

LEHI CITY POWER PLANT

Constructed: 1927

Address: 500 West 300 North

Owner: Lehi City Corporation

Before the advent of electricity into Utah, many citizens' sleeping habits were regulated by the sun. "Early to bed, and early to rise" made sense when houses were dimly lit by candles and kerosene lamps. Although twenty-six kerosene lamps were installed throughout Lehi City in September of 1890 their light was dim and, in windy weather, the lamps often blew out.

It was not until 1899 that an electrical franchise was granted within the town. Former Lehi resident, Christian Garff, approached the Lehi, American Fork, and Pleasant Grove city councils with a plan for providing all three communities with electricity. Garff's proposal was accepted by the municipalities--who agreed to buy \$18,000 of the company's \$30,000 shares of stock. The Utah County Light and Power Company was formed on 2 August 1899, and work rapidly progressed on the system. Water rights from American Fork Creek were obtained and a hydroelectric plant was constructed at the mouth of American Fork Canyon.

For the right-of-way on city streets, the power company agreed to furnish free electric lights at all principal intersections. A unique aspect of this system was that the power poles were installed in the middle of the streets. With the advent of the automobile, this caused traffic problems. So the poles were removed to the side of the roadways amid considerable debate and controversy.

The long-awaited electric light made its first appearance in Lehi on the night of 12 December 1900. "The streets and many of the business places were ablaze," the 13 December 1900 *Lehi Banner* enthusiastically reported," giving our city a pleasing appearance, and giving the little folks much delight as they gazed upon the brilliant light." The demand for electricity dramatically escalated as residents discovered how inexpensive it was. At thirty-five cents per month for each light, homes could be lit for less than their kerosene bills.

The lower American Fork Canyon generating plant, which supplied Lehi's electricity, fed power to an American Fork substation through a five-mile, 6,600 volt transmission line. Power at the canyon plant was produced by two General Electric 325 KVA generators. The upper American Fork Canyon hydroelectric plant, completed in 1907, housed two Westinghouse 667 KVA generators.

On 6 September 1912, Utah Power and Light Company was organized as a subsidiary of a large holding company, Electric Bond and Share Company of New York. Eventually this utility giant merged with more than 100 smaller electric companies, including Utah Light and Power.

Meanwhile, Lehi remained a customer of the utility until the late 1920s, when conflict occurred. In June of 1925 Mayor Joseph S. Broadbent was notified by the power company that the rate of each of Lehi's 183 street lights was going to be tripled. The city council voted instead to develop its own municipal power plant. After examining several other facilities, city officials recommended that a special bond election be held to undertake the project.

The \$18,500 bond was approved by citizens on 15 June 1926. That day, city workers removed all 183 light bulbs from the U.P.&L. sockets to avoid the rate increase. For the next twelve months the town's streets were dark at night.

Lehi's power plant, the first municipal facility in Utah to use diesel generators, was built near the Denver Rio Grande and Orem Interurban tracks at Third North and Fifth West. The plant officially opened on 15 June 1927.

After initiating a test case before the Utah Supreme Court, which affirmed that Lehi's municipal power plant was legal, the city commenced expanding its generating capability to provide residential electricity. Eighty percent of Lehi homes had signed up for this power by the fall of 1929, and the municipality remained in the power-generating business until 1946. The city then traded Lehi's generating equipment to Utah Power and Light, and the city again began purchasing power from that company and distributing it to citizens over the municipality's lines. The old Lehi power building was vacant for a time, but in 1957 it was refurbished as a storage facility and workshop for the electric and water departments, and is still used by the city today.