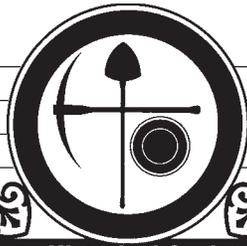


This month's theme:  
Territorial Idaho



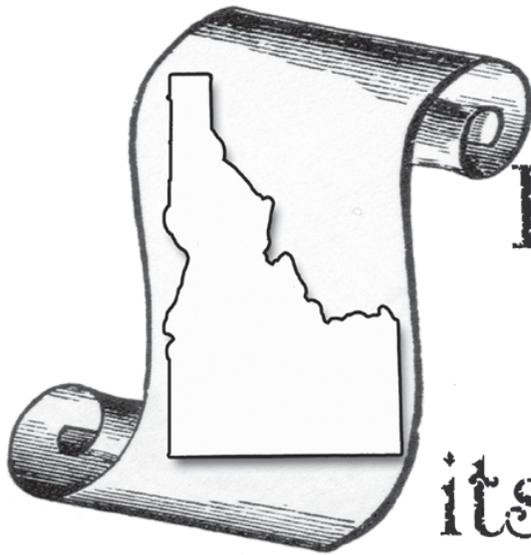
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The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society's Junior Historian Program

# PROSPECTOR

February, 2005



## How Idaho Got its Name

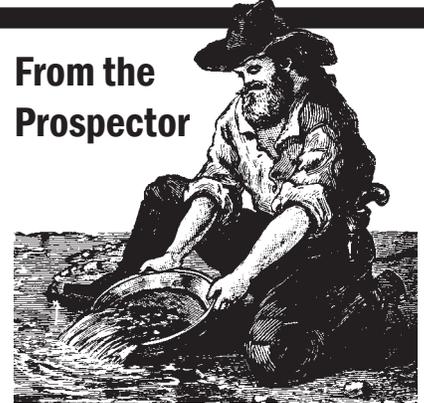
**D**o you know how Idaho was named? There are many stories about the naming of Idaho. Perhaps you have heard more than one of them. Almost all of them say that "Idaho" is a Native American word. This is not true. The name "Idaho" was made up in the mid-1800's. Making up names like this is very common. Many names for new products are needed every year, and

people work hard at coming up with new and original names for places and things.

Making up new names has been going on for a long time. When the United States added new land to the west, new states were formed. Each new state needed a name. Thomas Jefferson was one of the early American leaders who thought up names for new states. Washington, Illinois, and Michigan are from Jefferson's list of state

*Continued on next page*

### From the Prospector



#### Howdy Prospectors,

**Y**ou know, I wasn't always known as Lucky Noah. People only started calling me that when I found gold. For awhile, when I couldn't seem to strike it rich, people called me Empty Pocket Noah. Then there was that time when I broke my foot, I was Hopping Noah. A few years ago even, I used to eat limburger cheese sandwiches for lunch every day and people started calling my Smelly Cheese Noah. My point is that names change and sometimes those names have interesting stories behind them. This month we're going to talk about territorial Idaho and the strange way our state got its name. Hope you enjoy the story.

*Continued from page 1*

names, although the state that Jefferson would have named Washington is called Ohio.

Illinois and Michigan are names that Jefferson got from Indian words. About half of our state names are thought to be Indian words. Most Indian words, however, are very different from English words. Most Indian place names had to be changed a lot to make them into English words. Thus it often is hard to find what Indian words—if any—the Indian place names come from.

By 1860, just before the Civil War, mining in the West had led to the need for lots of new names for towns and camps. Names also were needed for territories that were to become states. People were running out of ideas. When the Colorado region needed a name in 1860, a leader from that part of the country thought up the name “Idaho.” He told everyone that it meant “gem of the mountains.” Since the Colorado people were looking for an Indian word, he told them it was an Indian word. The

Colorado people liked the name “Idaho.” Their leaders asked Congress to use it for their territory. Then, just a few days after Congress voted to call that territory “Idaho,” they found out that “Idaho” was not an Indian word at all. So they asked Congress to change the name “Idaho” back to “Colorado.” “Colorado” wasn’t an Indian word, either; it was Spanish. Still, they decided that if no one could find a good Indian word, they might as well go with “Colorado.”

