

Mayor Kenneth Blaine Singleton-38th Mayor of Lehi 1978-1981

By Richard Van Wagoner

During local nominating conventions in the fall of 1977, Mayor Evan Colledge was renominated along with city councilwoman JoAnn Brown, and political newcomer Carl (Blackie) Harris. The Progressive Party (formerly Republican) listed as their slate: Mayoralty candidate K. Blaine Singleton, and council hopefuls Arnold Pope and Mary Price. Mayoralty candidate Julian Mercer ran as an independent.

When the votes were counted at the conclusion of the low-key election the winners were: Singleton, Brown and Pope. The new mayor was born in American Fork to Kenneth D. and Edith Goates Singleton. He spent his early years in the metropolis to the east before moving to Lehi in 1946. Blaine graduated from Lehi High School in the Class of 1947. His description, penned by some long-forgotten editor, pronounced the future mayor “Sure footed as a centipede,” a prophetic reference to his subsequent political activities no doubt.

Following his high school graduation he attended college at Southern Utah University, the University of Utah, and Brigham Young University where he majored in chemistry. From 1950-52, during the Korean War, he served with the U.S. Army in Germany. After his discharge from the service he joined the Utah Army National Guard in 1953. He served with distinction in various command positions until his release in 1966.

In 1953, Blaine married Doris Roberts. They subsequently became the parents of three daughters. From 1953 until 1959, he was employed at Geneva Steel. He then obtained employment with UNISYS Corporation (formerly Sperry Rand). He remained there as an Engineering Managers until his retirement in 1991.

Prior to his election as mayor, Singleton had served on the local Board of

Adjustments and was a member of the Planning and Zoning Commission. He had also received two community service awards from Lehi City Corporation in 1985 and 1986. He promised citizens that if elected, “all I can offer is my experience, management, and planning experience and lots of hard work and dedication.” He delivered on that commitment by leading Lehi through a rather tumultuous period of history.

During Mayor Singleton’s administration, Larry and Sue Ellen Baum opened the Broadcaster Restaurant at 102 West Main in February 1978. This business, in a new building on the former sites of the Hardy Confectionery and Penny’s specialized in sandwiches and takeout foods. The following month the old Wattie’s Cafe building at 150 West Main was remodeled into office space by owner Mike Tracy. Near the end of the year the mayor received word that the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation had granted Lehi a \$300,000 grant for the construction of a swimming pool.

In a surprise 28 December 1978 announcement, “Lehi Free Press” publisher E. Russell Innes noted that he had sold both the “Free Press” and the “American Fork Citizen” to Newtah, Inc., a new Utah Corporation headed by Mike Stansfield. Innes, who had been in the newspaper business for forty-four years, died shortly after the transaction took place.

In early 1979, Lehi City officials announced plans to purchase the old LDS Fifth Ward Building at 95 East and First North. Eventually the city offices were moved into part of the basement and the Senior Citizen remodeled the old kitchen and Relief Society areas into a center for their organization. The former chapel area was remodeled into the city council chambers and the old cultural hall wing on the north was used for a multi-purpose area.

Guy and Mary Ellen Cash purchase Lehi’s Western Auto Store from Wilson Hayward in February 1979. This building at 2 West Main had housed more than a dozen grocery and hardware stores since 1910. During April, the Waterbed Store opened in one of the suites at 130 West Main, and the extensive Trinnaman Lane Sewer Project neared completion in the northwest section of town. March headlines included the news that Lehi and Cedar Fort had received federal grants

of \$363,000 for waterline and storm drainage improvements and housing rehabilitation.

In May the new two-story Orlin Wathen mini-mall at Third West and Main was completed. The facility contained several apartments on the second story, with the main floor consisting of commercial suites. The first businesses to locate in this complex were Walker's Electronics, owned by Perry, Terry, and Dale Walker; Ace Lunch owned by Max and Olive Larson; and a laundromat.

In July 1979, a \$100,000 fire destroyed the Lehi Floral at 235 North First East. The business was rebuilt by Melvin and Jessie Hartshorn, however, and later sold to Richard and Lynn Merrill. Fire also destroyed the Lehi Cereal Mill at Third North and Fifth West on 2 August 1979. This picturesque structure, which had been constructed for the Lehi Cannery in 1914, was never rebuilt. The property was purchased by Lehi City during Mayor Singleton's administration, and it is now used for storing city equipment.

