

# Viewpoints

## For one brief moment in time, Fat Tuesday was in Ogden

### Top of Utah Voices



**Michael Vaughan**

■  
Commentary

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of economic boosters seeking to bring national attention to Ogden. In the end, they decided to host a grand carnival — an Ogden Mardi Gras like the Mardi Gras in New Orleans. Records of the event are somewhat sketchy, but a former Utahn, Stephen W. Hales, who has lived in New Orleans for more

than 40 years, has carefully researched the history of Ogden's Mardi Gras in a paper titled "The Rocky Mountain Carnival."

Harvey and his fellow promoters didn't scrimp on Ogden's Mardi Gras. To establish Ogden's Mardi Gras they enlisted the famous Rex Organization, which was established in 1872 in New Orleans and still presides over the Mardi Gras celebration. In 1890, the Rex Organization was looking to expand the Mardi Gras to the West, and Harvey and his fellow Ogden promoters were successful in persuading Rex to bring the Mardi Gras to Ogden.

In June 1890, the King of the Mardi Gras, called King Rex, and his entourage of royalty, along with

community leaders and specially decorated carnival floats, boarded an elaborately decorated train in New Orleans. Their destination was Union Station in Ogden. They were ready to party. Ogden was more than willing to host the party.

On the evening of July 3, gallons of champagne flowed at the King's banquet in downtown Ogden. The following evening saw a parade witnessed by 13,000 onlookers and a grand ball where 2,000 partygoers danced the night away.

By some measures, the Ogden Mardi Gras was a huge success. It brought thousands of people to the city and there was a celebration unlike any Utah had seen before, or would see again. The citizens of Salt Lake, who initially ridiculed the idea, became convinced that the event would be successful and tried to exploit Ogden's Mardi Gras at the last minute by proclaiming Salt Lake as the port of entry for the celebration.

Unfortunately, Ogden's Mardi Gras suffered from a fatal flaw common to many of Harvey's schemes: It had a serious cash-flow problem. Fancy floats,

elaborate costumes and fine champagne cost a lot of money. The glorious celebration had been fueled by massive infusions of cash. Harvey and the Ogden promoters threw a great party, but they were less than diligent about generating revenue sufficient to cover the expenses. Ogden's Mardi Gras lost money. Harvey, seeking to cover the expenses of the celebration, sold off many of his assets, including his home on Jefferson Avenue. He left Ogden, and after several years and a series of moves, settled in

Northwestern Arkansas.

Today, Feb. 20, is Fat Tuesday, the last day before the onset of Lent. If you check the news channels tonight, you may see thousands of revelers filling the streets in New Orleans. You might consider raising a toast to them. Ogden has something special to celebrate. For a brief moment, Ogdenites were linked with the citizens of New Orleans in hosting an official Mardi Gras sanctioned by the Rex Organizations. No other city can say the same.

Having grown up in Arkansas, I am intrigued when I find connections between my home state and Utah, my adopted home for the past 26 years. One of the more curious connections between Arkansas and Utah is a gentleman named William "Coin" Harvey. Harvey was a businessman and a tireless promoter in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Harvey lived in both Arkansas and Ogden.

He pursued peculiar schemes for economic development in both states.

Monte Ne, in Northwest Arkansas, was intended to be Harvey's final and enduring monument. In the 1920s, Harvey became convinced that modern civilization was doomed. At Monte Ne, he set out to construct a pyramid to preserve relics of the 20th century. The pyramid would contain a variety of artifacts including a small library hermetically sealed in glass.

The discovery of King Tut's tomb in 1922 prompted a nationwide Egyptian fad. Thousands of people came to view Harvey's efforts to construct a 20th century pyramid. Despite widespread interest, Monte Ne was not a financial success, and

the monument was never completed. When I was a kid, my folks took us on road trips to see what remained of Harvey's Monte Ne. We climbed over steps and benches made of Portland cement, which were once intended to be the base of a massive pyramid. I still have a photo of my great-grandfather Mack sitting with me on one of Monte Ne's cement benches when I was about 9 years old.

Harvey's connections to Ogden preceded Monte Ne by about 30 years. He came to Ogden in the late 19th century and lived in a house at 2671 Jefferson Ave. which still stands. After arriving in Ogden, Harvey decided that Ogden's economy needed his help. He worked with a coalition

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