

21st Mayor of Lehi-Mayor William Francis Gurney 1914-1917

By Richard Van Wagoner

As the deadline for filing approached in the fall of 1913, an unusually large number of Lehi men were on record as eyeing Mayor Racker's seat. The "Lehi Banner" listed them as James H. Gardner, William Wing, Edward Southwick, J. E. Cotter, Thomas Webb, S.I. Goodwin, W.S. Evans, Dr. W. J. Hasler, George G. Robinson, and William F. Gurney.

The list was reduced to William F. Gurney, People's Party candidate and Francis A. Child, Citizen's Party candidate. Moving under the thumb of the national political parties, neither the People's or Citizen's party adopted campaign platforms. Candidate Child, for the "Lehi Banner", declared himself "in full sympathy with the purposes that actuated the people of Lehi to lay aside party affiliations and factional strife and get together on a common basis." His personal campaign promise was "to make Lehi the cleanest, the most sanitary, the most beautiful and her people the most united social unit in Utah county."

Candidate Gurney stood for a "fair, square deal for all the citizens irrespective of the party in which they may belong or the part of the city in which they may reside." He also stood "solid for prohibition" opposed the licensing of pool halls or "places where our young men may congregate and learn to gamble and drink." Moreover, he was strongly in favor of a closer relationship between the citizenry and local government.

Gurney won the election by a vote of 343 to 234. Elected officials who served with him during his two terms included W. Karl Hopkins, George G. Robinson, J. William Wing, Jr. W.S. Evans, Sidney Gilchrist, Joseph S. Broadbent, Francis A. Child Jr.; James F. Fyffe, A.L. Yates (recorders); Herbert Taylor (treasurer); George Webb (justice); Abel John Evans, David J. Thurman (attorney); John S. Evans, Thomas W. Jones (marshal).

During Mayor Gurney's administration he created Sidewalk Paving District No. 2 which called for the surfacing of thirty blocks. The city also constructed a bridge across Dry Creek on Second West, removed all telephone poles from the center of the streets, passed an ordinance providing perpetual care at the cemetery, and purchased a bicycle for the marshal.

No disaster, depression, or war had as much impact on American manners and morals as the automobile revolution. First introduced in the late 1890's, by the years of Mayor Gurney's administration, the novelty had become a necessity and nearly five million vehicles were owned across the country in 1917. Lehi's Main Street was transformed into a "speedway for autos," lamented the local newspaper. During a July 6, 1915 meeting, the city council passed the town's first speeding regulation. Drivers were not to exceed "eight miles per hour in crossing any street or intersection thereof or at a greater speed than fifteen miles per hour on any other part of a street."

Few years made as much impact on Lehi as 1914, Mayor Gurney's inaugural annum. On February 21, the first passenger car of the new Interurban railroad rolled into town. Salt Lake, with the "big-city" wonders, had come as close as a one-hour trip. Two months later, Mr. and Mrs. G. M. Cutler completed the renovation of State Street's dignified Cutler Mansion into the Reliance Inn. Camp W. G. Williams, a military reservation for the Utah National Guard was created on May 4, by executive order of President Woodrow Wilson.

Shock waves began to travel throughout the world on June 28, 1914, when Archduke Franz Ferdinand of the Austria-Hungary was assassinated by Gavrilo Princip. A chain of events was set off that within a few months engulfed all Europe in what was to become known as the Great War or World War I. Americans at first seemed relieved that none of the issues in the conflict concerned this country. Saragavo, Verdun, and the Dandenelles seemed eons away from life in Lehi and elsewhere in the U.S.A.

Both the August 8, 1914, "Lehi Banner" and the August 5, 1914 inaugural issue of the "Lehi Sun" announced up-to-date news from the war front. But most

townspeople, wrapped in the false security of American isolationism, felt the country safe from the violence “over there.” The new \$30,000 Royal Theatre opened in the former Union Hotel building in September. One month later the old city Pavilion was converted into a gymnasium and roller skating rink.

The lasting legacy of Mayor Gurney’s administration began evolving in late December, 1914 when Ira D. Wines deeded the Lehi City all of Block 81, the present Wines Park. Wines, former Lehi resident, was locally famed as a pony express rider, Overland Stage driver and prominent Ruby Valley, Nevada, rancher. He had actually made the generous donation to the city in 1908. Speaking for Mr. Wines at a mass meeting, Senator John Y. Smith said:

“Mr Wines offers to give to the citizens of Lehi, to be planted and maintained as a public park, the entire block south of the Central school building. The maintenance and planting of this park is to be provided for out of the city funds, and is to be controlled by the city officials. The donor’s purpose in making the award is to erect a lasting monument to his wife, Margaret Wines, who died a short time ago in Palo Alto, California.”

During the two years after Wines finally deeded the the property to the city, more than \$1,000 dollars worth of improvements were made, many of them by Mayor Gurney and his sons. Betterments included leveling the ground, installing water lines, seeding, graveling walkways, planting nearly five hundred trees and shrubs, and erecting a bandstand were memorable concerts were given on summer evenings.

Retrospectively, the years of Mayor Gurney’s two terms seem to represent the twilight of American innocence. The simple delights of ice cream parties, lemonade afternoon, and hayride excursions to Saratoga were forever changed by America’s entry into the war. Aside from the continuous flying of a fifty-foot flag atop the Liberty Pole, and heated discussions over America’s neutrality, few evidences of war could be seen in Lehi.

But this quickly changed when the first military recruiter, Captain Wesley King, came to Lehi on June 27, 1916, looking for recruits. When he found no takers, he “threatened to come back and obtain ten troopers by conscription if the

local officials did not get this number of volunteers.

After Congress approved President Wilson's declaration of war on April 6, 1917, 214 Lehi soldiers joined the 4,800,000 American doughboys who volunteered or were drafted. Ten local men died during the war, two from wounds received in action, five from pneumonia or influenza contracted stateside, and three in accidents before going overseas.

The folks back home were doing their part for the war efforts. Lehi citizens purchased their share of the \$23 billion in Liberty Bonds, Victory Bonds, war saving certificates and thrift stamps that were sold. Townspeople also "Hooverized" themselves, as part of the campaign waged by U.S. Food Administrator Herbert Hoover, and pledged "wheatless Mondays" and "meatless Tuesdays".

While Lehi people, like red-blooded Americans everywhere, were making sacrifices for the Allied war effort, the town also benefitted from the conflict. War demands for sugar resulted in extensive improvements at the sugar factory. In late 1914, a huge warehouse with a storage capacity 14,000,000 pounds was completed. And in early 1915, \$100,000 worth of improvements were made including the installation of the 194-foot tall smokestack which stands today). Utah-Idaho, Sugar stock, which sold for \$5 per share in the 1890s, shot up to \$29 per share in 1916. Beet grower, who were paid \$5.50 per ton in 1916, saw their payments increase to \$12 per ton by 1920.

Mayor Gurney, who had been born in Lehi on April 14, 1859, survived the great world-wide influenza epidemic spread across the globe by returning World War I veterans. But on July 15, 1942 the eighty-three-year-old church and civic worker died after a three day bout of intestinal influenza. He is buried in the Lehi City Cemetery.