

Mayor George Leany-32nd Mayor of Lehi 1950-53

By Richard Van Wagoner

During the fall of 1949 in local nominating conventions, two Lehi men became the town's first four-year mayoralty candidates. The Democrats re-nominated incumbent Mayor L. Carlos Coates. The Republicans nominated functioning city councilman George W. Leany. There was no controversial political issue of the day. Both candidates were solid men, committed to improving life in town. There was no mud-slinging during the campaign either. Coates promised that if re-elected he would "conduct a friendly, approachable administration." Leany pledged "the improvement of our cemetery, the betterment of our water system the beautification of our city, the reorganization of our road department, and an economical city government."

When the votes were counted, George Woodburry Leany was declared Lehi's 32nd mayor. Born October 8, 1893 in Harrisburg, Washington County, Utah to Hyrum and Mary Margaret Woodburry Leany, Leany graduated from Dixie High School in 1916. During World War I, he entered the armed services and was assigned to the 148th Field Artillery in the 91st division where he fought in the Meuse-Argonne offensive, one of the war's most heated battles. During a furlough he married Olive Standworth on May 18, 1918.

The Leany family moved from Delta to Lehi in the spring of 1945 to purchase "Goodwin's Golden Rule," a J. C. Penny-like mercantile. When Leany's son Cleon, returned from World War II service, the two men established a partnership to operate the mercantile and the Utah Theatre which stood where the Lehi Drug Store (Pioneer Copy) is today.

Leany Mercantile was located in the 1901-built Ross Block which was destroyed by fire on May 1, 1994. Because this building was linked to the Leany family for nearly half-a-century, I will detail its history for you here.

In the fall of 1900, Lehi postmaster Will Ross and his mother Amanda, my great-grandmother, purchased this property from Henry Jocy. By Late December of that year excavation work was progressing. The limestone foundation was done by late June 1901, and by Christmas the building opened for business.

Will Ross moved the post office into the east portion of the building. T.J. Wadsworth then established his drugstore immediately west, while the third section of the structure, an additional door west, became the new facilities of Ross & Ross mercantile, comprised of proprietors Ed Ross and his father J. Edgar Ross, my great-grandfather. The second story consisting of office suites for the Lehi Commercial Club, and eventually the American Legion, was converted into apartments in 1949.

Since 1901, the west portion (86 West Main) was continuously occupied by six mercantiles: Ross & Ross, Lehi Cas Store, Watson Mercantile, Paltridge Mercantile, Goodwin's Golden Rule, and Leany's. From 1901 to 1949 the east cubicle (80 West Main) was the Lehi Post Office. The middle section (82 West Main) had seen the greatest variety of tenants including Wadsworth's Drug Store (1901-06) and the State Bank of Lehi (1906-19). In the 1920s, it was converted into a dentist office for Dr. Harold Christensen. It was then successively occupied by two other dentists, Dr. J. G. Jones and Dr. Will Worlton. Sam Goodwin converted wuite into a ladies department in 1938. The in 1944 Alex Jameson established the Lehi Bakery there. When Jameson built his own bakery building at 35 West Main in 1946 (The Bridal Shop today), Leany's expanded into the area vacated by the bakery.

For a six-month period in 1952, Leany's became Allred's. Leslie Allred purchased the mercantile from Mayor Leany in January. The July 24, 1952 "Lehi Free Press" announced that Leany had repurchased it from Allred. Cleon Leany took over management of the store in late 1953 and built up a large appliance business (featuring Frigidaire) while managing the Utah Theater at night.

In January 1963 Cleon and Relva Leany purchased the Ross Block (which had been leased from the Hewitt Strong family) and initiated an extensive renovation and modernization project under the direction of Local contractor Alma

Peterson. A new exterior on the south facing was built of white etruscan brick and blue and silver plate glass panels. The interior partition that had divided the two west compartments was removed, making one large, open salon. While the construction project was taking place, Leany's temporarily moved to 189 West Main, which had recently been vacated by Hutch's

Saturday, July 13, 1963, was the Grand Opening of Leany's new store. In addition to the appliance business (television, vacuums, sewing machines), Cleon and his wife Relva offered men's, women's and children's clothing and an extensive line of shoes. Dry goods were still offered as well as many other sundry items.

