

Mayor Silas P. Barnes-First Mayor of Lehi

By Richard Van Wagoner

For those of you who are newcomers to town, and other perhaps unaware of our community's illustrious past, I would like to recount for you over the next several months the history of Lehi City Corporation and the contributions that have been made by the city's corps of dedicated mayors. I will not be including in this series a photograph of each of these forty-two men. I instead refer you to the city council chambers where a "Wall of Mayors" exhibits the likeness of each chief executive of the past.

Mormon Settlers first came to Lehi in the fall of 1850. But for two years the area remained unincorporated. In early 1852, Bishop David Evans, on behalf of the people of Evansville, as our town was then known, presented a petition to the Deseret Territorial legislature, of which he had been a member since 1851, requesting that the community be given legal status. This request was granted on February 5, 1852 along with Evan's suggestion that the town be named Lehi. Thus our city became the sixth incorporated community in what is now Utah. Only Salt Lake City, Ogden, Provo, Manti, and Parowan, were chartered at an earlier date.

Despite the official granting of the name, Evansville remained the town's unofficial designation until the election of city officers one year later. The earliest city council minutes, for example, note that "The inhabitants of the town of Evansville met at the (Log) School house in said town, for the purpose of organizing and electing the City Council of the City of Lehi, on the 29th day of January 1853."

David Evans, Charles Hopkins and Clairborne Thomas were appointed to act as judges of election and Jehial McConnel and John Spires served as clerks. Lehi's first mayor, Silas Parker Barnes, was elected to the position "unanimously" since

there was no opposition. Elected Aldermen (a councilor with justice of the peace powers), included: David Evans, David Savage, Chales Hopkins and Abram Losee. City councilors were : W.S. S. Willes, Harrison Burgess, Daniel Collett, Israel Evans, Samuel White, Ezekiel Hopkins, Lorenzo B. Hatch, Thomas Green and Richard C. Gibbons.

Lehi's first administration was busy. The following is a list of the legislation passed: "An Ordinance Defining the Amount of Toll for Crossing the Lehi/Jordan Bridge (Lehi City's first public works project)"; "An Ordinance Creating a Water Master and Defining His Duties"; "An Ordinance Creating a Police and Defining Their Duties"; "An Ordinance Creating an Assessor and Collector and Defining His Duties"; "An Ordinance Creating a Treasurer and Defining His Duties"; "An Ordinance in Relation to Fire"; "An Ordinance In Relation to Fire Arms and Power Shots"; "An Ordinance in Relation to Streets"; "An Ordinance Against Fast Riding and Driving"; "An Ordinance Regulating the Sale of Liquors also Regulating Taverns, Groceries, Beer and Liquor Shops"; "An Ordinance in Relation to Drunkenness"; "An Ordinance Creating a (Road) Supervisor"; "An Ordinance Creating a Captain Over the Police"; "A Resolution on the Building of a Wall Around the Forts of the City of Lehi"; "An Ordinance Organizing a School District"; "An Ordinance in Relation to Hogs and Pigs"; "An Ordinance Ordering an Election"; "An Ordinance Respecting Yard Fences on the Opposite Side of the Street From the Dwelling houses and Doging (meaning to dock or castrate) animals"; and "An Ordinance Providing for the Renumeration of City Surveyor for Surveying Plotting and Giving Certificates of Lots in the City of Lehi."

Mayor Barnes, a well-educated and cultured Bostonian, was forty-seven years old when he assumed his elected chair. Despite his position, however, the mayor was not the most powerful man in the community. That seat of potency was occupied by David Evans, bishop of the Lehi Ward. A power struggle which culminated in 1854, demonstrated that the town was not big enough for the two of them.

The dispute no doubt had its beginnings in the summer of 1853 when Indian hostilities in Springville exploded into “The Walker War.” Although Lehi settlers had experienced few problems with the local Utes, military leaders advised each community to “fort up”. Build forts “that the Devil could not get into unless you are disposed to let him in,” was the way Brigham Young put it.

Lehi citizens were told by Bishop Evans and other local militia leaders to dismantle their cabins and move them into a large hollow square centered at First South and Second West. But not everyone, including Mayor Silas Barnes, saw the situation as being dangerous. Furthermore, the year before he had planted a fruit orchard on his farm, 3/4 mile outside the fort boundaries, and the young trees and land were responding well under his care. Furthermore this was America, where men (make that white men) could live free wherever they wanted to. Exercising that autonomy the mayor refused to relocate.

Of course, Lehi was situated in America, but the dominating political force in the Great Basin was the communitarian ideal of Mormonism that the good of the group prevailed over rugged individualism. Uncertain of what to do with Mayor Barnes, Bishop Evans, in his capacity as local military leader, wrote to Daniel H. Wells, the territorial Adjutant General. Responding to Evans on August 24, 1853, Wells wrote:

“Now in the case of Brother Barnes, my council to you is go to him, show him this letter, offer to assist him kindly to remove his house as carefully as possible into the fort, and ten chances to one in my opinion he will promptly comply... (W)e should sustain ourselves free and unbiased in all of our official acts and seek to conciliate the feelings of all good men and still pursue the even tenor of our way regardless of every obstacle. You remember the old proverb, “If gentle means will not prevail...if neither grass nor tufts will answer then I will try what virtue there is in stone.” This is the case with us precisely.

Evidently local leaders resorted to exercising the “virtue in stone” option with Mayor Barnes. Commenting on the situation pioneer historian Andrew Fjeld wrote: “when a man objected to move, the rest of the men simply ganged up on

him and he had to come into line.” The Barnes cabin soon aligned along the South wall of the fortification, most certainly was there against the owner’s will.

The simmering dispute erupted again during a February 17, 1854 city council meeting when Alderman David Evans presented a resolution to tax the citizenry to generate labor and money for building a wall around the “fort of Lehi City.” The February 17th city council minutes cryptically note that the matter was “past two readings when on motion of alderman evans the rules of the House were suspended and the resolution passed.” Mayor Barnes, evidently opposing the measure with fervor, was fined \$10.00 for his obstinacy.

The mayor paid his levy on February 22, and made plans to leave the city as soon as weather conditions allowed. “Dissatisfied with conditions in general in Utah,” wrote a son, the family left for California in April, settling in Yolo County. Silas P. Barnes died there in April, 1888. A tribute written by his son Watson, noted that:

“During his later years, Silas became an adherent of the (Seventh-day) Adventist faith, and having been from his boyhood an earnest student of the Bible, but few men so convergent with its teachings as he. Of strong religious convictions, imbued with, to him, right principles, energetic, active, stern though just in all his dealing with his fellow, he built up not only a large worldly fortune, but also made for himself a place in the hearts of the people of the community as a good man and earnest friend to the interests of the public.”