

Mayor Calvin Swenson-Lehi's 35th Mayor 1966-1969

By Richard Van Wagoner

In one of the few instances in Lehi's history, the race for Lehi's mayorship in 1965 was wide open. Mayor Westring, the incumbent, had announced his retirement. In their political caucus, the Democrats nominated B.J. Lott, three-term city councilman who had also served as city clerk and recorder. Arthur Sabey and Evan L Colledge were nominated as the running mates for city council positions. The Republicans nominated Calvin Swenson, local banker, for mayor, and Dr. Kent Davis and E. Russell Innes to vie for the city council.

The Democrats, campaigning under the slogan "Spend Wisely But Well, Treating Public Funds as a Personal Trust," declared themselves the "type of men who will lend an ear to your problems, guarantee every citizen fair, consistent, and equal treatment." The Republicans, declaring themselves the "GO Party Candidates," promised an extensive beautification campaign, sound financial policy, improved long range planning, expansion of the culinary water system, and cooperation with civic organizations.

When the vote was held on November 2, the Republicans made a clean sweep. Calvin Swenson was elected mayor by a wide margin along with council members Dr. Kent B. Davis, local dentist, and E. Russell Innes, publisher of the "Lehi Free Press".

The new mayor was born December 3, 1916 at Pleasant Grove, Utah, to Helge V. and Adena Warnick Swenson. Young Swenson became one of the first Eagle Scouts in the rural Manila Ward and was an active participant in 4-H Club activities, being a member of Utah's first Registered Dairy Calf Club. His 4-H Demonstration Team, after entering a contest at Utah State, won a trip to the Pacific International Exposition in Portland Oregon.

After graduating from Pleasant Grove High School in 1933, young Swenson

entered BYU. He graduated in 1939, with a degree in Political Science, after having served an LDS mission to Norway.

In June 1939, Swenson began employment at the Bank of Pleasant Grove. His position, which paid \$65 per month, included serving as a combination teller, bookkeeper, and janitor. After receiving a \$5.00 monthly salary increase he married Ila Schow, daughter of Lehi residents A. Carlos and Laura Davis Schow. Ila, who has recently signed a contract to teach for a third year at Spanish Fork High School, was forced to break the agreement because of the policy in force at that time prohibiting the hiring of married women teachers.

In 1946, the Swensons moved to Lehi where Calvin had accepted a position as cashier of the State Bank of Lehi, succeeding the late Emmett Chipman. On January 13, 1953 cashier Swenson reported to the stockholders that the State Bank of Lehi was in its best financial position ever, with undivided profit and reserved of \$37,749.19. During the meeting bank president Junius West announced that the institution had made application to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation in Washington to build a new bank building. Approval for the structure, which was built at 99 West Main, was granted the following month. The much-expanded facility is now part of the First Security Banking system.

As financial advisor to many, bishop of the Lehi Sixth Ward, president of the Lehi Lions Club, president of the Chamber of Commerce, chairman of the Lehi Hospital Board, and chairman of the Lehi Planning and Zoning Committee, mayor Swenson had developed an intimate acquaintance and understanding of the people of Lehi. "I feel that Lehi is a wonderful community in which to live and rear a family," he announced at the beginning of his campaign. "Much can be done to help the city to grow and develop its business and industrial potential," he continued. "My aim, if elected Mayor, would be for the wise and careful use of public funds for the benefit of the whole community to accelerate the fine progress that Lehi has made in the past."

The tectonic plates of America were shifting during Mayor Swenson's term of office. "The Great Society" was the name Lyndon Johnson gave to his New Deal-like programs, and by 1965 most of them were in effect. Medicare helped

pay the medical bills of citizens over sixty-five. Medicaid provided money to states for covering the medical expenses of the poor of all ages. Johnson also declared a “war on poverty” to assist all Americans who lived below the poverty line. In 1964, Congress passed the Economic Opportunity act and Johnson created the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) to establish more housing for low-and middle-income families.

In the meantime, Lehi officials, under Mayor Swenson’s direction were engaged in upgrading our community with \$500,000 worth of improvements to the city waterworks. New water mains were installed, a new million-gallon storage tank built near the old settling tank on the bench, and more than fifty new fire hydrants placed throughout the city.

