

## THE HISTORY OF SUGAR CITY

Compiled by Laurie Luke

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"To those who live in it needs no introduction, praise or recommendation. People residing in this beautiful, prosperous and up-to-date town are envied and those who have had the pleasure of visiting it are to be congratulated.

A stranger in our midst is at once attracted by the general appearance of prosperity, cleanliness and comfort the modernness and beauty of the residences and homes, and the intelligence and integrity of the people. Everyone has business and attends to it. No one loafs in Sugar City."<sup>1</sup>

The men in the Upper Snake River Valley began studying crops which would fit the ground and climate. Around 1901 the sugar beet was tried. It was a sturdy plant and frost did not bother it after it got started. At first it was not too successful, but after a few years it proved very profitable.<sup>2</sup>

On August 8th, 1903, practically a whole section of land was purchased. The south half was to be used as a townsite and upon the north half a sugar factory was to be built. When this land was purchased there were two or three log cabins and part of the land was under cultivation. After it was purchased the whole thing was put under cultivation and it comprised a field of 320 acres.<sup>3</sup> This land was purchased from Willard Ricks, Christain Johnson, Amos C. Jacobs, Conrad Miller, C. B. Valentine, Hyrum Bell, and the homestead of John Dalling.<sup>4</sup>

The town of Sugar was laid out soon after. A ten acre park was in the central part of the plot. In April, 1904, the streets were all

graded and set with beautiful shade trees, with sidewalks on either side throughout the entire plot. The building of residences and business houses commenced about April, 1904. Throughout a two year period, buildings were always in the course of erection. A park for athletic purposes, with a high board fence and a grandstand costing \$800, was also built. The grandstand had a seating capacity of five hundred. A race track of about a half mile in length was in the center of the townsite.<sup>5</sup>

One of the first buildings built was a large two story Opera House block. The lower floor was comprised of a department store, and a drug store, facing south on Center street and the Telephone exchange and Post Office facing east on Austin Ave. The second floor was occupied by one of the most up-to-date and beautiful opera houses and dance halls combined. It was elaborately decorated and the floor was of highly polished maple. Also on the second floor was the office of the Sugar City Times and the handsomely furnished rooms of the Commercial Club.<sup>6</sup>

All lots that were sold were under contract that buildings were to be erected within one year of the date of purchase. All homes were to be built thirty feet from the sidewalk line and a "respectable" home was to be built. It was to be painted within sixty days of erection.<sup>7</sup>

Sugar City was a beautiful town and one way people kept it beautiful was by giving prizes for the best kept yards, gardens, and surroundings.

There has never been a saloon or gambling house in Sugar. Every deed or lease had a clause prohibiting the use or sale of any intoxicating liquors, or gambling devices. A paragraph in the Sugar City Times, Dec. 25. 1906, stated that "Sugar City has been, is and forever means to be a strictly prohibition town."<sup>8</sup>

In 1903 the foundations of the sugar factory were laid down. President Joseph F. Smith, President of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, dedicated the factory.<sup>9</sup> The cost of the factory was one million dollars. It was then the largest sugar factory in the United States.<sup>10</sup> It remained the largest in the state of Idaho for some years. In 1904 the first campaign was run. They cut 35,000 tons of sugar beets.<sup>11</sup> Mark Austin was the Assistant General Manager of the Utah-Idaho Sugar Company.

