

# A Brief History of the Idaho State Historical Society

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Originating as the Historical Society of Idaho Pioneers, incorporated by members of the territorial legislature and Boise pioneers, February 10, 1881, the Idaho State Historical Society became a state agency March 12, 1907. Under the leadership of John Hailey--one of Idaho's most distinguished pioneers--the society commenced to assemble information and to collect objects relating to the history of Idaho and the Pacific Northwest. After construction of the capitol building was completed in 1920, the society was provided room to display these collections in the basement of the west wing. Space there proved to be insufficient, so provision was made in 1941 for a new museum building in Julia Davis Park. Construction there had not much more than begun when the whole project had to be halted for the duration of World War II. This interruption, in fact, lasted until 1950, when the new museum building finally was ready to be occupied. During the years between design and completion of the building, the entire concept of historical society and museum function had changed drastically over the nation, and the responsibility of the Society was enlarged in a major way when the legislature established the Idaho State Archives as a division of the Historical Society in 1947. Modernization of the Society commenced in 1956, when Jack Simplot contributed funds to launch the project and H. J. Swinney came as director to get the new program under way.

From the beginning of state operation, the Historical Society has been an educational agency. In the next dozen years of modernization, the education functions of the society expanded greatly. Publication of a quarterly magazine for members, Idaho Yesterdays, began in the spring of 1957. Reference and research materials increased so much that the new building no longer could hold them, even if the Society had had nothing else to preserve. Museum objects ranging in size from tiny pins and earrings to a stage coach and an ornate 16x28-foot backbar have swelled the collection far beyond what was contemplated in 1950. New displays have attracted thousands of visitors, and the Society's school program brings thousands of students to the museum each year. The Boise Junior League originated and put on a regularly scheduled marionette show dealing with Idaho history, with presentations to grade school audiences. This program originally was taken to the schools, but later a marionette theater was built in the museum and the children see the show as part of their visit to the museum. Volunteer

services of many other kinds were also provided by the Junior League, and in 1964 the Idaho Historical Auxiliary was organized to enlarge and enhance these volunteer services. All of these important educational operations have required more space, and by 1967 storage problems had become critical. In February 1968, the legislature appropriated \$450,000 to match with federal funds for renovation of the museum building strictly for museum display and for construction of a storage center and of a combined historical society, archives, and state library building, completed in 1969 and enlarged eight years later. The State Historic Preservation Program began in 1966, in accordance with federal regulations.

The Pioneer Village, next to the Museum, started with the moving of the I. N. Coston and J. B. Pearce cabins from another location in Julia Davis Park in 1969; the Logan House was added in 1971, followed later by the Adelemann House and a homesteader's shack. The U.S. Assay Office in Boise and the Pierce Courthouse were acquired by the Society in 1972. Responsibility for preservation of the Old Idaho State Penitentiary was assumed in 1974. The Historical Society acquired the Thomas Sleight Cabin in Paris in 1978, the L. H. Hatch House in Franklin in 1979 and the Rock Creek Stage Station in 1984. A large addition, doubling the display area, was added to the museum in 1982.

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