In 1968, city crews installed 5,000 feet of used, eight-inch cast iron pipe at the collection system at School House Springs above Alpine. Two years later the city received a \$111,000 Housing and Urban Development water and Sewer Facilities grant. This money, coupled with a \$225,000 water bond approved by voters on October 29, 1968, allowed for vast improvements to the city’s municipal water system. The project’s first phase consisted of developing the Hamongog Springs, higher up the mountain from School House Springs. The second phase consisted of replacing the leaky main line from Alpine to Lehi--which was losing 80 percent of its flow. A new half-million-gallon storage tank was also constructed in the Highland area in the vicinity of Twelfth East.

Mayor Swenson’s administration also instituted the city’s own garbage collection system which came on-line on October 1, 1970, and the closing of the Lehi Dump, an open burn facility which was unable to meet state air pollution standards.

Other highlights during the Swenson years, included the official opening of the John Hutchings Museum on May 8, 1965; the completion of a new \$75,000 postal building (1966); the construction of new restroom facilities at Wines Park (1968); dedication of the Carter Airport on the Lehi Bench (1968); construction by the Lehi Auxiliary Police of an ambulance garage at the Memorial Building; permanent closure of the Lehi City Hospital (1967); and the filming in and about

Lehi of the David Wolper Productions movie, "The Devil's Brigade" (1967).

Few years had as much long-term impact on America as 1968. The year was "pivotal and messy," wrote journalist Lance Murrow, wrought with "deaths of heroes, uprisings, suppressions, the end of dreams, blood in the street of Chicago and Paris and Saigon, and at last, at Christmastime, man for the first time floating around the moon."

On January, the American spyship U.S.S. Pueblo was captured by North Korea. One week later, the Viet Cong launched the massive Tet Offensive in Vietnam which knocked America's military system reeling. President Lyndon B. Johnson announced to startled Americans on March 31st that he would not seek another term, and on April 4th, Martin Luther King, Jr., was gunned down by an assassin in Memphis. Popular presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy was similarly assassinated on June 6th in a Los Angeles Hotel.

The unpopularity of the Vietnam War, in which 145 Lehi men served, reached an all-time high during this tragic year. On college campuses, anti-war rhetoric grew stronger. Protesters joined in huge marches on Washington, arguing that the government was wasting lives and money on an unjust war. The South Vietnamese government, they said, was no better than the Vietcong or the North Vietnamese. And, they argued, American bombs were destroying the country they wanted to save. During the August 26-29 Democratic Convention, TV viewers watched in disbelief as hundreds of war protesters were clubbed and arrested by Chicago policeman.

Nightly, Lehi citizens joined their fellow Americans in watching news broadcasts that depicted the horrors of the war. Body counts-the number of daily war deaths-were reported like sports scores. Villages went up in flames, innocent civilians were maimed or killed. Napalm rained fiery death from the skies, and zippered G.I. body bags were sent stateside by the thousands. Four Lehi men returned that way to be buried in the soil of their hometown. Several others survived serious wounds. Promising an end to the turmoil at home and "peace with honor" in Vietnam, Richard M. Nixon was elected U.S. president on November 5, 1968.

While Mayor Swenson's accomplishments during this epic period of American history are certainly commendable, he does have one regret and that was the failure of a proposition for a city-wide sidewalk, curb and gutter and drainage system.

After serving his term, Mayor Swenson retired to his banking activities, family and church work. In addition to overseeing several expansion projects at the bank, Swenson ultimately became the organization's president and a director. He was also involved with the Jacobs interest in the organizing of several other banks and corporation that became the Deseret Bancorporation. In January, 1982, Mayor Swenson retired from active management of Deseret Bank but remained a director for another five years in a banking career which spanned forty-seven years. During his career, he was active in local, regional and national banking associations, including membership in Executive Committees of the Western Independent Bankers Association and the American Bankers Association. He also served as president of the Utah Bankers Association.

Aside from his professional and civic activities the former mayor has served on the Lehi Stake High Council, a High Priest Group leader, stake Mission President, a member of the Provo Temple presidency and a temple sealer. He and his wife are parents of six children, thirty-five grandchildren, and five great-grandchildren. The former mayor also crafts fine woodwork in his home shop, and has one the best-landscaped yards in Lehi. A Lehi institution, Calvin H. Swenson has truly made his mark on history.