While the factory was being built and before the houses in town were finished, tent houses were set up on the company property. This place became known as "Rag Town" because the floors and half the walls were made of rough lumber, then the rest of the wall and roof were made from canvas. About fifty families lived there. People who built the factory and some who worked there lived in these houses. In the winter time it was very cold and some of the people about froze to death.<sup>12</sup>

The L.D.S. Church Officials in Salt Lake City sent to Germany and had three men sent over to teach the people in the factory how to make sugar. They were three chemists named Hemmil, Stemmil, and Stock. The Sugar Company built a lovely club house on the corner by the factory for these men. They had a Japanese cook and gardener. They had the best kept yards anywhere around and was a place of beauty that everyone enjoyed.<sup>13</sup>

The general foreman at the Sugar Factory was David Hodge. Walter L. Webb was one of the chief foremen. These men were very capable and also popular at the factory.<sup>14</sup> With people like this the Sugar Factory became a great success. Thomas R. Cutler, Jr. was the first superintendent of the factory.<sup>15</sup>

Mark Austin has been foremost among those who have been responsible for the growth and development of Sugar City during its early years. He was the one who, in August of 1903, negotiated the purchase of the land for the factory and city. In 1903, he represented the Sugar City Townsite Company, organized by Salt Lake capital, as resident manager and to him entrusted the laying out, building up and growth and development of Sugar City.<sup>16</sup>

Mark Austin had a strong desire to plant trees. He planted around 8,000 trees of different varieties around the town and also the grounds of the factory. Today, most of these trees have been cut down and it is sad that people have not replanted some. Mark Austin with the help of J. B. Gaddie planted a circular park. It was a favorite place for celebrations and reunions. Mark Austin was a very influential man of his time. Besides being Assistant General Manager of the Idaho and Western Idaho Sugars Companies, he was resident manager of the Sugar City Townsite Co., President of the Fremont County Bank, half owner of the Sugar City Times, President of Austin Bros. Ass'n., and president or director of many of the stores and companies. He was one of the best agriculturists and authorities on beet culture in the United States. He had a big heart and helped many poor and needy people.<sup>17</sup> One of the streets of Sugar is named Austin Avenue.

Besides the Opera House Block there were other places of business erected in the city. A Meat Market located on the south side of Center Street was owned and run by George and Jim Ricks. It was always kept clean and was a very up-to-date place. Besides selling meat; oysters, fish, fruits, and pickles were sold. The Sugar City Hardware and Lumber

Company was located where Davenport's Hatchery is presently standing. Fred Schwendiman was the manager and became known as the "Hardware Man." He had the most complete line of hardware items this side of Salt Lake.<sup>18</sup> The first store built was located where the Sugar City Mercantile now stands. It was named the Sugar City Cash Store and was managed by Ben R. Ferman. When it was finished in 1904, the first dance in Sugar City was held there.<sup>19</sup> This store carried more up-to-date and complete line of general merchandise than any store in Fremont County. It was later sold and became known as the Sugar City Mercantile. The Ricks family had ownership in it for 43 years.<sup>20</sup> ~~It is now owned by Glen Newbold.~~

Just for a sidelight, Flossie Austin was chosen as the most popular girl in Sugar City in 1906. She was an exceptionally bright and industrious girl. To make home pleasant was the ambition of her life.<sup>21</sup>

The Sugar City Furniture Company was organized and commenced doing business in July, 1905. It was located in the Opera House Block on Center Street. John Schwendiman was the manager. The store carried a complete stock and also did general repairs and made picture frames. The Sugar City Mercantile Company was located in the lower western half of the Townsite Building. It incorporated for \$50,000. Orlando Iverson acted as manager with Mark Austin as director. It was a very popular store and even at times had as many as twelve clerks to handle the trade. The Fremont County Light and Power Company was located in Teton, Idaho, but it furnished electricity for the people of Sugar.<sup>22</sup>

The Fremont County Bank was organized October 10, 1904, with a capitol of \$10,000. It was one of the largest banking businesses in the great Snake River Valley. The first bank occupied the corner in the

Havermeyer Hotel Building. Mark Austin was President, G. E. Bowerman of St. Anthony, Vice President, and Artie I. Comstock, cashier. In September 1906, the bank was moved into the beautiful new stone building. The second floor of this new building was used by the Telephone Exchange and for the Commercial Club rooms.<sup>23</sup> This building is now used as the hot lunch room for the Sugar-Salem High School students. Also the top is a classroom and the Superintendent's Office. Besides the businesses mentioned there was a Pharmacy, two construction companies, the Van Tassel Brothers General Merchandise store, Havermeyer Hotel, a restaurant, book store, livery stable, blacksmith shop, shoe shop, and hat shop. There was also a dentist and doctor.

