

James H. Gardner-Lehi's 23rd Mayor

By Richard Van Wagoner

“One of the chief reasons why Utah has today so many men of initiative and ability to lead,” wrote Lehi historian J. Hamilton Gardner in 1913, “ is that by force of circumstances they were early thrown on their own resources and compelled by an unkind fortune to develop that supremely valuable quality--self reliance.” Gardner was specifically writing about his father, James H. Gardner, Lehi's twenty-third mayor.

James Hamilton Gardner was born on July 27, 1859, at Mill Creek (southeast Salt Lake County), the twenty-fourth of his father Archibald Gardner's forty-eight children, his mother Sarah Hamilton being Gardner's ninth wife. Archibald Gardner, bishop of the West Jordan Ward, had so many children he scarcely knew what to do with them. Ultimately young James was compelled to rely on his own resources, living alternately with his mother Sarah, and his grandfather, James L. Hamilton until he was eighteen years old.

Like many others of the day, young Gardner had little opportunity for schooling. His entire education consisted of six winters in the classroom. During the good-weather month he was a farmhand and worked in various sawmills in Little Cottonwood canyon.

In 1880, when he was twenty-one years old, Gardner was called on a mission to the Sandwich Islands, (Hawaii) where he lived for nearly four years. Arriving on the island just as the LDS Church's sugar boiler was ready to return home, Elder Gardner was assigned to work in the cane sugar mill, much to his regret--then.

While he did do some missionary work, much of his time was spent becoming a master in the art of boiling sugar, learning the process from a German expert hired to teach him, and later resulted in his long association with the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company.

In 1884, young Gardner returned to Utah and again found work in various farming and canal building activities with his father. On October 15, 1886, he married Rhoda Pricilla Huffaker and to them were eventually born nine children.

Shortly after their marriage, the Gardners decided to take advantage of newly available government lands in Idaho. They homesteaded a quarter section at Willow Creek (now Elva) near Idaho Falls.

In 1890, the Utah Sugar Company, an LDS Church subsidiary, built its first beet-sugar processing plant in Lehi. Local superintendent Thomas Cutler, and other officials searched the territory for sugar men, those with experience in the field. Among the application received was one from James B. Gardner who stated that he had previously boiled sugar in Hawaii. He was summoned to Lehi and hired on the spot.

It was with much anticipation that sugar beet growers, investors, creditors, and factory officials awaited the fall harvest of 1891 and the completion of the plant. “Can this factory produce granulated sugar?” was the question on everyone’s mind. Gardner, who boiled that historic first batch of sugar, later recalled the long-ago evening of October 15, 1891:

“The first strike of sugar was watched with great interest and considerable concern. Such a crowd of citizens were present in the pan room while the boiling was going on that it was difficult to get around. Ed Dyer supervised the boiling of that first strike and I helped him. There were present Manager Cutler, James F. Jennings, Elias Morris, John Beck, George Austin, Fred Trane, Byron W. Brown, Elisha Davis, Thaddeus Powell, William E. Racher, and probably a dozen others whose names I cannot remember. Fred Trane was the “doubting Thomas” who repeatedly stated that he wouldn’t be convinced that white sugar could be made from that black syrup until he saw the sugar right in his hand.

It was after midnight when the strike was dropped, but they all waited for that important event. Then everyone rushed to the centrifugal and when the first

machine had spun off the molasses, Mr. (Ed) Dyer could hardly get room enough to perform the washing. However, he soon passed out the clear white sugar, giving each one of his audience some of it-right in his hand. Immediately hurrahs and hosannas filled the air--even Fred Trane cried out, I'm now convinced that sugar can be made from beets!"

After the first campaign, Gardner was made night foreman. He then worked his way up to general foreman, plant superintendent, and finally general Superintendent of all Utah-Idaho sugar factories in the western Utah States, a position he held for fifteen years.

Gardner, the first bishop of the Lehi Second ward, was also the prime mover in many local enterprises including the Lehi Roller Mills, the State Bank of Lehi, the Commercial Club, the Bank of American Fork and the Lehi Mercantile. He also developed a large section of land west of the Jordan River into a dry farm, vast orchard and grazing ground. He called the place Uncomprahgre, apparently in home of Colorado's Uncomprahgre Plateau.

Interestingly, Gardner's best-known industrial project is still going strong today. Miller Archibald Gardner, who depended on the Jordan River for water power at his mill in West Jordan (Gardner Historic Village today) was a long-term advocate of pumping Utah Lake water into the Jordan River's channel. From 1900 to 1901, a period of extreme drought, the river shrank to 25 percent of its normal flow.

James H. Gardner approached Angus M. Cannon, president of one of the Salt Lake County canal companies, and suggested the development of a large pumping station at the mouth of the Jordan River near Saratoga. During a March 26, 1902, joint meeting of the Salt Lake City Council and the Board of Canal Presidents, the body which regulates irrigation matters in the Salt Lake Valley, Cannon presented the idea. After careful consideration the group voted to proceed with construction of such a plant. Bids were awarded to superintendent Gardner and his chief engineer at the Lehi Sugar Factory, M.W. Ingalls.

Construction on the pumps, as the station is known, began on June 21, 1902. By August 19. four forty-eight inch Byron Jackson centrifugal pumps, each capable of delivering four hundred cubic feet of water per second (approximately three thousand gallons), had been installed. During the summer of 1903, the pumps were so successful in increasing the Jordan's flow that a considerable amount of new land was opened for farming in the Salt Lake Valley. In 1905, another pump was added and in 1907 two more were installed. Six years later, a sixty-inch pump, with 1,600 gallons per second capacity, was brought on line. When all eight units were in full operation the plant was delivering seven hundred million gallons of water every twenty-four hours. At the time, it was considered to be the largest pumping plant in the world.

During Mayor Gardner's administration, Lehi City first adopted a budget system in 1921. Drainage districts were also formed to dry out swampy areas of town. Other important events during the Gardner's term included the the conversion of the Lehi Canning Factory on Third North and Fourth West into the Lehi Cereal Mill, and the beginning of construction work on the new Lehi High School building(southwest corner of Center and Second North). The Carnegie Library, the first completed portion of the Lehi Memorial Building, was also dedicated on December 30, 1921.

Other elected officials who assisted Mayor Gardner in managing the local municipal affairs included: J.E. Cotter, Leo W. Goates, Morgan S. Lott, William A Knight, Walter dickerson (councilmen); A.L. Yates (recorder), Thomas Powers (treasurer), John S. Evans (marshal), A. M. Davis (justice), and J. Hamilton Gardner (attorney).

After his term was completed, Mayor Gardner served as a Utah Country commissioner for six years, and was elected to the Utah Legislature in 1925, serving at the same time as his son Hamilton, who was a representative from Salt Lake County.

The Gardner home, fondly called the “Rose and Green Villa” by family members, still stands at 187 East 300 north (owned by Devere Oliver today). When the fine old edifice was completed in 1896, it was dedicated by Mayor Garner’s close friend, LDS Church president Wilford Woodruff. Gardner lived well and long. After a lengthy illness the ninety-two year-old man died in Salt Lake City, of causes incident to his age, on January 15, 1952.