah Power and Light got out and we got in full time.

Susan: Which is still the case?

George: Which is still the case. Yes. Now they have a big crew and a lot of equipment.

Susan: I have heard the budget was tight when you were a mayor. Can you give us insight on that?

George: It was. I guess I have always been raised in a big family and was raised conservatively, so when I became Mayor it carried over. So when we built all these new city buildings I financed them without bonding. I kept the budget tight, saved money. I called it creative financing. We saved the money. We had enough money to build and pay for those things without bonding for the citizens. We accomplished a lot without putting the citizens in debt. And yes, our budget was tight.

Susan: Can you give us a dollar figure?

George: I think our largest budget, when I went out, was \$6,500,000.

Susan: For the whole city?

George: For the whole city. Now it's \$36,000,000 or something like that. Of course we are a lot bigger.

Susan: Any other things you can remember?

George: When we put in the pressurized system, the new culinary system, and upgraded the other one, we tore the roads up terrible. The contractor came and wanted to draw on what they had accomplished. But in the contract they were to fill the trenches, compact them and resurface them. They had not done anything. I said that there wasn't going to be any money until you fulfill your contract. They hummed and hawed and they finally got around to filling the holes and resurfacing the roads and everything. They finally got their money after they had fulfilled their contract. So they thought I was pretty hard nosed, I guess.

Susan: What were some of the city celebrations like?

George: One of the oldest city celebrations is the Lehi Roundup. We sponsored the professional rodeo, a three-day professional rodeo in conjunction with the parades that went along with that. We called it a celebration. They asked me to come and work on the Lehi Civic Improvement Association the year after I was married in 1949. I served on the committee, as the director or president until 2003. I served 55 years on that. That still goes on. We have a week long celebration.

Susan: What was the beginning year?

George: 1987 [looking at his belt buckle] was the 50th year, so 1937. We have built the rodeo grounds up and remodeled it several times. We have made it available for use year round free of charge to the public. A lot of the young people use it year round, especially in the good weather months.

Susan: Can you tell us about the early rodeos?

George: The earlier rodeos were held down in Evans Field. They didn't have an arena, so they parked their cars all around to make a big corral. They would bring their stock in there. They would rope them and saddle them right there in the area. Some of the cowboys and even some of the Indians out on the reservation would come and ride in that. The PRCA, Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association, sponsored it. They don't sponsor it now, but they are representative of the rodeo cowboys. It used to be it was the Turtle Association that represented the whole cowboys.

Susan: What was that?

George: Turtle Association. That is just what they named it. Then it turned out to be the Professional Rodeo Cowboy Association which is worldwide now.

Susan: What events did they have? Is it pretty much the same as they have now?

George: Yes, pretty much the same. They had dances, city dances, parades, put on shows, and things like that. One of the things that we accomplished when I was mayor is that we bought a lot of extra ground to expand the cemetery. We were getting filled up, up there. People were just dying to get into the cemetery. We had to expand that.

I have to tell you an interesting instance that happened to our water system. Dale Walker was the water superintendent. We used to collect our water up at School House Spring up above Alpine. Our collection system wasn't really the best so the old timers put in some wooden boxes and they had wooden covers over them to protect them because of the deer and all kinds of animals. Dale went up there one day to check his boxes and make sure his collection was all right. One of the tops had come out of one of the boxes. There he found a deer that got in there, on his back and it had all disintegrated and flowed down through the system into Lehi. There was only a few bones and little bit of hide or hair left. We dug it down so that everything was submerged and our collection system was well underground. It's a good clean collection system now. So that was accomplished there. I guess people would just as soon not to know about that, but that is what happened.

Susan: Anything else happen? Like parks?

George: Wines Park was donated to Lehi by Margaret Wines who moved out to Star Valley and donated that piece of ground there for a park.

Susan: About when?

George: Before my time, so it's quite a while ago. One of her stipulations was that it wouldn't be used for residents, corrals or anything, but that it would be used for a public park. That is what it has stayed. It's a nice park centrally located.

Layne: I have heard great things of you as a mayor. What made you decide that Lehi needed your services?

George: I came home from work one day and had a whole committee full of people sitting on my doorstep, waiting for me to come home. They wanted me to run for mayor, which I didn't want to do. There were such things as our water system, our roads, our power system that needed to be upgraded. The next night I came home and they were sitting there again. They finally persuaded me that I ought to run for office. I finally consented to do it. It was a great learning experience for me. I think, with the council I had, were able to accomplish quite a few things, such as our pressurized irrigation system, our new city buildings, our expansion of our cemetery. I ran for one term and it was only a two-year term because the fellow that was the mayor had a conflict of interest.