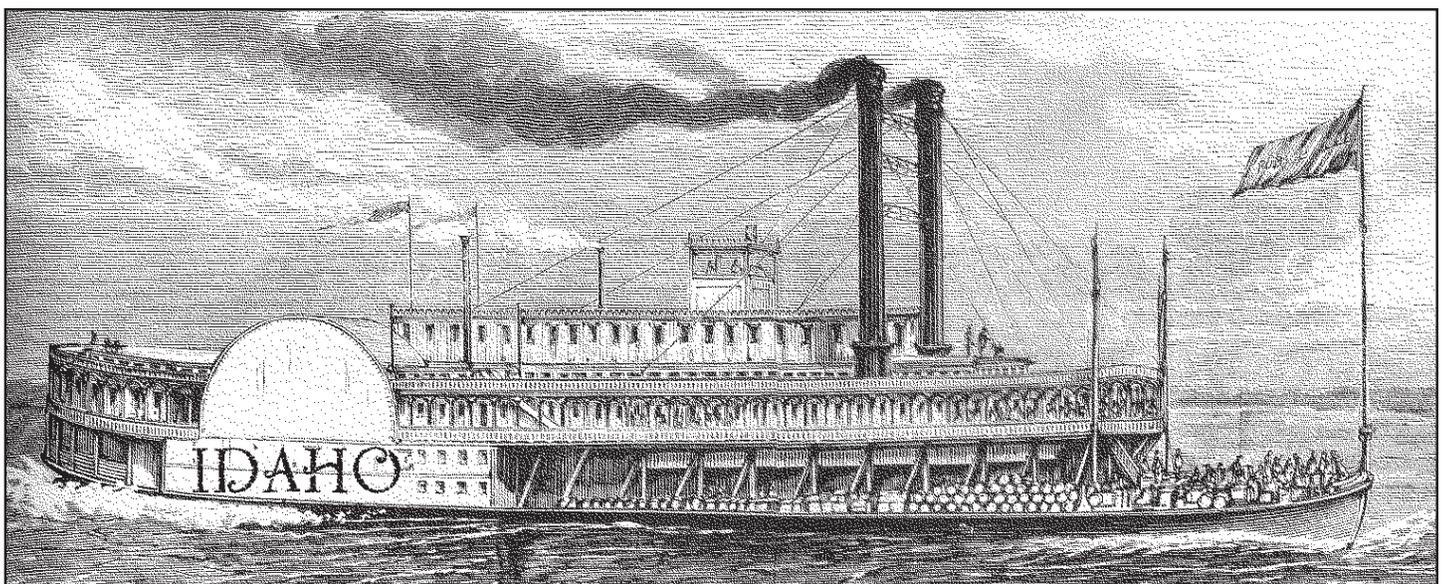
In 1860, while the Colorado leaders were talking of using the name “Idaho”, one of their friends in the Pacific Northwest named a steamboat on the Columbia the Idaho. Later that year, gold was discovered in the Clearwater country. Soon the mines were called the Idaho mines, after the steamboat that thousands of miners rode on their way to the new gold camps. When the new mining country was made into a territory in 1863, Congress chose to name it Idaho. Just about everyone had forgotten about the Colorado mix-

up over the name “Idaho” by that time. Most people still believed that Idaho meant “gem of the mountains”.

After Idaho was created, people began to ask about the Indians who were thought to have used the word “Idaho.” Some were smart enough to know that “gem of the mountains” was not a good meaning for an Indian name. So they thought up all kinds of other Indian meanings for the word. But none of the Indian meanings made any sense, because “Idaho” is not an Indian word. People tried to find Nez Perce, Shoshoni, Yakima, and Arapaho words that sounded like “Idaho.” But they never really got anywhere. They were looking for an Indian word that never really existed.

In the end, it’s kind of amusing to think that our state has a made-up name. Even though it’s not an Indian word, Idaho is a pretty good-sounding name. Since the man who thought up the name wanted it to mean “gem of the mountains,” perhaps that’s the best way to leave it.☞

*Adapted from an article  
by Merle Wells*





# The Fun Page

## HOW TO BUILD A LOG HOUSE

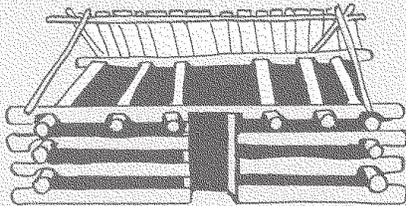


Gather straight sticks and cut them for logs. Leave the bark on your logs and cut notches near each end.

1

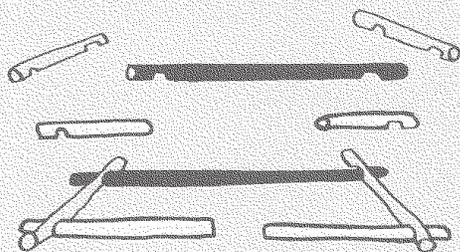


Most log houses had attics for the children to sleep in. The roof was built of logs and covered with boards and wooden shingles.



