

LEHI ROLLER MILLS

Constructed: 1905-06

Address: 900 East Main

Present owner: Sherman Robinson

After considerable effort by the Lehi Commercial club, our town's first booster organization the 22 June 1905, *Lehi Banner* announced that Lehi was to have "a new flour mill with modern pattern and equipment." Stockholders of the Lehi Mill & Elevator Company invested \$20,000 in the new venture.

The site for the mill was selected on East Main Street on the sugar factory spur of the Union Pacific Railroad (the sugar factory was a mile further down the line). The contract for the mill's machinery was awarded to the Wolf Company of Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, the largest suppliers of mill machinery in the United States. This equipment included four sets of double rollers, one washer, two purifiers, two reels, one cleaner, one dust roller, one gyrator, one separator, and one bran duster.

The three-story-high building, with its multitude of cables, belts, and whirring machinery, was initially powered by a fifty-horsepower motor. Under the management of Parry and Franck, the first sack of flour was produced on 2 April 1906. Full daily capacity of sixty to seventy bushels was soon achieved. The immediate success of the mill required that an addition be built in May of 1906. And when the directors met later that summer on July 30th they decided to immediately erect an elevator with a capacity of 10,000 bushels.

By 1907 the Lehi Mill & Elevator Company had changed its name to the Lehi Roller Mills and was storing and processing virtually all the grain grown in the area. On 25 August 1909, Giles & Giles leased the business. This was only a short-term arrangement, however, as George G. Robinson soon assumed the lease. He then purchased the mill from the co-op, and begun an extensive modernization project.

In 1915 Robinson contracted with the Birrell Engineer Company to construct a 43,000-bushel capacity grain elevator. Four concrete silos, ten feet in

diameter, rested on a concrete base forty-one-feet-eight-inches square and six-feet deep. The four silos each held 10,000 bushels and were joined on the sides so as to form a fifth compartment that had a capacity of 3,000 bushels all completely rodent-and-fire-proof. The Turkey Red and Peacock Brand logos, colorfully painted on the east side of the concrete silos, have been a Lehi tradition for nearly eight decades.

After George G. Robinson's 1936 death, his sons Sherman and Raymond Robinson continued to operate the mill. During World War II, all the flour milled was sold to the government for the war effort. R. Sherman Robinson, George G.'s grandson, who had been taught to run the mill by his father, became the manager of the family-owned mill in 1980. "I deal now with farmers whose grandfathers dealt with my grandfather." Sherm is fond of saying. But it has only been possible because of the Robinson's efforts to continually upgrade their business.

In the late 1970s it became evident that in order to stay in the milling business the Lehi Roller Mills would have to undergo complete retooling and expansion. Accordingly, the Robinsons instigated a thorough modernization process installing imported Swiss milling equipment that, when completed in 1985, increased production capacity to 60,000 bushels a day. The 1990 completion of a new warehouse increased their storage capacity to 100,000 bushels.

While the Lehi Roller Mills is in business to make whole wheat flour, bleached and unbleached white flour, cracked wheat cereal, and germade (cream of wheat) cereal, the picturesque structure has also become a popular haven for artists. The mill has been immortalized in pencil, ink, watercolor, and oils by dozens of artists.

Aside from its milled products, the Lehi Roller Mills is best known for serving as the backdrop for many of the scenes in Paramount's 1984 blockbuster movie, *Footloose*. The film, produced by Dan Melnick, directed by Herb Ross, and starring Kevin Bacon and Lori Singer, is the improbable story of an American town that has banned dancing and popular music. The dancing in the movie was energetic and the Kenny Loggins soundtrack terrific. But I thought the

eighty-year-old Lehi Roller Mills, the town's most distinctive landmark, was the true star of the show--a scene stealer of the first magnitude.