Lehi was involved in the building of the IPP plant down by Delta. He was one of the engineers down there on the project, and he being a mayor there was a conflict of interest, so he had to resign. They appointed one of the city council, Gary Sampson, to take his place and finish out his term until the next election. Bud served about eight months as mayor, Bud Eliason. Then Gary served the rest of that first two terms out. Then I ran and won a two year term. When election came again, I had all these projects started and I want to see them finished. So I ran again for another four-year term which enabled me to finish those projects that were started. So that's how I got involved.

Susan: You mentioned that had come here from Calleo to go to high school. Tell us about high school in the '40s.

George: There wasn't very many of us over there in the old high school. I think the graduating class was only 65. I didn't graduate from here. The next year I went to Delta High School, then World War II was on and I went into the service and stayed there until the war was over. Then I moved back here and married a local girl and have been here ever since.

Layne: Do you get the electricity from the IPP Power plant now?

George: Lehi gets some of their power from an allocation of the Central Utah Project from Glen Canyon Dam. That costs us about a third of what the rest of our power costs us. It's a cheap source of power. In as much as we own seven and a half percent of the IPP Power plant we get that allocation. We own into Hunter II down in Castle Dale. We get power from there. We own into San Juan Power Project down in New Mexico and we get some of our power there. Then we have bought power from Idaho Power in the past, but their power is pretty well allocated and I don't think it's available any more. After I went out as mayor, Mayor Gibbs came in, and he appointed me to the UAMPS Utah Association of Municipal Powers as Lehi's representative. I served on that board. They voted me in to be a board member. I served there for about five or six years, endeavoring to acquire more firm power for Lehi City. About two years ago to two and a half years ago, when they ordained me a Patriarch, they counseled me not to be involved in anything that is controversial. Since then I have resigned from the Board of Directors, as President of the Civic Improvement Association, UAMPS, all of those things that I was involved in before.

Layne: With the growth of Lehi, where did you get the additional power? Didn't you serve about 5,000 to 8,000 to 30,000 people in a short time? Do you have a piece of the new IPP Power Plant?

George: I understand that Lehi will be a partner in that. The last few years they built a new gas fired power generating plant in Payson. Lehi owns into that. However, my personal feeling is the we should have got a bigger piece of the new IPP Power plant because coal prices are fairly stable. Gas prices are so volatile that the new plant that we own part of in Payson, at times is not practical, because of the cost of the fuel to generate the power. That's my own personal opinion. And I know that is the case, that sometimes they don't run it because the fuel prices are so high that it's not practical.

Layne: Where do you get your peak-season power? From the same sources?

George: Yes.

Layne: So you have that much in reserve?

George: No, we are on the open market. That is why we need more firm power. When I was on

the board of UAMPS they made me chairman to try to get a new power plant up at Dorswack, that is the new source up there. The Dorswack Dam is the same size as Boulder Dam—the width of the canyon it covers, the height of the dam. The government built that as a flood control dam but they put six penstocks in that dam—that's to let the water out of it and it can be used to generate electricity. The government thought they were running out of money so they built two 90 megawatt power plants and one 20 power plant so there were three instead of the six. The foundation and everything is there for three other plants. The penstocks are there. We found about it and made application to the federal government to put in a smaller plant at 57 megawatts. The engineering found out it was feasible. It would be about the price of the power we get out of the Glen Canyon Dam, which is about a third of the cost of the rest of our power. We had to get through 53 government agencies in be able to do that. We held the hearings and got permission for 52 of them but the Bonneville Marketing agents for all the hydroelectric dams in the Northwest said no. Nobody's getting any of our marketing agency. No one is getting into our territory. So we were not able to do it.

Susan: I know we talked about this a little bit before, but this will be our last thing. Tell us about the remodeling of this building.

George: Oh, this was a fun project. This had been abandoned because the library had been moved over into their new building. The police department moved out of here, and the city offices had gone over to the old 3rd Ward church building which was getting in bad repair then. The city fathers engaged an architect to see what could be done with this building. We got some bids on a contract to do the work. They were outrageous.

Susan: Was this the late '80s?

George: This was in the first of the '90s. I went out of office January 7, 1990. That is when the new city council and mayor had taken over. Carl Harrison and I convinced the city council and the mayor that we could do it with volunteer help at a fraction of the cost that it would cost them to contract it. They weren't willing to spend the money to contract it anyway. They didn't have the money and they didn't want to bond for it.

It took a lot of doing but we told them we could do it. Carl and I supervised the work. We did all the work with volunteer help. It consisted mainly of American Legion Post 9. Actually Carl furnished most all the help. He and I supervised the remodeling and refurbishing of the building and the building on.

Susan: Is that when you replaced the furnace systems?

George: Oh, yes. We tore out all the old furnace systems and put in the new furnace and air conditioning. We subcontracted that part of that. I think everything else we did with volunteer help.