In 1904 the government officially opened a Post Office in town which was housed in the northwest corner of the Opera House.<sup>24</sup>

The Sugar City Times was established in September 1904 by James H. Wallis and was under his management until the following September, when Professor Oliver Christiansen assumed the position of editor and manager. When his duties as a professor in the Ricks Academy became so numerous, W. L. Adams became editor and manager.<sup>25</sup> The paper moved to Rexburg sometime later.

The first marshal of Sugar City was David A. Sanders.<sup>26</sup> The jail house was located where the city pumphouse is today. It was right next to the church. The jail house was later moved to the Ephraim Ricks farm, where it was used as a granary.

In the spring of 1904 a baseball team was organized and called the Sugar City Red Socks. It was made up of the most highly respected young men. A keen rivalry sprang up between Sugar and Rexburg. In time there

were fewer men to choose from and Sugar and Rexburg consolidated into one team. This soon proved unsatisfactory.<sup>27</sup> Another ball team was known as the Beet's Ball Team who in 1906 held the amateur championship of Fremont County.<sup>28</sup>

Until July 24, 1904, Sugar City was a part of Salem Ward. The community had now reached a population to justify organizing a ward. On July 24, in the Opera House, a meeting was held and Sugar Ward was organized. Mark Austin was chosen Bishop, with James B. Gaddie and Alfred Ricks as his counselors. For a time meetings were held in the Park School Building, then the Opera House. The rock meeting house was built in 1905 and remained until it was torn down in 1960. On May 27, 1956, a new building was dedicated. The church has played an important part in the lives of the people of Sugar. On July 21, 1935, the ward was divided into Sugar First and Sugar Second. However, February 11, 1945, the two wards were dissolved and reunited into one.<sup>29</sup> Since that time the ward had grown to 925, so on February 18, 1968, the ward was again divided.<sup>30</sup>

Before Sugar was laid out the children went to Salem to school. The Sugar (Park) School Building was erected in 1904 at a cost of \$10,000. It housed the first high school in the county. During the first year there was an enrollment of about 120 pupils. J. T. Worlton was the first principal of the public schools. The educational status of the schools at that time was of an exceptional high order. In 1906 the enrollment had increased so that some classes had to move to a room in the bank building. It soon became apparent that another building was needed.<sup>31</sup> In 1908 a large rock building, west of the railroad track, was built

costing around \$20,000.<sup>32</sup> Both Sugar and South Salem went here to school. The year this building was finished a ninth grade was started in the school. By 1914 it had reached the requirements of the State to become a Standard High School. The name given to this school was "Sugar-Salem High School." The first school paper to be published was called "Commencement." It was published in 1914 and dedicated to John K. Orme. In this same year the first class graduated, having completed a full four years curriculum. There were six in the class.<sup>33</sup> Mary A. Ricks (Thomas) remembers the chemistry lab. She said that J. W. West, the chemistry teacher, was one of the best in the state. She also said that the last three years of high school were held in the Park Building.<sup>34</sup> Some of the classes held were shop, Home Economics, and four different sciences.

At about the same time the school began taking an active interest in athletics. One interesting game that Sugar played went as follows: In 1914 the big games of the season took place between St. Anthony and Sugar. "We played them two interesting games; one on the Sugar floor; the other in St. Anthony. We went down smiling at our last game in St. Anthony because luck was against us. Frank skinned his knees, Emery sprained his thumb. Ellis was "knocked out." Jack was detained home nursing rheumatics. We came out with only the consolation of having fought a good fight and with a heavy score against us, still ready to rise and smile."<sup>35</sup>

On February 25, 1953, the Old Rock Building burned down. It was estimated at a \$300,000 loss.<sup>36</sup> Around 1916 the high school was moved to the upper floor of the townsite building. At the present time the high school occupies the whole building. During the years, improvements

have been made. A gymnasium was added and a student lounge was built connecting the school and gym together. In 1966 a very modern elementary school building was built in the eastern part of the town. Also a very beautiful and up-to-date Seminary building has been built just a little ways from the high school. During this past year many improvements have been made inside the high school. The building may be very old, but the facilities and equipment are very up-to-date.

