

Mayor Frank E. Sharp-Lehi's 33rd Mayor 1954-57

By Richard Van Wagoner

Municipal elections in the fall of 1953 brought some engaging changes to local politics. Each party nominated a slate of just six candidates. This was the smallest election slate in the history of Lehi, affected because city recorder and city treasurer positions had earlier been changed by state law from elective to appointive offices.

Local Republicans nominated Mayor George W. Leaney for a second term. His running mates were Heber Hadfield and Hugh Otterson. The Democrats selected Frank E. Sharp for their mayoralty aspirant, with Rex Zimmerman and Harold D. Westring as city council candidates.

As in many previous Lehi elections, the positions of both political parties was essentially the same on major issues. In the 1953 election, the looming concerns were the installation of a city-wide sewer system, which both parties favored and consolidation of northern Utah Valley high schools which both parties opposed, realizing it would mean nothing more than Lehi and Pleasant Grove high school students being bused to American Fork.

In an election-day stunt the local Jaycees launched a "Get Out the Vote" drive. The inventive approach consisted of a three-phase plan. Pilot Wesley Turner, chairman of the campaign, dropped 1500 flying saucers over the city. The paper plates were imprinted with both Republican and Democratic monikers plus the message:

"It's Up To You--The outcome of the election is up to you, the voter. It is the privilege and duty of every Lehi citizen to cast his ballot on election day for the candidates of his choice. No one can tell you how to vote. The decision is up to you. Be sure you can say "I Voted". Sponsored by the Lehi Jaycees-Young Men of action."

During election day Jaycees drove about the city in a sound car urging citizens to go to the polls. The third feature was to give each voter a lapel button which stated: "I Have Voted--Have You?"

When the votes were counted all three Democrats were declared winners. Continuing in the Lehi tradition of showing mayors the door after a single term, Mayor-elect Sharp won over Mayor Leany by a vote of 684 to 514.

The new mayor, Frank Sharp, was born in Lehi on December 18, 1898, a son of William R. and Valate Anderson Sharp. After graduating from Lehi High School, where he served as studentbody president, Sharp married Pearl Leffler in 1918, was later divorced, then married Enid Dunn on December 29, 1942.

Sharp's early employment was with the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company where for eight years he worked in various plants including Lehi, Spanish Fork, Garland and Idaho Falls. He then became an employee of the Utah Power and Light Company where he eventually became credit manager for northern Utah County. For all of his adult life, he also operated a model farm north of present day I-15, just west of the Lehi Cemetery.

His life-long interests in beautification were fulfilled through work in the Lehi Lions Club, where he served as president of the local chapter, and the Lehi Beautification Committee. Active in the LDS Church, Sharp, a member of the Lehi Fourth Ward, was Elders Quorum President, chairman of the Stake Missionary Committee and held many positions in the MIA. Musically inclined, the future mayor served for many years as Fourth Ward chorister and sang at hundreds of church and civic functions throughout the community.

The most important accomplishment of Mayor Sharp's administration was the completion of a city-wide sewer system. Disposal of human waste materials in a noxious but necessary demand on city government. The first consideration of a sewer system in Lehi was during the post-World War II administration of Mayor

Dean Prior. During an April 15, 1946 city council meeting, city engineering consultant Dr. T. C. Adams proposed a city-wide sewer disposal system. The plan was further pursued in another council meeting in September, when financial plans were submitted and approved. The city proposed issuing \$50,000 of obligation bonds, and \$125,000 worth of revenue bonds.

City leaders were enthusiastic about the benefits of a modern sewer system. “Proper sewage disposal not only provides health protection,” Mayor Prior pointed out during an August 12, 1947 round table discussion, “but ensures and promotes civic values as well.” The specific advantages pointed out to citizens included health and sanitation improvement, including reduction of polio, enhancing the city’s growth; elimination of odors and stench; and an increase in property values.

In the fall of 1947 city representatives began a house-to-house approach to arrange sewer contracts with citizens. Households could subscribe under one of the four following plans:

1-\$300 cash payment

2-\$100 down payment and two \$100 monthly payments

3-\$75 down payment and two successive monthly payment of \$50 each.

4-\$50 down payment and two successive monthly payments of \$15 each.