The mercantile world is a constantly changing, dynamic environment. merchant's must make adjustments to retain business. In the late 1970's, Cleon Leany went so far as to give his store new name by changing the spelling of his surname to Laney. He also discontinued his appliance, dry goods, and shoe departments. Emphasis was then placed on electronic entertainment including stereos and televisions. Women's and young ladies' fashions expanded into the former men's wear and shoe departments. An extensive video cassette rental department featuring hundreds of movies, was later added, and in 1988 a drop-off station for dry-cleaning needs was offered by the store.

In mid-May 1989 Cleon and Relva Laney announced that after nearly forty-three years in business, they were going to retire, "relax and enjoy life to its fullest." Until July they regularly slashed prices until virtually all their clothing items were sold. The video and Nintendo business was sold to Tom and Clayton Kearly of Sandy who opened Fun Fever in the Laney building. The Kearly's business was not successful, however, and in October 1989, Cleon Laney reopened for business under the new name Laney's Circus Video which was ultimately managed by his son Gary.

At the time of the May 1 holocaust, the Leany building was being leased by Milton Maldonado who had established take One Video and Pizza on the premises. Future plans for the ravaged site have yet to be announced.

Mayor Leany had begun his political service in Leas as a City Councilman with Mayor Daryl Fowler and L. Carlos Coates. During his mayorship, he was instrumental in establishing city-wide drainage districts which lowered the town's water table in preparation for installation of the sewer system. During 1951, the city replaced the old cement posts of the "white way" with new aluminum light standards.

Mayor Lean was also in office during the Korean War. One hundred twenty-one local men served, and one, James E. Gaisford was killed in action. In 1952, newly elected President Dwight D. Eisenhower ended the Korean War quickly, but a chilling cold War and Arms Race between the United States and the Soviet Union ensued. Fear of Russian subversion and potential atomic attack permeated American society. Lehi's Civilian Defense was reorganized under Mayor Leany's direction, and citizens were encouraged to maintain a two-week supply of food, water, medical supplies and other emergency necessities. Basement rooms in many Lehi homes were converted into bomb shelters, and elementary school children practiced huddling under their desks in mock air-raid drills.

Though the Russians kept their distance during the Leany administration, Americans in the early 1950s were bombarded by two powerful new influences--television and rock 'n' roll music. In 1946 only 17,000 television sets existed in the country, but in the 1950s TV sales rose to nearly 7,000,000 a year. The new device brought news, sports, and entertainment into people's homes on a daily basis. During the election years of 1952 and 1956, when Dwight D. Eisenhower won by landslide margins, Lehi citizens joined millions of Americans in watching the events on TV.

Television brought to life a new set of personalities. Every week 20,000,000 teenagers saw and heard rock 'n' roll stars sing their latest hits on Dick Clark's "American Bandstand". Children enjoyed "Howdy Doody", "Lassie", and "Roy Rogers and Dale Evans" While their parents watched "The Ed Sullivan Show", "Our Hit Parade", and the "I Love Lucy" show.

In early 1953 the State Bank of Lehi announced plans for a new \$80,000 building on the site of the original New West School at 99 West Main. Orlin

Wathen moved his Modern Shoe Repair to larger quarters at 36 West Main, a building previously occupied by the National guard, and Hugh Otterson opened the Gateway furniture store in the Racker Building at 189 West Main. Cleon Leany became manager of Leany's store, and also re-opened the Utah Theatre with the first-run feature "Mississippi Gambler" starring Tyrone Power.

Accommodating the new rage of television, Rex Losee and Jack Barnes both opened sales and repair shops on Main Street. Cloyd Penrod opened a new toyland next door to his variety store. On State Street Brent Mackay opened a new Arctic Circle in the former Utoco Service station, and Bill Haase purchased Ralph's Cafe at 198 East and reopened it as the Lehi Drive-In.

When Mayor Leany retired from the political scene in early 1954, he devoted his energies to his family, the Lehi Beautification Committee, the Hutchings Museum and his real estate work with Utah Valley Realty. The former mayor died on September 7, 1974 and was buried in the Lehi City Cemetery where he had expanded so much of his energy as part of his long-term efforts to beautify Lehi.