Susan: I have just learned about a storage room that is in the veterans' side of the basement, on the east side. I have one room on the west side. What were they used for?

George: I think the American Legion Post used that one that they have down there. Before they had that and before the museum moved in here, it used to be a kitchen down there on your side and this was the lunch room for the high school—all the basement down there. Those rooms were used to store the things that they served: food, storage, and things like that.

Susan: What other uses has this building had over the years?

George: The part that is on the north there that is now your Mineral Room was the library, they had the city library. Where you have your offices there in the front, it was used by the Soil Conservation Services. They had a couple of offices in there. These rooms over here, the Pioneer Room, were partitioned off and they had a little waiting room there. The judge's room and the judges secretary over here. Then on this side, the police had an evidence room, a booking room on this part where it is all one big room now. The city council had that part where you go to the Sugar Room area. That was the city council room. They had a big long table in there and that was the city council room. The city offices were behind that. Then the police had an evidence room that was in the building that is connected to this building now. It didn't used to be. It had a low ceiling, a big old cement ceiling like that. We had to tear it out to use it for what we are using it for now.

Layne: Projections of Lehi are for between 50,000 and 80,000 people in the next 10 to 15 years. Is Lehi's infrastructure prepared for that?

George: Not without quite a bit of upgrading. When we put in the new pressurized irrigation system, our engineer made a projection of what our growth would be. He said, this would give us water for the next 40 years. He based it on the four percent growth which we had had over the past forty years. As soon as we got the new pressurized irrigation system in, that was wiped out in just a few years. If you project from what has happened in the past and guess what is going to happen in the future, you can be a ways off.

Layne: I know you shared a water-treatment plant with American Fork.

George: No. Oh, the sewer plant. Yes. Pleasant Grove, American Fork, Lehi and Alpine were the original partners in that and of course now we have all these little towns that have hooked onto it like Highland and Saratoga Springs. It has been upgraded. When I was chairman of the sewer plant, special service district, my kids called it the poop plant. We upgraded it then. It cost us quite a bit of money. They have upgraded again to increase capacity, and we will need to increase it more to be able to handle the influx that comes.

Susan: That is all. That was painless wasn't it?

George: I'm not an old timer. I don't know what happened a long time ago.

Susan: We knew you had involvement with the water system and the power.

George: I had a lot of opposition when we wanted to put the pressurized system in. Some of the old timers thought it would be too costly. They didn't want any growth. They weren't willing to change. I'm not going to name any names but one old fellow, he's a good man, said it would cost a lot more than you are saying it will. I told him it would not because if the bids come in for more money than the finances that we have arranged for, we won't give the contract. He was holding meetings monthly, and he wouldn't invite me, to try to stir up the people to oppose it. I went anyway and tried to debunk the things which he was telling them that weren't true. And I was successful at it. It took a lot of time and patience.

Susan: Look how much further you are ahead now because of that.

George: Those things are trying. Especially for a person who doesn't like conflict. My time as a mayor was profitable as I look back. It was educational. We got a lot accomplished. The thing that I enjoyed more than anything was I was able to work with the council without a big confrontation like you seen in some other cities. I would say we were all different people and we all thought differently but let's reason together and come to a conclusion that will be beneficial to our people not to just what we want. And it worked.

Susan: Funny how that works.

George: When you get to an open meeting, people get involved and get emotional. As soon as emotion takes over reason sits down. So you have to calm the water somehow.

Susan: Is there anything else that you would like to add that would be helpful? This oral grant is the history of Lehi. We are having about 20 people come in and tell us different aspects of growing up here that may be of interest to people down the road.

George: A lot of our old citizens don't want to see anybody come in. There are a lot of mighty fine people who have moved in—good people. Of course, you get some that you would rather not have, but you get that no matter where you're at. You have to live with that. It has been a good thing that our community has grown. It has been helpful. It's been healthy.

Susan: You were always the town that never did change. They wanted to stay the same.

George: We were for a very long time. I think the change came when we got a sewer system and got adequate water that we could expand. Then when the economic conditions improved, we were able to expand and profit from that.

Susan: The only thing you didn't do was plan on the traffic.

George: No. Our little city streets used to be a lot narrower than they are now. We used to have big, wide sidewalks on both sides, but a little narrow street. You only needed room for a team of horses and a buggy to go through there. The city

fathers cut the sidewalks in half and widened the streets. It is still too narrow, but it did help the traffic somewhat.

Susan: Who made the determination that the sidewalks should be so wide?

George: Everyone used to walk or ride a horse or a buggy. It was adequate at the original time. The sidewalks—everybody walked. Now everybody rides—so you need to have more room for traffic.

Susan: Thank you George. You were awesome.