

Lehi Hospital

by Richard Van Wagoner

In addition to being a bank, a hospital, a funeral parlor, and a garage, the former building at 206 East State was home to nearly a dozen other businesses, which included Utah Sugar Company offices (1891-92, 1895-97), Lehi Leaching works, (1892), Deseret Telegraph Company (1893), Mosiah Evans-Rotary Republic (1894), A.O.U.W. Lodge Room (1895) A.J. Evans Attorney (1905), Lehi Commercial Club (1905-11), Union Pacific Offices (1973), Ray Baldwin Photography (1975) and Studio Five (1986-87).

The facility also had a large ballroom in the main floor where scores of social functions were held in earlier days. The Lehi Fourth Ward met in the building for years while their chapel was being completed. In 1917 and again in 1919 a serious classroom shortage hit Lehi, and an upstairs room of the bank building was used for school.

For those of my generation, many of whom were born in the building, the structure is best remembered as the Lehi Hospital. In 1925, the year he served as president of the Utah County Medical Society, Dr. Fred Worlton purchased the former Lehi Commercial and Savings Bank Building and remodeled the upper floor into a hospital.

During 1928, more than 150 patients received medical or surgical treatment in the Lehi Hospital. The following year Dr. Worlton remodeled the building to fully utilize the ground floor. When completed the fourteen-bed hospital boasted-in addition to an operating room-a bathroom, reception room, and kitchen. Unfortunately Dr. Worlton lived only three more years to enjoy the upgraded hospital. While duck hunting in Ogden on 22 October 1931, he suffered a heart attack and died.

Dr. Elmo Eddington born in Morgan, Utah, 19 March, 1895, served in the medical corps of the U.S. Navy during World War I. After the war, he enrolled in the university of Pennsylvania Medical School, receiving his M.D. in 1924. Upon completing his internship at St. Francis Hospital in Pittsburgh, he passed the Illinois state board examination and opened a practice in Chicago.

It was here that he received a phone call from his brother that would bring him to Lehi. While driving along State Street Eddington's brother had hit a small boy riding a bicycle. He rushed the slightly injured lad to the hospital, where he learned that Dr. Fred Worlton had recently died. Eddington phoned his brother in Chicago, told him of the circumstances, and within a month Dr. Eddington had relocated to Lehi, purchased the hospital from Dr. Worlton's widow and established his living quarters and office in the facility.

Business in the early years of the Depression was very slow for Dr. Eddington. "I waited and waited for days," he later remembered, "and not one patient showed up." One day he saw a man coming across State Street and he thought, "Hurray, I have my first patient." Actually the man's cow was sick with milk fever. But once the doctor demonstrated his skills with this udder patient his practice began to grow.

Many townspeople did not like to visit the doctor at his hospital office, so Dr. Eddington began making home calls to enhance his practice. One day during a fierce blizzard he made eight home visits, for which he received just \$3. Depression prices for tonsillectomies were \$15, and maternity care was only \$35.

Despite the financial difficulties of the 1930s, Dr. Eddington desired an upgrading of the hospital. Federal grants required that a building be owned by a municipality before awarding WPA funds. Accordingly Dr. Eddington deeded the Lehi Hospital to the city in 1937, after which a \$14,000 grant allowed the facility to be remodeled into an eighteen-bed hospital.

Construction work, under the direction of W.W. Dickerson began on 1 July 1937. The landmark dome top the old bank building was removed and the exterior brick walls stuccoed. The eastern portion of the ground floor was remodeled into a waiting room, a rest room, a nursery, a delivery room, an emergency operating room, x-ray facility, and kitchen and dining rooms. The west portion of this floor became the business offices. Dr. Eddington's office, his reception area, and three examination rooms.

The upper story consisted of private and semi-private patient rooms, an operating room, labor room, shower, bathrooms, nurses offices, nurses bedroom and closets. In addition to central heating and air conditioning, a water-powered elevator was added to the building's south side.

Dr. Boyd Larsen, who saw patients in the hospital for nearly thirty years, remembered, "the elevator rose slowly going to the second floor, but moved more quickly when descending. " Unfortunately the labor room was on the second floor while the birthing room was on the first floor. " If the water pressure in the system was low," Dr. Larsen recalls, "the transfer to the delivery room was a close race." This system was converted to a hydraulic one in 1956.

In 1940, Lehi City established a hospital board consisting of W.A. Anderson, Virgil Peterson, E. B. Garrett, Sadie Russon, Essie Worlton, Joseph E. Smith, E.N. Webb, William Hadfield, and Dr. Eddington. In early 1942, the hospital, which had been leased and operated by Dr. Eddington since 1937, came under the control of the Hospital Board. Most of the business management during this time was assumed by Head Nurse Ethel Ball.

In April 1948, however, businessman George S. Peterson, married to Dr. Fred Worlton's widow, was appointed hospital manager. Though Dr. Eddington still maintained an office in the hospital, other physicians who attended patients there included Dr. Boyd Larsen and American Fork doctors Guy S. Richards, and Kenneth Noyes.

Dr. Boyd Larsen, who grew up working in his father's Main Street Grocery store, was the second Lehi-born physician after Dr. Fred Worlton to achieve acclaim in local medical and civic circles (both served with distinction on the Alpine School Board). When he returned from an LDS mission to Denmark in 1937, Larsen married his high school sweetheart Roberta Ball. She was working in Dr. Eddington's office at that time. Enrolling in the physical science program at Brigham Young University, young Larsen first intended to forge a career in physics.