In October, the city requested bids on Lehi's olympic-size swimming pool. The giant \$660,000 heated pool, designed by architect Eric Sandstrom, was 187 feet long and 75 feet wide. In addition to a diving area, wading pool and wheelchair ramp, the facility included both men's and women's dressing rooms, a snack bar, and well-groomed grounds.

City officials under Mayor Singleton's supervision ushered Lehi into the decade of the 1980's by purchasing a large Burroughs B-91 computer for \$39,700. This system, which went on-line in April, was used for utility billings, budget reports, payroll, inventory, purchase order, and to serve as a check register. Lehi citizens had another banking option in March 1980 when Wasatch Bank opened at 620 East Main.

The early 1980s were difficult financial years for Lehi. Inflation escalated, and the high interest rates made it difficult for the town to sell its municipal bonds. Several city employees were terminated and vacant positions left unfilled. By mid-decade the economic pressures were greatly relieved.

On Saturday, 7 June 1980, the long-awaited Lehi Swimming Pool opened to the public. centrally located and beautifully designed, the facility quickly became the place to be during sultry, summery days.

Lehi's new electrical sub-station was completed north of the Lehi Block Plant in 1980. This new facility, in connection with the town's other sub-station north of the Rodeo Grounds on Fifth West, provides 12,470 volts of power. Lehi electricity is purchased from the Intermountain Consumer Power Association, and conveyed over Utah Power and Light lines to Lehi's sub-stations.

The State Bank of Lehi began construction of a large new 5,600 square-foot office complex addition onto the south of its building in the spring of 1981. Ribbon-cutting ceremonies held in July marked the seventieth anniversary of this Lehi institution.

The most controversial news story during 1981 involved city government. On July 20, Lehi City Recorder John Daly was indicted on charges of theft of city funds, a third-degree felony. Daly allegedly had purchased \$492.22 worth of tires for his own use with city funds. The Lehi Police Department, under Chief Berl Peterson, initiated investigation in mid-June. Peterson informed city officials of the situation on July 16, whereupon Mayor Singleton immediately issued a gag order, prohibiting city employees from discussing the case with the press. He also convened an emergency session of the city council on July 18.

The first action taken by officials was to demand Daly's resignation. In a July 28 interview with a "Lehi Free Press" reporter, Mayor Singleton intimated that the city council was angry that they had not been informed earlier of the investigation. "I think I can safely say the council is very displeased," Singleton said: "I am very displeased. We should certainly have been notified, maybe not when the investigation was started but certainly when the police chief was notified." On August 17, Singleton demanded Peterson's resignation. When Peterson--who had been chief for eighteen years--refused he was suspended by the mayor.

The controversy broiled for several weeks. During highly charged city

council meetings supporters of Chief Peterson were outraged that he was suspended without due process. The city council stood firm, refusing to provide an official reason for its action other than to declare it was empowered to terminate employees “without cause.” A new chief, William Gibbs, our current mayor was eventually hired, and Peterson remained with the department as a patrolman until his 1988 retirement. Meanwhile charges against John Daly, the source of the contention to begin with, were dropped by the Utah County Attorney’s Office in October 1981. “In the interest of justice, “ Deputy County Attorney Jay Pitt explained,

“it wouldn’t be fair to prosecute him when other city employees do the same things and ought to be chastened for the same behavior. We have discovered that it’s not uncommon in smaller municipalities that city employees buy items through the city in order to receive a discount and to avoid paying sales tax. it wouldn’t be fair to make John a scapegoat for doing the same things many other city officials are doing.”

During the 1980-81 school year, the “year of champions,” Lehi High School accomplished the near-impossible by winning four state athletic titles, including football (defeating Morgan 7-6) basketball (defeating Manti 66-60), track and baseball. This highly skilled group of athletes also took second place in wrestling.

When the jostling for local political offices began in the fall of 1981, mayor Singleton chose not to run for a second term. He continued to work with UNISYS for another decade before retiring to a well-earned quiet life in Lehi. Retrospectively Mayor Singleton’s term was well-served and progressive. Dedicated men like him, possessing a strong sense of community, are the bedrock of American Democracy. Small towns like Lehi can truly be grateful for men of the stature of Blaine Singleton.