

Mayor Joseph S. Broadbent
24th Mayor of Lehi
1922-1927
By Richard Van Wagoner

The 1920's brought prosperity to most Lehi citizens as well as Americans across the country. People called it the "Coolidge prosperity" in honor of the U.S. president. Lehi's mayor during most of this decade was Joseph S. Broadbent. Interestingly, former city councilman Broadbent's name was not among the likely candidates for office mentioned in the September 22, 1921 "Lehi Sun". The talk of the town was postmaster Joseph Anderson, G. S. Peterson, George G. Robinson, Dr. Fred Worlton, former mayors Sydney Gilchrist and W. E. Racker, and the incumbent, James H. Gardner.

When citizens met in a joint nominating caucus in the Lehi Tabernacle on October 1, Mayor Gardner was renominated by the Citizens party. The Republicans first put forth the names of Sydney Gilchrist, Dr. Fred Worlton and Bishop Henry Lewis, all of whom declined the nomination. Prominent merchant and long-term chairman of the Lehi Old Folks Committee, Joseph S. Broadbent was then named, and graciously accepted the commission.

Battlelines for the local election were drawn up by Citizens party leader S.W. Ross who introduced the following proclamation: Resolved that we pledge the Citizens party to a reduction of the City tax levy and to conservative administration of City affairs during the next two years. That we pledge our candidates to a policy of giving all public work to Lehi citizens and getting the City gradually out of debt.

The controversy over the increased tax levy was generated by the construction of the Lehi Soldiers', Sailors' and Marines' Memorial Building then partially completed. An anonymous letter from "Taxpayer" in the October 20, 1921 "Lehi Sun" accused the actions of city officials on the matter as "bordering on the criminal at least to be tainted with a mild form of insanity." "Give us bread

to eat not stones,” fumed the irrate citizen, “and substance for support not a shadow, to the end that our obligations may be met and liquidated and our tax burden lightened and the true administration of our municipal affairs.”

City councilman W. A. Knight, responding to the letter with a blistering attack, closed with the sardonic comment: “Now, Mr. Taxpayer, of course you were at the primaries and helped to select a least one of the present tickets. Why did you not aspire as an honest, sane citizen to the office of Mayor that we may have the benefit of your superior business ability. For if you can give us “Bread (without the dough) instead of stones,” I should have been most pleased to vote for you.”

Taxpayer, writing again, called Knight “Mr. man of many political contortions, “ before setting forth his own Republican agenda. “My mind is made up,” the writer closed, “that the thing to do is take a mental picture of my tax notice to the polls and vote for the men who say we believe taxes can be reduced and who offer us some assurance that if elected there will be a decrease in the levy.”

Evidently Lehi voters did precisely that. Councilman Knight and his fellow Citizens party candidates were soundly defeated. Mayor Broadbent welcomed into the winner’s circle council members Sydney Gilchrist, LeRoy Davis, J.N. Buttm and Charles Colledge. A.F. Gaisford, Jr. became the new city recorder, and Martha Ball the new treasurer. They were joined by marshal Alex D. Christofferson, justice James Brown, Sr., and attorney William Asher.

Joseph Samuel Broadbent was the second child in a family of eight children born to Joseph and Sarah Dixon Broadbent. Born in Lehi on November 3, 1863, Broadbent never lived more than a block from the spot on which he was born, excepting the years he spent in England as a Mormon missionary.

His boyhood was spent toiling on the family farmstead and pursuing his passionate interest in music. For many years he sang in the local Lehi Ward choir under the leadership of John L. Gibb. An avid member of several male glee clubs, Broadbent sang with the Isaac Fox choral group which won first prize in an 1894 county-wide contest.

In 1882, Sarah Broadbent suggested to her husband and nineteen year-old son that the family open a small mercantile. Accordingly, they built a fifteen-by-thirty-foot wooden room on the north end of their adobe home (the northeast corner of First North and First East). In addition to watch repair and jewelry work Broadbent and Son carried a small line of merchandise, furniture, and Sarah Broadbent's homemade work clothing.

The Broadbent's industriousness brought them immediate success. In the mid-1880s they more than doubled the size of their place by building a second wooden addition on the north of the original store. They then maintained two departments: dry goods and grocery.

Lehi's economy experienced a dramatic upsurge in the 1890s because of the local sugar factory. People had cash money to spend. Broadbent's sought to capitalize on this commercial windfall by expanding their business. The July 7, 1892 "Lehi Banner" announced that Broadbent and Son were hauling brick from M.& B. Co.'s yard at Lehi Junction "preparatory to beginning a new building." This two-story structure, with tastefully arched windows and flagpole atop the roof, remains the heart of Broadbent's store today.

In addition to their mercantile and photography business, Broadbent's also established the Lehi Floral. On Christmas Day, 1910 Joseph s. Went to John Winn's home (141 West Second South) to purchase a table bouquet. The discouraged florist lamented that his heating system had failed during the night and all his flowers were frozen. He agreed to sell his business to Broadbent for \$50. The following spring the enterprising merchant built a small greenhouse at 235 North First East. Under the management of Broadbent's wife Annie and later his sons John and Alvin, this business eventually expanded to four greenhouses with 35,000 feet of floor space and 7,500 square feet of glass.

Mayor Joseph S. Broadbent's three-term administration was highlighted by the completion of the Lehi Memorial Building, our town's most historic public building, presently being renovated to house the Hutchings Museum. Broadbent, as a city councilman, had been involved with the Memorial Building project from

its inception. Dedication services for the \$55,000 center, the first municipal facility in American erected to the memory of World War I veterans, were held on Memorial Day, May 31, 1926.

The most controversial project of Mayor Broadbent's administration was the implementation of a local power generating plant. In June 1925, the mayor was notified by the Utah Power and Light Company that the rate of each of Lehi's 183 street lightw was going to be tripled from 90 cents to \$3 per month. The city council voted instead to develop its own municipal works. After examining several facilities elsewhere, city officials recommended during a June 12, 1926 mass meeting that a special bond election be held to undertake the project.

The \$18,500 bond was approved by citizens on June 15, 1926, the same day that city workers removed all 183 light bulbs from the Utah Power and Light sockets to avoid the rate increase. For the next twelve months the town's streets were dark at night.

Lehi's power plant, the first municipal facility in Utah to use diesel generators, still stands near the Denver Rio Grande and former Orem Interurban tracks at Third North and Fifth West. Though a railroad tanker car filled with eight thousand gallons of fuel arrived on January 11, 1927, the plant did not officially open until 15 June. On that night the city sponsored a "White Way Celebration" to unveil the Main and State lights which were mounted atop attractive prefabricated cement standards.

After initiating a test case before the Utah Supreme Court, which affirmed that Lehi's municipal power plant was legal, the city commenced expanding its generating capability to provide residential electricity. Eighty percent of Lehi homes had signed up for this power by the fall of 1929, and the municipality remained in the power-generating business until 1946. It was then determined, during Mayor Dean Prior's administration, that the Lehi plant was in need of extensive repairs and expensive upgrading. Service was becoming faulty and operating costs were dramatically escalating. The city council voted to trade Lehi's generating equipment to Utah Power and light, and the city again began purchasing power from that company and distributing it to citizens over the

municipality's lines.

Former Mayor Joseph S. Broadbent died on February 4, 1937. He had married Amanda Tweede in 1899. After her death six years later he married Annie Shaw. The father of thirteen children including present residents Edith Haws, John and Alvin Broadbent. Broadbent was also grandfather of current Lehi city councilman Knollin Haws.