

# **Wing Mortuary Once Site of Denmark's Native Home**

## **By Richard Van Wagoner**

Lauritz (Louis) Graff was born in Eskebjerg, Denmark in 1853. Four years later his family, converted to Mormonism through the efforts of missionary Gudmund Gudmundsen, emigrated to America with Elder Gudmundsen and other saints.

During the overland trek westward, Louis's father died. Shortly after their arrival in Salt Lake, the widow Graff married Gudmundsen. The family first settled in Fairfield where Gudmundsen established a goldsmith business based on trade with Utah Expeditionary soldiers stationed at the military base.

When Camp Floyd closed at the outbreak of the Civil War, Louis Graff moved with his family to Weber County where they became affiliated with an apostate Mormon group, the Morrisites.

Suffering much opposition, including a militia attack which resulted in the death of Joseph Morris and two of his followers, the group disbanded. The Gudmundsen family then traveled to Sacramento, California to seek medical care for their young son Decon Garff.

While in California, the Gudmundsens regained their faith in Mormonism and desired to return to Utah. They had little money, however, and so a trek to the Salt Lake Valley was impossible.

One day their son Isaac and a friend were playing in an abandoned cabin. Under the floorboards, they found a cache of gold and coins worth \$5,000. No claim was made on the money and Isaac's share enabled his father to pay off Decon Garff's \$700 medical bill, finance the trip back to Utah, and establish his gold and silversmith business in Lehi.

Like his step-father, Louis Garff also became a businessman. As early as 1885, he was in the mercantile business in Lehi. Deciding to expand his commercial interests, Garff erected a large two-story rock building at 154 West Main in 1887. The history of this structure known both as Garff Hall and the Lehi Opera House, was a two-part Lehi Yesteryears last month.

Louis Garff married late in life. He was 37 when he finally wed Amelia Bromley on June 25, 1890. Within a year they moved into their new home at 118 East Main. But Garff's life was cut short. He died on July 21, 1902 at age of 49.

The Garff's Main Street home was purchased in 1910, by George G. Robinson, new owner of the Lehi Roller Mills. In the early 1920s , Robinson and his wife Beulah built the fine home at 489 North 100 East now owned by Ralph and Rose Hoover.

The Robinson's Main Street Home was purchased in 1924 by Alva and Udine Wing. Lehi native Wing, who had been employed the three previous years by George W. Larkin & Sons Mortuary of Ogden, announced in the October 2, 1924 Lehi Sun that he was "Now Located in Lehi and Ready for Business" in the Taylor Building on Main Street(the present home of Cobblerock Cloggers).

Their quarters were only temporary, however, Wing noted that after Oct. 16, he would be permanently located in the Leiter Building (east half of Ream's Wrangler today.)

Wing remained in the Leiter Building before establishing the undertaking parlor in his residence at 118 East Main. A major 1944 remodeling of the place resulted in the new A. H. Wing as shown in the photograph.

Two years later, Wing who was widely recognized for his organizational and musical abilities as well as his compassion moved from Lehi and turned his business over to his son Ralph, a recent graduate of a California mortuary service program.

As the population of Lehi grew, Wing Mortuary expanded. Until 1958, most Lehi funerals were held in the various Mormon chapels or the Tabernacle. On September 21, dedication services were held for the new Wing chapel which would seat 350 members.

Construction work on the new area, built as an addition to the north portion of the old Garr home, was under the direction of local contractor, Alma Peterson.

An interesting section of the September 18, 1958, Lehi Free Press is a two-page advertisement for fourteen local firms which assisted in the building and furnishing of the new Wing Mortuary.

Lehi Mayor Harold Westring and the City Council took out a congratulatory advertisement which stated, "We recognize the importance of this beautiful addition to our city...and wish you continual success in efficiently serving the community with modern facilities to honor the departed and bring hope and inspiration to the bereaved."

Since that time, hundreds of Lehi funerals have been held in the Wing Mortuary. Ralph Wing is now retired. His son Leonard, trained in mortuary science like his father, directs most funerals in town.

Local funeral customs have changed considerably since the earliest days of Lehi settlement. Burial then occurred the day of the death if possible- although the availability of ice allowed for extensions.

The body was washed, then dressed in best attire or temple clothing by men and women called to that function by local Mormon Priesthood leaders. A camphor impregnated cloth was placed on the face to retard discoloration.

If the burial could not take place until the following day, family members or friends conducted a wake by sitting up with the body overnight. The primary

reason for this was to watch for signs of life to avoid the terrifying possibility that an unconscious person might be buried alive. Embalming was only done if the body was to be shipped out of town.

The custom of publicly displaying a body hasn't always been encouraged by LDS Church Leaders. When young Mormon Apostle Abraham H. Cannon died of meningitis in 1896, some church members "improperly handled his body" during the viewing.

The dismayed First Presidency then publicly announced, "It is needless to say to intelligent Latter-Day Saints that all this is repugnant to that spirit and decorum which ought to characterize the laying away of the earthly tabernacle of those whom we have loved or respected; and the general authorities of the Church have felt called upon to exert an influence to check this evil and have advised the Saints not to expose their dead to public view".

But time-honored funerary customs live on. And while the funeral still serves as a formal, socially-recognized statement and recognition of the death of a person, the late twentieth-century has formalized and sanitized the practice.

Most people now die in a hospital. A nurse or doctor calls the funeral director, who soon arrives to take the body to a mortuary where it is professionally embalmed and prepared for viewing.

Though wakes are no longer held, the evening before the funeral and one hour before the services the body is usually displayed in an open casket while friends and family members file past to pay their final respects to the deceased and offer condolences to the bereaved family.

The typical Mormon funeral begins around noon and includes a private family gathering where a prayer is offered, last goodbyes given, and appropriate adjustment made to the temple clothing. The casket is then closed and wheeled into the general funeral assembly.

The bishop or counselor of the deceased's ward usually conducts the funeral. This customarily consists of prayers and traditional music number such as "In the Garden," "Going Home," "Beyond the Sunset", or "Sunrise, Sunset". A medley of the deceased's favorite songs is often played and a brief biographical sketch is generally read. Eulogies that favorably recall the departed and proclaim a celestial afterlife are then given by family members, close friends, and the presiding church leader.

After the services are concluded, a hearse transports the coffin to the cemetery, where it is situated over the grave on a motorized hoist. Pallbearers seldom have to carry the body for more than a few feet.

After the site is dedicated by a Melchizedek Priesthood holder, family and close friends usually gather at the ward, where a luncheon is served by the Relief Society.

Meanwhile back at the cemetery, the coffin is lowered into a cement vault (now required by law), and the grave filled in by the sexton's backhoe. The flowers are then arranged to cover the neatly mounded earth and life goes on for the living while the dead enter their reward.