Fortunately for thousands of Lehi Citizens who have benefited from his compassionate medical care (including the approximately three thousand persons he has attended at birth), he changed his major to zoology. In the fall of 1940, he entered the University of Utah School of Medicine. "Anatomy was like studying a foreign language", he later wrote: "pathology was worse, physiology and biochemistry were equally difficult." But the ambitious student, anxious to pass his future exams, quit his weekend job in Larsen Brother's Market and lowered his nose to the grindstone.

Successfully completing the two-year Utah program in the midst of World War II, Larsen packed his bags and moved with his wife to St. Louis, Missouri. There he entered Washington University School of Medicine. Much of his clinical work was in the St. Louis City Hospital where, in addition to the usual medical fare, he attended many births. The maternity unit was on the eleventh floor. The elevator ascent was long and tedious and many young Missourians entered this world on that slow ride.

After graduation in December 1943, Dr. Larsen began his internship at the Salt Lake General Hospital and then served as a medical officer in the U.S. Navy until July 1945. He returned to Lehi in the spring of 1946 and filled in for Dr. Eddington, who went on an extended vacation. On 1 July, 1946, he was hired as company physician for the Geneva Works of U.S. Steel. Thirteen years later he was appointed Medical Director of the Utah operations--a position he would retain until his retirement in 1980.

In addition to his work at the steel plant dispensary, Dr. Larsen maintained a private practice in Lehi. Initially he established an office in November 1946 above Dean Danico's Deluxe Shoe Repair (116 West Main). But within a year or two, he moved to the former post office building at 80 West Main (Laney's in 1921).

In 1954 Dr. Larsen and his wife Roberta, who served as an office nurse for his thirty-four years of private practice, built a new home at 700 North Center in Lehi. The family residence was on the upper story, while the lower floor was the medical office. His patients were admitted to the Lehi Hospital, where his major surgical cases were attended by Dr. Martin C. Lindene, a board certified surgeon (from Salt Lake City).

Widespread citizen support for contracting a new Lehi Hospital manifested itself in the early 1950s during the administration of Mayor George W. Leany. During a 21 March 1951 meeting attended by civic, club, church, and business representatives, Dr. Eddington outlined three alternatives. The present building could be remodeled, though he felt this would be difficult and impractical. The citizens could "roll up our sleeves and build a new one." Or the hospital could be closed and citizens sent elsewhere for their hospitalization.

A six-man committee consisting of John Broadbent (chairman), George T. Strasburg, John W. Zimmerman, Lee College, Miron Fowler and Wane Christensen was appointed in early 1952 to spearhead the drive for a new hospital. Property was ultimately purchased on the northwest corner of Fourth East and Second South (present site of the Lehi Swimming Pool).

Though a new Lehi Hospital was never realized, the old facility provided yeoman service to the community until 1967. In early 1952, T. F. Kirkham was appointed hospital manager. When he became City Clerk in July of that year, N. LaVell Jorgenson was appointed hospital manager. He was succeeded by Alvin Schow, then Ned Wilson, followed by Basil Dorton.

Meanwhile problems with the Lehi Hospital continued. During an October 1954 meeting of the City Health Council, Drs. Elmo Eddington and Boyd Larsen explained that the hospital was “losing patients at an alarming rate, and something must be done soon if Lehi is to remain in the hospital business.” A year end report noted that hospital admission in 1954 were 12.54 percent lower than the previous year, while operating room use had decreased 50 percent. Hospital revenue was \$27, 006.28. Expenses were \$28, 540.47-the venture was a losing financial proposition.

The 1961 hospital board consisting of Alice Broadbent, Elmo Christofferson, Calvin Swenson, and Harold Ellison met with the city council in March to report that the state department of health would close the hospital in the near future because of its outdated facilities. Though the hospital lost the license in 1965, it remained open until 01 March 1967, when the last patient, Mrs. James King was transported to University Hospital by ambulance.

A discussion of the Lehi Hospital would not be complete without mentioning the compassionate and efficient nursing care rendered by such stalwarts as Ethel Ball, Dorothy Bennett, Juliet L. Black, Annie Bone, Clara Clover, Hazel Dunsdon, Marjorie Harris, Louise Johnson, Mabel Jones, Jennie Losee, Jena Mitchell, Melba Rothe, Eva Sherwood, Eva Smith, Valera Smith, Edith and Laura Strasburg, and Clifta Varney. Alta Clark, Mae Daley, Clara Jorgenson, and Twila Johnson also deserve credit for years of preparing the hospital’s tasty meals.

At the time of closing, the Lehi Hospital Board consisted of James Strong (chairman), Dr. Kent B. Davis, (city councilman), Alice Broadbent, and Basil Dorton (hospital manager). Dr. Eddington had discontinued his private practice, was Director of the County Health Department in Provo. Dr. Boyd Larsen began admitting his patients to the American Fork Hospital (where he served as a director from 1978-84), and Dr. John E. Meyers, who since October 1964 had maintained an office in the Lehi Hospital, moved with his family to Pennsylvania.

Dr. Eddington returned to Lehi in 1967 and re-established his office in the old hospital building. When the property was sold the following year, Eddington opened a home office at 1015 East Ninth North. He remained in practice until his 1975 death.

Wally Olsen, new owner of the old hospital building, first rented a section to a company which manufactured a health elixir. A furniture upholstery business was later established there. Max Chapman intended to make an apartment house out of the building when he bought it, but he was denied a multiple-housing permit. Russell Daly operated his Studio Five (music) in the building during 1985. The building had an apartment on the Main Floor but the rest of the floors remained vacant.