

Mayor George Austin-16th Mayor of Lehi 1901-1903

By Richard Van Wagoner

In November 1900, Mayor Mosiah Evans was elected to the state legislature and resigned his local office. George Austin, prominent local agriculturalist, was appointed to finish Evan's term. Mayor Austin, son of John and Emma Austin, was born in Studham, Bedfordshire, England on January 13, 1849. After converting to Mormonism, his family wanted to emigrate to Utah, but had little means to do so until fate knocked on their door in 1854. A salesman, selling straw for braiding, persuaded Emma Austin to invest in a number of bundles to sell for profit. The business brought enough success that in 1866 the family sent the two eldest children, George, and Harriet, to America.

When they arrived in Lehi seventeen-year-old George hired out as a farmhand, Harriet opened a millinery shop at 415 First East (still standing today). The intricate straw hat weaving techniques she had learned in her native England served her well. During a July 1868, visit to Lehi, Brigham Young was so impressed with the straw hats worn by the town's somen that he ordered twelve of them from Harriett, paying \$4.00 each from them.

Within two years the two Austin children had saved enough money to bring the rest of the family to Lehi. The Austin men were among the first local settlers to work the land on the Lehi Bench and along the Bull River Ditch. When the Utah Sugar Company established its first factory at Lehi, the Austin brothers were among the first to successfully cultivate the sugar beet.

As a result of his interest in the sugar industry, George served as general agricultural superintendent of the entire Utah-Idaho Sugar Company from 1891-1917. He was also president of Austin and Sons Livestock Company, and served as a director of Austin Brothers, Salt Lake Union stock yards, Utah

Distributing Company, and served as a director of Austin Brothers, Salt Lake Union stock yards, Utah Distributing Company, and was vice president of the national Woolgrowers' association.

The most successful Austin family venture was Austin Brothers Association founded the Lehi Slaughtering Company, and the Salt Lake Union Stockyards. The company also owned Saratoga resort from 1914-1930. The April 25, 1914 "Lehi Banner" announced that Austin Brothers and Austin and Sons Sheep companies had bought the property for \$60,000. The Austin interest was initially speculative. They anticipated selling lake frontage lots to Salt Lakers for "residential purposes at fancy prices." The resort was to be leased with twenty-to-fifty acres of surrounding land, while the rance was to be subdivided into farm parcels.

Spokesman George Austin, in a May 9, 1914 "Lehi Banner" interview, foresaw that "within two years street cars would be running there...within five years hundreds of suburban homes would be built on the lake front...(and) the resort would be the most valuable asset that Lehi ever had."

Further plans were jointly announced one month later by Austin and Utah-Idaho Sugar Company manager Thomas R. Cutler, a stockholder in Austin Brothers. Ten summer bungalow tents were to be built as a nucleus for "Lake Front," the proposed name for the new town. A plat of the city lots had already been made and planners announced that within a few weeks streets and cement sidewalks were to be laid out.

Despite Austin Brothers' spirited real estate plans, consumer interest never materialized. "Lake Front" was the first project to be abandoned. Two years later promotion was also halted on the sixty-acre Saratoga town sites northwest of the resort. The failure of the property developments did not affect the success of the resort, however, it continued to thrive.

In 1922, Austin Brothers embarked on a poultry project at Saratoga. The April 19, 1923 "Lehi Sun" reported that the sheepman had imported six thousand

chicks from California. They intended to pipe the hot spring water through the coops to keep the young birds warm. If successful they intended to import one hundred thousand chicks the following year to make the “Saratoga farm one of the biggest chicken ranches in the state.” But like John Beck in the late 1890’s the Austin brothers were not successful in the fowl business. After both George and Thomas died, the company sold the resort to Frank H. Eastmond in the spring of 1930.

Prior to being appointed mayor, George Austin had served four years as a city councilmember. Lehi civic workers who served with him during his administration included: councilors James B. Gardner, James Harwood, Joel Mears, William Bone, Jr., Samuel Taylor, Elias Bushman, and Joseph S. Broadbent; recorders James E. Ross and Sarah T. Evans; marshals Henry East and Newburn Butt; treasurer John Roberts, Jr.; and justice Stephen W. Ross.

Retrospective, the principal accomplishment of Mayor Austin’s first term was the purchase of a large plot of ground north of the D&R.G. station for a city park. On July 17, 225 workers cleared the ground, laid out a baseball field and bicycle track, erected a grandstand, and built an open-air dancing floor which was enclosed in August. This large Pavilion and the surrounding park became the center of hundreds of community, church, and school functions for the next twenty years. The site today is the Lehi Rodeo Grounds and Lehi Power Department substation.

Mayor Austin was re-elected in 1901, a term that saw a group of young civic-minded men organize the Lehi Volunteer Fire Department. An eighteen-by-twenty-six foot fire station was erected to the east of city hall at 172 West Main. Two water cisterns, each with a forty-five gallon capacity, were erected. One was immediately in front of city hall and the other was just north of Main on the east side of First West. On July 11, 1901 the city purchased from the Salt Lake Hardware Company for \$570 the small hand-pumper fire engine now on display in the Hutchings Museum.

In 1902, Mayor Austen, elected to the state legislature, resigned his

mayorship. The remainder of the term was filled by former mayor Mosiah Evans. George Austin died on 29 November 1925. The fine two story home he built in Lehi still stands on the southwest corner of 2nd East and 6th North.