

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

NEAL

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Cattlemen and packers had spent years on upper Black's Creek near a summit that provides access to Willow Creek before any of them noticed outcrops of important gold lodes there. Jack Slater, in fact, had cut right through a mineralized outcrop while building a road there, but "tossed it aside as worthless rock." Tom Johnston of Caldwell picked up some ore there in 1887 but lost his samples before he could get them tested. Then in December, 1888, Arthur Neal came across some rich float there while bringing his pack string from Pine Grove out to Boise by way of Willow Creek. Since he could not prospect so late in the season, he spent the winter in Mountain Home and returned that spring to try again. On July 20, he found what he was looking for while searching for water for his pack string. His mineral discovery outcropped too high in elevation to have much water handy. But that fall, in partnership with George House, he began to develop a valuable lode. A number of other prospectors found additional mineral evidence nearby, and in September, T. H. Callaway (a prominent Confederate refugee from Missouri who had spent more than two decades in Idaho) recommended Neal's mines as the best he had seen. Placer deposits, also available there, could not be worked for lack of water. But lode mining at Neal had a really bright future. One owner refused a \$2,500 offer for an undeveloped prospect, and others showed equal confidence.

In common with most Idaho lode districts, Neal's mines attracted eastern capital. Four major properties there owed their development to New York, Chicago, and similar investors who brought in mills and engaged in essential exploratory work. In at least one instance, a local owner managed to develop a valuable property without access to major outside capital resources. Yet after that unusual achievement, he sold out to a Chicago and Wisconsin investment group in 1902 for \$225,000. Within a year, 15,000 tons of ore (75% free milling and 25% susceptible to cyanide recovery) worth \$16.20 a ton had been blocked out, so no loss would be incurred in that transaction. Another property produced \$40,000 in 1904 in operations incidental to development, while a third mine had a 200-foot shaft and several thousand feet of tunnel to expose \$16 to \$18 ore in a vein ranging up to sixteen feet wide. A long development tunnel opened a fourth property, and new mills were being brought in to increase production there. Altogether, mining at Neal worked out satisfactorily: before operations here were shut down, more than \$2,000,000 came from that district.