

David Evans, Lehi's Second Mayor

By Richard Van Wagoner

The key person in the settlement of a Mormon village was not the mayor, but the bishop, usually appointed for life by Brigham Young. Because this ecclesiastical position was considered an extension of the prophet's authority, the bishop's word was viewed as law not only on religious issues but on such temporal matters as politics, public work projects, land allotments, water disputes and marital squabbles.

Brigham young, recognizing a man hewn in his own image, sent David Evans to preside over the Saints in this locale. Shortly after Evan's February 15, 1851 arrival, he was appointed bishop of the new Dry Creek Ward by Apostle George A. Smith. David Evans was a remarkable man. Born in Maryland on October 27, 1804, he moved to Pennsylvania and later Ohio, where he was converted to Mormonism in 1833. Seasoned by the famed Zion's Camp march in 1834, Evans was appointed branch president of Crooked River Missouri.

The future Lehi luminary was ordained to the First Quorum of Seventy under the hands of the Prophet Joseph Smith and Sidney Rigdon on April 29, 1835. He attended the Kirtland School of the Prophets during the winter of 1835-36, and left Ohio May 1834 for Caldwell County, Missouri. Many of the Saints traveling with David Evans to Missouri were earlier converted by him. A core group these people, including a branch of my family, later settled with him in Lehi.

On October 30, 1838 Evans was the militia captain of a small group of Saints camped at Haun's Mill, Missouri, when an undisciplined unit of the Missouri Militia attacked the camp. As soon as evans realized what was happening he ran toward the 240 horsemen swinging his hat and crying out "Peace, Peace!" but it was no use. Though he escaped into the woods and was not injured, Evans saw seventeen men and boys cut down by the mob-- an image that was to

haunt him for the remainder of his long life.

During a brief stay in Adams County, Illinois, his first wife died. Evans soon moved to Nauvoo, Illinois, where on August 20, 1842 he was made bishop of the Eleventh Ward. On April 15, 1844 he was among the elders selected to stump for Joseph Smith U.S. presidential campaign. After the Prophet's death, Bishop Evans was appointed an agent for the church to visit, comfort and encourage the Saints to finish the Nauvoo Temple. During the winter of 1846 his family was driven from their home in Nauvoo and settled for three-and-one-half years in Nodaway County, Missouri, before starting for Utah in June 1850.

In addition to serving as Lehi's bishop for twenty-eight years, David Evans was a hostier, the local postmaster, commander of the Lehi militia, a unit of the Nauvoo Legion (Deseret Territorial Militia), and Lehi mayor from 1854 to 1861. According to contemporary Andrew Fjeld, Evans was "very plain and blunt spoken in public", a quality which had "caused many people to dislike him". In a letter to Brigham Young, Evans said: "I am a man of a turbulent disposition and have a continual Warfare with myself". In some cases his irascibility served him well. While addressing Lehi citizens during a May 10, 1859 he warned those who were trying to serve a bench warrant on him that "he was willing to be followed around by marshals, sheriffs, and soldiers... but an apostate must keep off his track, he carried the tools and would use them if apostates attempt to arrest him."

In his capacity as bishop/mayor (it was hard to tell which hat he was sometimes wearing). Evans supervised all public works projects initiated in Lehi's earliest years. These included the construction of the Lehi Ditch, which still conveys irrigation water to town from the American Fork River, the Big Field, the Tithing Office, the Meeting House, the Indian House and all roads in the area.

The largest public works project that Mayor Evans initiated was the massive fortification that enclosed the town. On February 17, 1854 the city council, on Evan's motion, voted to erect an eight-foot high adobe wall surrounding the fort. Before they could begin the project, their plans were changed by the unexpected May 29th arrival of Brigham Young. Governor Young argued for building a larger fort wall than the citizens had envisioned. The fortification was started the

following day in order to take advantage of the storm-dampened soil.

Mayor David Evans, using a pocket compass and a carpenter's square, first directed a surveying of the city at this time. This survey, which included the log fort, resulted in a plat containing sixteen blocks, each twenty rods (330 feet) square, intersected by streets six rods ninety-nine feet) wide. A street was planned to circle the outermost tier inside the wall. It was eight rods wide, excepting the southern street. (Third south) which was only five rods wide.

Building the wall with wooden spades was difficult work. Wooden forms were first put into place. Then a foot of wet clay was tamped between these planks. As the clay began to dry the forms were moved higher and another layer of mud added. To obtain one of the 128 lots inside the for's perimeter, each man in the community was required to build four rods (sixty-six feet) of wall or pay the equivalent--sixty bushels of wheat or \$60.

During the summer and fall of 1854 the wall slowly grew. A Lehi reporter in the August 16, 1854 Deseret News reported that "the wall of our great city...is progressing finely. Three of the four gate posts are already up, and some of the wall is twelve feet high, and we expect to raise the whole of it to eight this season." Ultimately, though the entire was raised to eight feet, Tunis Rappleye was the only man to complete his four rods to their full height.

While guns thundered and men were dying by the thousands on distant Civil War battlefields, Lehi townsmen were preoccupied with expanding city boundaries beyond the fort. Mayor Evans initially opposed growth because of limited water resources. But he later changed his opinion and authorized the surveying of a tier of blocks surrounding the walls. Community growth soon demanded another tier on the north and south and the fort soon became obsolete and its walls pulled down.

Mayor Evan's administration established sever interesting posts including the "Office of Superintendent of Lost and Found", "Poundkeeper," "Sealer of Weights and Measures." and a Board of Examiners" to determine the fitness of applicants for teaching school.

Intriguing ordinances passed during his seven-year tenure included: “An Ordinance Organizing a School District”; “An Ordinance Granting Discretionary Power to Civil Officers with Regard to Costs of Courts in the City of Lehi”; “An Ordinance Creating a Stray Pound and Defining the Duties of Pound Keeper”; An Ordinance for the Safety of the Big Field”; “An Ordinance in Relation to Geese and Ducks”; “An Ordinance in Relation to Fires in the Fort”; “An Ordinance in Relation to Dogs”; “An Ordinance Creating Bylaws for the City Council”; “An Ordinance in Relation to Firing Guns, Shooting Arrows, and Throwing Stones From Slings”; and the inevitable “An Ordinance Ordering an Assessment and Collection of Taxes.”

After Mayor Evan’s retirement from politics in 1861, he continued his activities as Lehi Ward Bishop, served a president of the Lehi Union Exchange, and engaged in the extensive ranching and farming activities still pursued by his numerous descendants in this area. Like most prominent Mormons of the nineteenth-century David Evans was a polygamist. He eventually married seven wives and fathered forty-one children. By 1911, twenty-eight years after his death, the bishop had 208 grandchildren, 317 great-grandchildren, and 73 great-great-grandchildren.

Shortly after suffering an incapacitating stroke, David Evans died on June 23, 1883. On the day of the funeral services a special train was dispatched from Salt Lake City carrying LDS president Wilford Woodruff and many other dignitaries. Woodruff, delivering one of the eulogies in the Lehi Meeting House, praised David Evans’s sterling qualities, “ and commented that “his career was remarkable for his great industry, frugality, and charity to the poor, his public spiritedness and broad self acquired education.” The funeral procession to the Lehi Cemetery consisted of 115 vehicles, a significant tribute to Lehi’s most prominent citizen of the day.