If one of the latter two methods were contracted, the unpaid balance was to be paid from the revenue bonds and billed to the home on a monthly basis of \$1.50 per month. Those who subscribed to one of the sewer plans received a patriotic red, white and blue window sticker which read: “ I Have Subscribed to the Lehi Sewer”. Two large barometers were placed on Main and State Streets to keep residents apprised of the status of the \$50,000 goal.

On December 17, 1947, bids on the project were opened. the lowest submission exceeded engineer Adams’ estimate by \$46,435.04. After considering several options, all of which would have increased both connection and monthly fees, the sewer plans were abandoned and all deposits refunded.

The sewer issue was again raised during the summer of 1954 after Mayor

Sharp had assumed his position. City physician Dr. Elmo Eddington was a driving force behind the successful effort. “If Lehi hopes to save its face as a respectable place in the State of Utah,” he argued, “if we who live here have any conscience about the type of sanitary surrounding we live in, if we have any hope of developing a community which invites new people, new homes, and new industry, we had better get that sewer no matter what it costs.”

Engineer Alton B. Sorenson, during a May 9, 1955 city council meeting, estimated that the installation of the sewer lines and treatment plant would cost \$700,000, more than double the projected costs of the 1947 system. Lauren W. Gibbs, city fiscal agent, recommended that the city obtain a \$175,000 general obligation bond for constructing the treatment plant, and a revenue bond, to be repaid from monthly service charges, for the balance of the system’s cost. The city council voted not only to pursue this proposal but also to bond for an additional \$90,000 to repair the city streets after the installation of the sewer lines. The sewer bond and ordinance was overwhelmingly approved, with only a 6.8 percent dissenting vote.

Winning bidders on the disposal plant were the Davis and Butler Company (\$191,395), and Redferd and Kendsen on the collection system (\$381,288.74). Thomas F. Kirkham was appointed financial manager of the system, and Douglas Willes was designated superintendent of the newly combined Water and Sewer Departments.

The sewage disposal plant was constructed on a four-acre site south of town near the lake. A cement filter tank, ninety feet in diameter, was filled to the seven-foot level with two thousand tons of two-and-one half to three-inch filter rock. Immediately south of the filter tank were the primary and secondary clarifier tanks—each thirty feet in diameter. Nearby was the control building, where grinding and pumping operations were carried out.

After the sewer system was completed in June 1957, the disposal plant operated automatically. Sludge from the clarifiers was pumped to the digester tank

where it was heated to 94 degrees to stimulate the action of bacteria in breaking down the sludge. This action was continuous with the “dead” sludge being pumped out to the open sludge beds, or drying fields, periodically. Water from the secondary clarifier tank, 85 percent pure was pumped into an open ditch which emptied into Utah Lake until the plant was closed in 1979.

Other important accomplishments of the Sharp administration included the completion of the Segoe Lily Elementary School (1956), completion of a new \$32,000 fire station on the east side of Center Street opposite the Memorial Building, and remodeling of Lehi’s old fire station into a new city jail (1957). The city’s streets, many still dirt, were modernized in 1957 after the sewer system was completed. More than sixty-thousand tons of gravel were used in the \$115,000 project.

While Mayor Sharp wished to run for a second term, a conflict-of-interest controversy arose over his long-term employment with Utah Power and Light, from which Lehi then purchased its power. The Utah Constitution contains a clause restricting a person employed by a company which does business with the city corporation from holding the office of Mayor.

During the local nominating convention, when the question arose, mayor Sharp explained that Lehi City did not have a franchise with Utah Power and Light but merely purchased power wholesale from the company. He therefore argued that he was not in violation of the restrictive clause. Lehi City attorney DeVere Wootton, upheld Mayor Sharp’s position, but also acknowledged that he was uncertain if the Utah Supreme Court would sustain the argument if contested. After deliberating the matter, Mayor Sharp withdrew from the nomination process rather than create a potential legal problem for the city.

The former mayor retired from Utah Power and Light in 1966, after serving the company for thirty-seven years as district agent and collection manager. He died of heart failure on September 12, 1967. The consensus of eulogists Mayor Calvin Swenson and Olin H Ririe vice-president of Utah Power and Light

Company, was that the former mayor was “loyal to his community, devoted to his family... and his farm stood as a monument, not only to him, but to the community as well.”