

22nd Mayor of Lehi-Mayor Sydney Gilchrist 1918-1920

By Richard Van Wagoner

The new slate of Lehi City officials elected in November, 1917, including Mayor Sydney Gilchrist, Joseph S. Broadbent, J.E. Cotter, Leo W. Goates, Morgan S. Lott and James W. Holden (councilmen); A.L. Yates (recorder), Herbert Taylor (treasurer); Thomas W. Jones (marshal); and David J. Thurman (justice).

Mayor Gilchrist, second son of Robert Taylor and Mary Jane Willes Gilchrist, was born at Lehi on August 2, 1876. His early years were spent working with his father as a carpenter's assistant, during which time he helped construct the Lehi Sugar Factory. His education was obtained in the New West Academy, a private school situated where the Lehi Post Office now is.

In 1896, Gilchrist became a clerk at the People's Co-op on State Street, working under superintendent William E. Racker. Two years later he married Ione Rachel Thurman. They became the parents of six children.

For three decades Sydney obtained a wide variety of experience at the Co-op, eventually succeeding S.I. Goodwin as manager of the hardware and furniture department. In the spring of 1926, Gilchrist established his own firm, Gilchrist Hardware, in the quarters of the defunct Winchester Store on Main Street (west half of Colonial House today).

Sydney's civic interests were broad. In addition to being a member of the Lehi Volunteer Fire Department, he was appointed to Lehi's first library board in 1917. A charter member of the Lions Club and an active member of the Municipal League, the state organization of city officials, Gilchrist was a leader in the efforts to construct Deer Creek Reservoir. During the early years of World War I, he assisted with many local war drive committees and unbeknown to most local citizens, also served as a special agent for the United States government.

Foremost among the responsibilities of his first term as mayor was dealing with the effects of the war, which has swept up 214 of Lehi's finest young men. On November 11, 1918, at 11:00 A.M.--the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month--the guns fell silent. The war was over. American casualties were 112,000 dead and 237,000 wounded. Returning soldiers were welcomed home by jubilant townspeople. Lehi's vets were paraded about town and feted at a 'welcome home celebration' in the Tabernacle, and a permanent memorial in their honor was deemed appropriate.

During a December 17, 1918, city council meeting, a "Sailors' and Soldiers' Memorial Building Committee" was appointed. The combined efforts of virtually the entire community resulted in the 1926 completion of the first municipal building in the United States to be erected in memory of World War I veterans. The Spanish-mission-styled center included not only a memorial hall, but also a Carnegie Library, and city hall.

Other accomplishments during Mayor Gilchrist's first term included the naming of all city streets and providing each residence with an address prior to the inauguration home mail delivery. Previous to this time all patrons picked up their mail directly from the post office. Another accomplishment during the administration was the initial paving of State Street through Lehi City limits by the Utah State Road Commission.

Perhaps the greatest challenge of Mayor Gilchrist's first term was the catastrophic influenza epidemic, spread through the world by returning servicemen. Many Lehi citizens and more than 500,000 nationwide died from this horrid malady. Louise V. Turner, who expired May 5, 1916 was the town's first flu death. Another victim died in 1917, but during the final three months of 1918, thirty-three people (1 percent of Lehi's population) succumbed to the disease. The "Lehi Sun" ceased publication for two weeks in October 1918 and virtually all businesses were closed during this period. Lehi schools closed during this time and did not re-open until February 1919.

Mayor Gilchrist's second term did not begin until 1928; two other mayors, James H. Gardner and Joseph S. Broadbent, were elected in the interim period.

During this second term officials who served with Mayor Gilchrist included Edward J. Larsen, Isaac W. Fox, A. D. Christoferson, George S. Peterson, and LeRoy E. Lott (councilors): J.O. Meiling (recorder), Martha Ball (treasurer); G.A. Wall (justice), A.V. Watkins (attorney) and E.H. Fowler (marshal).

In August 1929 plans for a large athletic field in the heart of Lehi were jointly announced by the Lehi Lions Club, Lehi City, and Alpine School District. Laid out just west of the Memorial Building, the project necessitated the closing of First North street between Center and First West. May 1 was declared a city holiday and several old pioneer homes and the city jail were demolished.

This was also the year that natural gas came to Utah when it was piped three hundred miles from the Baxter Basin of Wyoming by a consortium of companies known as Western Public Service Corp. Western had three subsidiaries: Mountain Fuel Supply Company (production), Uintah Pipeline Company (transmission), and Wasatch Gas Company (transmission and distribution). In 1930 Wasatch Gas Company was granted a franchise in Lehi to replace Utah Valley Gas and Coke Company. This latter organization had earlier been given a franchise during the administration of Mayor Joseph S. Broadbent, but had defaulted.

Disaster far beyond the control of Mayor Gilchrist or anyone else befell Lehi in the fall of 1929 as the shadow of the Great Depression fell across the world. The troubled times began in October 1929, when stock values plunged dramatically. Thousands of investors lost vast sums of money. Banks, factories and stores closed, leaving millions of Americans penniless and jobless. Until 1942, the country and most of the world remained in the worst and longest period of high unemployment and low business productivity in modern times.

On October 16, 1930 Frank Gaisford, publisher of the "Lehi Sun" announced that it had become necessary to move the firm's presses and linotype machine to the 'center of the ... north end of Utah county (American Fork), Gaisford tried to lessen the impact of this decision by reassuring his Lehi subscribers that the "Sun's "readers will receive a strictly Lehi paper each Thursday morning."

Prominent Lehi citizens, irked that their hometown paper was being published "in A.F.," sought to bring another newspaper to town. Mayor Gilchrist, his good friend S. I. Goodwin, and Stan Goodwin drove to northern Utah in mid-December 1930, to examine the possibility of purchasing a newspaper facility and moving it to Lehi. En route home, while traveling between Garland and Brigham City, the driver attempted to pass a load of hay and skidded the car into a ditch.

While the Goodwins were uninjured, Mayor Gilchrist struck his head during the accident. He was taken to the Brigham City hospital where the wound was stitched up, and the three men returned to Lehi.

Unfortunately, Mayor Gilchrist had also suffered internal injuries. When local treatment failed to rectify the problem he was rushed to Salt Lake City for surgery, but died shortly thereafter, on January 23, 1931.

His funeral services, held in the Lehi Tabernacle on January 27, were one of the largest memorial services in the town's history. Citizens, business associates and friends from every part of the state packed the building. Lehi city officials and the Lehi Lions Club attended in a body. Members of the city council served as his pallbearers.

Mayor Gilchrist was the first Lehi mayor to die in office. To honor him, the Lehi City Council, in a pioneer practice seldom seen anymore, prepared a "Preambles and Resolution of Respect." The memorial, read at the funeral by Hugh Otterson, was later framed and delivered to his widow.

The "Lehi Sun" eulogy, published on January 29, 1931, is a fitting closing reflection today. "His passing grieves an entire community, "began the homage,

"for his service to his city and its citizens had brought him close to the hearts of his friends in every walk of life. He was a character, honored and respected by everyone who came in contact with him. His every act was one of uprightness and honor and both as an individual and a civic way his business dealings were honest and above reproach. It's wish bowed head that we, each every one, pay final tribute to this public servant who has so freely given of his time and knowledge for the good of his city and fellow townsmen.