The land that Sugar City stands on was part of the territory known as Bannock County. On January 14, 1885, the county was divided and this land became a part of Bingham County. In 1893 the county was again divided and Sugar City became a part of Fremont County until February 1913, when the boundary lines were changed and a county was created. Since that time Sugar City has been a part of Madison County.<sup>37</sup>

Sugar City had a few advantages when it started out. It was centrally located in the richest part of the Fremont County; was laid out beautifully; was on the line of the Oregon Short Line; and was a reasonable distance from many beautiful attractions. The factory also brought money into the city. Many sheep men came because of the open range and the beet industry made a good animal food called pulp, which was good for sheep. Every year the Sugar Company would have large numbers of cattle shipped in because pulp also provided a good food for them.<sup>38</sup>

In 1905 the Commercial Club was organized. It was formed by the business men to secure better cooperation and to be more beneficial and helpful to the town. As time went on the organization became known as the Chamber of Commerce, the Business Men's Association, and at the present time the Boosters Club.<sup>39</sup>

Boardwalks were provided everywhere in town and even went clear up to the factory.<sup>40</sup> The Sugar Company built many of the houses in Sugar and most of them are still standing. They were built very sturdy and some were quite beautiful. Some have been kept up and remodeled while others have become run-down and neglected. The house I live in was built by the Company.

In the early days of Sugar most of the entertainment was provided by the Opera House. One of the groups that came through periodically was the E. Forest Taylor Co. Also plays were provided by the Community Drama Society. There were lots of home parties, candy pulls, dances, and hay rides. The older people used to give new married couples wagon rides on their wedding day. The 4th and 24th of July were celebrated better than nowadays. All the houses were decorated. A large bowery was built and decorated. There was a salute of guns at sunrise, a program, races, and lots of games for old and young. One experience that happened on the 24th of July goes as follows. The only pump in town was owned by the Mercantile. They were selling lemonade for the event. Someone stole the handle off the pump so that everyone would have to buy lemonade, if they wanted something to drink. The manager found out and made them put the handle back on. At Christmas time everyone went to a meeting. There were no Christmas trees in the houses, but the ward had a great big one with presents on it for the children of the Ward. After the meeting there was a dance and lunch for everyone.<sup>41</sup>

Dr. Shoup had an eight room hospital where Johnnie Morgan now lives. In 1912 he had the first car in Sugar.<sup>42</sup> Up to this time the people had used horses and buggies. The school vans were a wagon drawn by horses.

At one time Sugar was to be one of the leading towns. It was thought once that it might be the county seat.<sup>43</sup> The population from 1908-1914 was around 1500-2000.<sup>44</sup> In 1926 the population was about 1200. In this same year a Pocket Directory and Booster Guide was put out. In it was stated that business failures were unheard of. There now were two churches, Mormon and Lutheran (the latter does not exist anymore in Sugar), a movie theater, two barber shops, the largest sugar factory in the intermountain country, and many other businesses. There were three miles of cement sidewalks. The flour mill worked twenty-four hours a day to supply local trade. It also read: "Move to Idaho, in the Sugar City District, and realize a good income every year. Here you will find a good, clean lot of American citizens who will try to help you."<sup>45</sup>

Sugar was a rather peaceful community. The only cattle rustlers in town were two local men, Jo Hunt and Fred Johns. One time they stole Old Brother Kids only cow. However, they later ended up in the Idaho State Pen.<sup>46</sup>