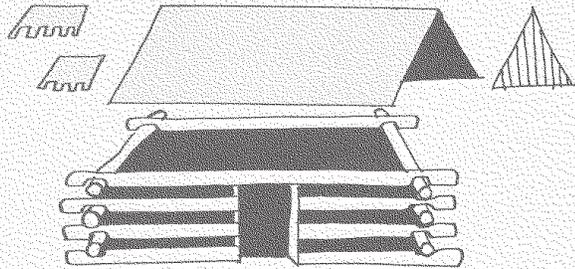
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Glue the corners together. Cut a space in one wall for a door.



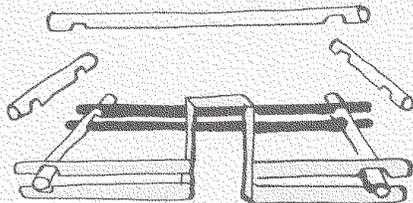
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Cut a cardboard roof, cut paper shingles and glue them to the roof.



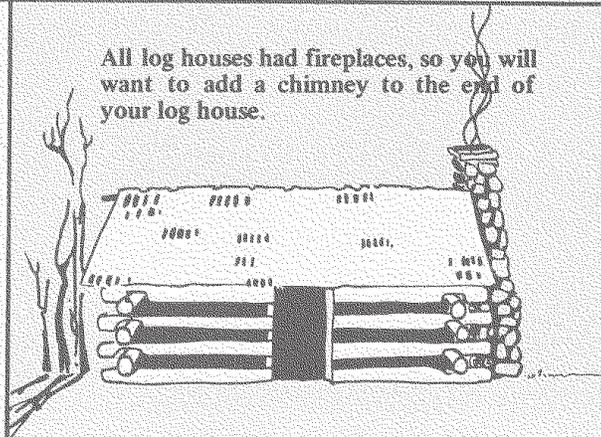
5

Glue a strip of cardboard in the doorway to hold the logs together. Windows could be made the same way.



3

All log houses had fireplaces, so you will want to add a chimney to the end of your log house.



6



## Next Month's Activities

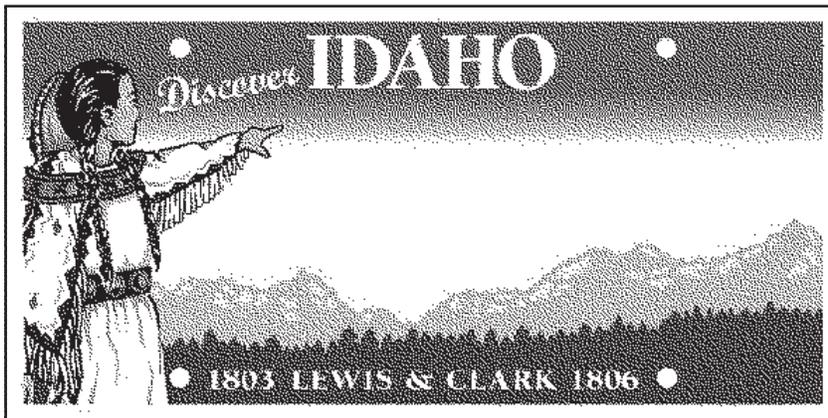
**W**ell, we've told you all we know about territorial Idaho, but we need your help so that we can learn more. Pick from one of the activities below or make up your own about early Idaho and send it in to our Prospector Headquarters. We'll take some of your best work and print it in next month's magazine.

Remember to include your name, the school and town where you're from, and the name of your Prospector chapter. We can't wait to see what you send in!

### History of a Name:

Many of the places in Idaho have interesting names. Although some of the names are made up, other have histories that can tell you interesting stories about life in the past. Do you know where your town name came from? Do a little research and tell us the origin of the name of your town. If you can't find information on that, try the name of your school or the street you live on.

**License Plate History:** One of the ways Idaho celebrates its heritage is with different license plate designs. We have license plates that have a picture of the Capitol, license plates that show our wildlife and mountains, license plates that feature our favorite sports; we even have license plates with a picture of a potato.



Can you design a license plate that features an important event in the state's early history? Study the plates on your car at home and make a new state plate that we Prospectors would be proud to have on our cars.

**State Nicknames:** Every state has a nickname. Illinois is the "Land of

Lincoln" because Abraham Lincoln lived there. Utah is the "Beehive State" for the Mormon symbol of the beehive. And Minnesota is "Land of 1,000 Lakes" for its many bodies of water. Of course, here in Idaho, we are known as "The Gem State." This seems like a pretty good nickname, because of all the

rocks and mineral that can be mined here, but are there other possibilities? See if you can come up with a few new nicknames for our state. Remember to write a short explanation showing why you think your nickname is a good one.

Send in your work by March 14<sup>th</sup> to:

Prospector Club  
 Lucky Noah  
 Idaho State Historical Museum  
 610 North Julia Davis Drive  
 Boise, ID 83702

Or email it to us at [kzwolfer@ishs.state.id.us](mailto:kzwolfer@ishs.state.id.us).