

Thomas Webb- Lehi's 18th Mayor 1906-1909

By Richard Van Wagoner

The Sample Ballot of Lehi's 1905 municipal election is an interesting one. The Republican Party Ticket is headed by mayoralty candidate Thomas Webb. G. N. Child is running for mayor on the Citizen's Ticket and Socialist Ticket mayoralty candidate Edson Whipple is listed in the third column. Henry East is listed as a candidate for marshal on both the Citizen and Socialist Tickets as is city justice of the peace candidate R. J. Whipple.

Continuing in the tradition of being a Republican town in the most Republican of Republican states, Thomas Webb became Lehi's eighteenth mayor when elected on November 7, 1905. His supporting cast included councilors William Bone, Jr., Samuel I. Goodwin, John D. Woodhouse, Henry Lewis, Parley Austin, Joseph W. Goates, Jonas Holdsworth, Le Roy Lott, and Henry Lewis; marshal George Evans and J. Newburn Butt; recorder John T. Winn, treasurer T.J. Wadsworth and justice Samuel Taylor.

Mayor Webb was born at Studham, England, April 20, 1858, son of George and Sarah Thorne Webb. After arriving in Lehi in 1864 he contained a common school education while working on his father's farm and the grist mill at Mulliner's Mill Pond. When he was twenty years old he went to Arizona, where he hauled cordwood and burned charcoal at Grand Gulch. When he returned the following year he found employment herding sheep first for William Clark and William Winn then Egan and Davison.

In 1882, Webb married Mary Evans, a daughter of Abel Evans. After marrying, young Webb began to build up his own sheep business, an enterprise he maintained for thirty-seven years, one which made him a wealthy man. At one point

during his career he owned five thousand head of sheep.

In addition to extensive farming and cattle operations, Webb became principal stockholder in the Lehi Commercial and Savings Bank. A charter member of the Lehi Commercial Club, Webb was also a director of the Standard Knitting Factory Company, and the Lehi Mill and Elevator Company, the enterprise that built the Lehi Roller Mills in 1905-06.

During Mayor Webb's two-term administration from 1905-1909, he bestowed honorary citizenship on "Old Roanie" a legendary Hammer Brothers Livery horse. The animal, according to one account, "had more gray matter between his ears than many a diver to whom he was hired out."

The Pioneer Monument was erected by the Lehi Pioneer Committee in 1908. And Lehi's culinary waterworks were also developed during this period. Although Lehi City Corporation owns the works, the impetus for development came from the Lehi Commercial Club rather than the municipality.

During the summer of 1907, the Commercial Club engaged the services of engineer Richard R. Lyman to examine several potential water sources. Lyman who was also working with the city of Alpine to establish a culinary system, recommended a joint project to develop Schoolhouse Springs. With an estimated outflow of one million gallons a day, these spring north of Alpine had sufficient water for Lehi, Alpine, and American Fork.

The Commercial Club, after considering the water issue at its September 14, 1907 meeting, decided to offer Alpine \$3,000 for four-fifths interest in the springs. Financial and political problems developed, however, and American Fork withdrew from the project in the summer of 1908. To resolve the log-jam the Commercial Club urged Lehi City to pursue the waterworks as a municipal project. The consensus of Lehi citizens was to undertake the project. Accordingly, the city offered Alpine \$8,000 for five-sixths of the springs' flow.

In a special election held on September 14, 1908, 160 Lehi citizens voted in favor of the \$26,500 water bond proposal while 75 voted against. That same evening in Alpine, citizens also voted overwhelmingly in favor of the project. The twenty-year maturation bonds, issued at five percent interest, were quickly sold to investors, and by February 4, 1909, \$21,000 was deposited in a Lehi bank account. Work began in March 1909.