The Sugar Factory produced approximately a quarter million bags of sugar annually. \$750,000 was paid out to farmers for beets. Three hundred and fifty men were employed during the harvest, with a payroll of \$30,000 a month.<sup>47</sup>

The Sugar Factory run thirty-eight campaigns. It closed down in 1942, due to the decrease in beet acreage. Since then most of the buildings have been torn down. In thirty-eight years of running, six men were killed. The first accident happened in building the factory, when a beam fell on a man and killed him. James B. Gaddie was the first man killed in the factory. He was a popular man in Sugar and associated with the

Opera House. On the 16th of October, 1906, the fly wheel of an electric dynamo broke loose and hit him. The wheel then flew through a cement floor and through the roof and landed out on the lawn. One man got scalded to death with hot syrup and a boy fell in the spinners and was killed. One of the worst accidents happened to <sup>Leo</sup> Wright. He stepped over a belt and his clothing got caught and threw his body up the belt and to the ceiling where there was a space of about four or five inches. It crushed his body and dropped it to the floor sixteen feet below.<sup>48</sup>

During the depression the bank closed down. Also many people lost all their life savings. Those who were heavy stockholders went broke.<sup>49</sup> Ever since the close of the factory most of the stores have closed down or moved somewhere else. Some of these buildings have been torn down while others have been fixed up and used for something else.

In 1943, the old hotels which had been built by the Sugar Company were used as a German Prisoner of War Camp. There were four tall look-out towers where guards stood with machine guns. There was also a tall wire fence all around the buildings. The young girls of the town would go up and flirt with the soldiers. The prisoners were allowed to go out and work in the fields. About 1946 the camp was closed down.<sup>50</sup>

In 1955 Elmer Timothy bought one of the first television sets in Sugar. He bought it for Grandma Jacobs.<sup>51</sup> Until that time the kids in town had to go to Bean's Hardware Store and watch it through the window. From then on all the kids in our neighborhood went to Timothy's house.

In 1945 the old Town Hall was torn down and a new one built.<sup>52</sup> A sewer system was installed in 1965-66.<sup>53</sup> In the last 10 years there has been a few improvements in Sugar. A new Post Office has been built.

Street signs and speed limit signs were put up in the autumn of 1969. Curbing has been put in some parts of the town and is supposed to be put in all over someday. Three of the streets have been oiled and all of the remaining unoiled ones will be oiled this year.<sup>54</sup> A \$20,000 park has been drawn out and approved and will be started sometime in the near future. It will have an interchangeable hardball softball field as well as a covered picnic area with two barbeque pits. There is a possibility of including an ice skating rink and also a swimming pool.<sup>55</sup>

Sugar is now a very peaceful community of around 600. The Town Board and Boosters organization are always thinking up new things to help improve it. It has always been the aim of Sugar to be a quiet respectable community. Most people are associated with the church and school. Sugar has always had a fairly good reputation and it is the goal of the town to keep it that way. Even though we are small we can be proud because our history has been one of good background.

