

Mayor George Webb-11th Mayor of Lehi

By Richard Van Wagoner

Many of Lehi's most prominent early citizens were former Brits. George Webb, our eleventh mayor, was born in Studham, Bedfordshire, England, May 6, 1839. A convert to Mormonism, he married Julia Cushing in 1864. She died later that year while crossing the Great American Plains. The grief-stricken young husband arrived in Lehi in November, 1864.

George married Mary Ann Ward on May 30, 1865. In his native England he had apprenticed as a miller, and for the first year in Lehi, he followed that occupation at Mulliner's Mill, a grist mill then situated at our local Mill Pond. In 1866, he purchased a large farm and engaged in that occupation until 1891.

Prior to being elected Lehi mayor on February 9, 1887, Webb briefly served as acting mayor for two months. Although he was not a lawyer, Webb served a term as Lehi City attorney, and was also chief alderman for many years. In 1884 he was chosen a member of the Utah Territorial Legislature, and thereafter served as a member of two Constitutional Conventions.

During Mayor Webb's administration the city planted trees in the cemetery, purchased a site for a community park, and opened several new streets, including the one we now call Mill Pond Road. Of the many laws and ordinances passed by Lehi city councils during the past century and a half, none were more interesting than the Curfew Law of July 18, 1887:

It shall be unlawful for any person under fourteen years of age to be or remain in or upon any of the streets, alleys, or public places in this city at night after the hour of nine o'clock, unless said person is accompanied by a parent, guardian or other person having the legal custody of such minor person, or is in performance of an errand of duty directed by such parent, guardian or other person having the care and the custody of such minor person, or whose

employment makes it necessary to be upon said street, alleys or public places during the night time after siad specified hours. Any person violating the provisions of this section shall, on convictions, be fined in any sum not to exceed five dollars for each offense, and shall stand committed until such fine and costs are paid.

In September 1887, Mayor Webb was authorized \$50 to purchase a bell which was installed in a belfry atop city hall on Main Street. The curfew bell, rung by the marshal every evening at 9:00, served as the standard for setting all Lehi timepieces. The bell also served as a fire alarm, and starting in 1895 sounded at 9:30 each Sunday morning to announce Sunday School. That historic bell is now permanently mounted on a framework in front of the fire station at 176 North Center.

Near the end of his term Mayor Webb became interested in the sugar beet industry. The First Presidency of the LDS Church had issued a March 22, 1889, prospectus to “All Persons Interested in the Development of the Resources of Utah.” The letter sought financial investment in the beet sugar business. “As this industry when fully established,” the document concluded, “will provide labor for hundreds, save the outgo of a very large amount annually, and yield a good profit to investors, we recommend it to the careful consideration and palpable support of all who desire to aid in the development of the resources of our Territory.”

On September 4, 1889, the Utah Sugar Company filed incorporation papers in Salt Lake City. Officials estimated that a beet processing factory could be built for approximately \$350,000. Such a plant would be capable of handling 30,000 tons of beets per season, from which would come six million pounds of sugar. If farmers were paid \$5 per ton for the beets and sugar sold for 7 cents per pound as predicted, profits would amount to \$120,000 per season, a yield of 33 percent on investment.

In addition to their \$88,000 stock purchase, the Lehi group tendered other attractive financial inducements, which included a thirty-five-acre building site on

Mulliner's Mill Pond, and a \$1,000 donation to purchase additional land as needed. The site was admirable from a transportation standpoint since the Rio Grande Western Railroad transversed the property and the Union Pacific line bypassed a mile north.

Other aspects of the package included perpetual water rights to the Mill Pond, eighty acres of limestone quarry at Pelican Point, 1,500 acres of ground for a company beet farm, and \$1,000 worth of labor to improve the road to the factory site.

After visits to several areas, the choice for the future plant was narrowed to two possibilities: Lehi and American Fork. On November 18, 1890, the Board of Directors voted to build here. Elisha Peck, Jr., described the town's reaction when it received the news. "Lehi went wild and crazy," he remembered; "at night the whole town was lit up with bonfires until it looked lit the city was on fire, everything they could jerk loose was burned. Barrels of beer were free to all up and down the street. American Fork phoned over to determine the outbreak. When they found out the truth they were mad." And they stayed mad. One historians wrote that "a literal social feud existed between the two towns for a long time because of this regrettable incident."

During the spring of 1891, as the Lehi Sugar Factory neared completion, the town was bustling with activity. The taste of prosperity was on everyone's tongue. A newspaper seemed to be in order. The Lehi Publishing Company, organized in the spring of 1891, consisted of officers George Webb, president; T.F. Trane, vice-president; C.A. Granger, secretary; S.B. Vowles, manager; and directors W.E. Racker, Samuel Taylor, and James Harwood.

James H. Wallis's newspaper plant in Nephi was purchased and moved in its entirety to Lehi. Advocating freedom of religion, "liberal and independent" politics, and home industry, the inaugural issue of **The Lehi Banner** rolled off the small cylinder press on May 29, 1891. Although its masthead proclaimed it was the Official Organ of the Utah Sugar Company," there is no indication that the

company, with financial struggles of its own, underwrote any of the newspaper's expenses.

Despite delinquent accounts and circulation woes, the Banner was in excellent financial condition at the end of its third year of publication. Credit for the paper's success was due to the untiring efforts of publisher George Webb and his editor son Walter.

Beginning in 1903, George Webb edited his own paper. He remained publisher until 1 June 1905, when local merchant James M. Kirkham leased the plant. One year later he bought Webb out and moved the plant elsewhere. For years Webb published the Banner in the building at 355 North First East. One door away, at 387 North First East still stands the George Webb home.

In addition to his beet sugar and newspaper interests, George Webb was one of the community's strongest Republican leaders. In his later years he was a Utah County Commissioner, president of the Lehi Irrigation Company, a director of the Utah Banking Company, vice-president of the People's Co-operative Institution, and served on the board of the Lehi School District for nineteen years.

He was also a strong asset to the Lehi Ward, particularly in Sunday School activities and in the 127th Quorum of Seventy. A 1902 biographical reference in a national publication said of the former mayor:

Mr. Webb's career in Utah has been such as to merit the very highest praise. His life in public, private and business walks has been above reproach and those with whom he has been associated have only words of warmest praise for him. Coming to Utah a comparatively poor man he has accumulated a very comfortable competence and stands among the foremost men of (Lehi) for which he has labored earnestly through many years."

Mayor Webb died in the town he had long promoted on December 18, 1917.