General Superintendent W. S. Evans directed the four-phase construction project. A crew of twenty-five men built roads to the Schoolhouse Spring through thick timber and massive boulders. The trenching was backbreaking pick-and-shovel work supplemented by occasionally blasting through rocky terrain. Twenty-eight branches of collecting pipe were laid, often at so shallow a depth that erosion quickly exposed them again. Most of the heavy clay pipe was carried into the area on horseback because teams and wagons could not negotiate the formidable area.

The main pipeline carried water to a splinter box on Moyle's Hill in Alpine where Lehi's five-sixths share was diverted down an eight-mile pipeline to a 324,000 gallon settling tank on the high benchland of Sixth East. This sixty-by-sixty, twelve-foot deep concrete structure was constructed under the supervision of Jonas Holdsworth. The main city lines were ten-inch clay pipe, the branch line six-inch pipe. By the fall of 1910 the waterworks were completed.

After Mayor's Webb's retirement from local politics, he devoted himself to his banking interest. In 1905 he had become a vice-president of the Lehi Commercial and Savings Bank which had been established in the building at 206 East State. Both he and his father were heavy investors in the establishment.

In the fall of 1906, American Fork businessman James B. Clarke and others canvassed that town to raise money and enthusiasm for establishing a bank in a building just completed by the American Fork Co-op. More than fifty "monied men of the town purchased stock in the new venture. The Lehi Commercial & Savings Bank, with \$350,000 worth of business on their 1906 books, had a

substantial clientage in American Fork and wished to join with this new venture.

So the directors of the Lehi Institution submitted a proposition to the American Fork investors which promised to deliver half the capital stock of the Lehi bank at a price of \$130 per share. The A.F. group agreed to the terms and the articles of the bank were amended, changing the name of the organization (effective November 1, 1906) to the Utah Banking Company. Thomas R. Cutler remained the bank's president. Thomas Webb remained vice-president.

Winds of financial discontent began to blow across America in 1907. They struck Lehi on January 23, 1911 when state banking examiner C.A. Glazier posted a closure notice on the Utah Banking Company's door. Anxiety continued to build in town until on the evening of July 20, 1911, a host of angry depositors met in the Tabernacle in a state of near hysteria. The mood of some was that bank officers and directors should be held personally accountable for their management. The consensus, however, was to appoint a group to investigate the bank affairs further.

The bank finally re-opened on May 1, 1912 under the leadership of Ira D. Wines, president; Thomas Webb, vice-president; Charles C. Friel, cashier; Thomas R. Cutler, A.J. Evans William Thornton, George T. Odell, J.H. Storrs, and S.L. Wells directors. The 1914 annual report by cashier William E. Evans demonstrated that the bank was in its best condition in years and was "rapidly getting back to the former position it held as one of the leading financial institutions of the state."

Unfortunately the bank had invested \$90,000 in Price River Irrigation Company Land and Water. When a primary dam was blown by agitators during World War I the loss to the Utah Banking Company was devastating. The institution tried to recover by reorganizing under the name People's Bank of Lehi in 1917, but losses were too great. On May 4, 1921 C.J. Thatcher, state bank examiner, again suspended the bank's operations and placed it in receivership.

In September 1922, the People's Bank had repaid 55 per cent of its debts. On January 20, 1923, the bank stockholders, including Thomas Webb, received

notice from the law firm of Willey and Willey informing them of their personal liability to assume the remainder of the losses. Despite great hardship, most stockholders, including Thomas Webb, complied with the directive. The final settlement and closing of receivership of the defunct bank occurred in December 1929.

It seems ironic that the People's Bank building, which Thomas Webb had tried so hard to salvage during its period of financial insolvency would become the Lehi Hospital in 1925. For that is where the former mayor and recent justice of the peace died on May 14, 1926, after suffering complications from a broken hip.

In 1903, Webb built a substantial brick home at 388 North 200 East. This fine example of turn-of-the-century craftsmanship is today owned by Colleen Paul, Thomas Webb's great-great granddaughter and her husband Jay. It is a fitting monument to one of Lehi's most enterprising citizens of the day.