#### Sugar Ward Bishops since 1904:

Mark Austin 1904-05

Alfred Ricks 1905-27

Charles O. Hamilton 1927-35

Marion Murdock 1st Ward 1935-45

John W. Stocker 2nd Ward 1935-45

J. Wendell Stucki 1945-56

Marion G. Forsyth 1956-65

Ferron W. Sonderegger Sugar Ward 1965-

Calvin J. Davenport Sugar 2nd Ward 1968-

## DOCUMENTATION

- <sup>1</sup>Sugar City Times, Volume 3, Number 14, December 25, 1906, p. 1. Newspaper in possession of Laurie Luke.
- <sup>2</sup>Samuel M. Beal, The Snake River Fork Country (Rexburg: The Rexburg Journal, 1935), p. 35.
- <sup>3</sup>Sugar City Times, p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup>Caddie Davis Jenkins, "The History of Sugar City," 1943, p. 2. Possession of Fern Ladle.
- <sup>5</sup>Sugar City Times, p. 1.
- <sup>6</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup>Commemorating the Dedication of the Sugar Ward Chapel, May 27, 1956. Program in possession of Lucy Furness.
- <sup>8</sup>Sugar City Times, p. 1.
- <sup>9</sup>Interview with John Camphouse, Sugar City, Idaho, April 4, 1970.
- <sup>10</sup>Jenkins, p. 2.
- <sup>11</sup>Sugar City Times, p. 2.
- <sup>12</sup>Interview with Lucy Furness, Sugar City, Idaho, April 4, 1970.
- <sup>13</sup>Ibid., March 15, 1970.
- <sup>14</sup>Sugar City Times, p. 3.
- <sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 14.
- <sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 2.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 3, 8.
- <sup>19</sup>Jenkins, p. 3. Ben R. Ferman's name is spelled Firman in the Sugar City Times.
- <sup>20</sup>Furness, April 14, 1970.
- <sup>21</sup>Sugar City Times, p. 6.
- <sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 5, 7. The Townsite Building was built on the Opera House Block. If a store was located on the Opera House it was most likely in the Townsite Building.

- <sup>23</sup>Jenkins, pp. 3-4. Havermeyer is spelled Havemeyer in the Sugar City Times.
- <sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 4.
- <sup>25</sup>Sugar City Times, p. 5.
- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 3.
- <sup>27</sup>Jenkins, p. 4.
- <sup>28</sup>Sugar City Times, p. 14.
- <sup>29</sup>Dedication of Sugar Ward Chapel, May 27, 1956.
- <sup>30</sup>Interview with Floyd Luke, April 18, 1970.
- <sup>31</sup>Sugar City Times, p. 4.
- <sup>32</sup>Jenkins, p. 6. Also the cost came from the Sugar City Times, p. 4.
- <sup>33</sup>Commencement Annual, published by Sugar-Salem High School, May 15, 1914. In possession of Albert Pincock.
- <sup>34</sup>Interview with Mary Thomas, Sugar City, Idaho, April 4, 1970.
- <sup>35</sup>Commencement, May 15, 1914.
- <sup>36</sup>Interview with Joyce Luke, Sugar City, Idaho, April 4, 1970. Information of building loss from Rexburg Journal, Feb. 25 (year of paper was cut off).
- <sup>37</sup>Jenkins, p. 2.
- <sup>38</sup>Furness, March 15, 1970. Also the advantages were taken from the Sugar City Times, p. 1.
- <sup>39</sup>Jenkins, p. 6.
- <sup>40</sup>Furness, March 14, 1970.
- <sup>41</sup>Interview with Mr. and Mrs. Ezekial Holman, Sugar City, Idaho, April 4, 1970.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup>Interview with Emery Thomas, Sugar City, Idaho, April 4, 1970.
- <sup>44</sup>Furness, April 4, 1970.
- <sup>45</sup>Pocket Directory and Booster Guide of Sugar City, Idaho "The Progressive Town," 1926. In possession of Mr. and Mrs. Emery Thomas.

<sup>46</sup>Camphouse, April 4, 1970.

<sup>47</sup>Beal, p. 51.

<sup>48</sup>Camphouse, April 4, 1970.

<sup>49</sup>Lucy Ricks Furness, "Life History of Lucy Ricks Furness," 1969, p. 8.  
Possession of Laurie Luke.

<sup>50</sup>Joyce Luke, April 4, 1970.

<sup>51</sup>Interview with Elmer Timothy, Sugar City, Idaho, April 4, 1970.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid.

<sup>53</sup>Statement by Rondo Barrus, Sugar City, Idaho, April 19, 1970.

<sup>54</sup>The Rexburg Standard, Rexburg, Idaho, April 16, 1970, p. 10.

<sup>55</sup>Floyd Luke, City Councilman of Sugar City, April 10, 1970.

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