

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### KETCHUM

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The close of Idaho's Indian wars in 1879 brought an expansion of prospecting that fall into the previously inhospitable Wood River Valley. The miners, encouraged by attractive silver and lead strikes on the upper reaches of Wood River, founded Galena and settled down to await the coming of spring, when their holdings could be worked. At least one of the prospectors wintered farther down the river, where a natural hot springs provided a more comfortable environment. David Ketchum built a cabin on the site: the next spring, the development of one of Idaho's popular resorts started at the hot springs, and the new town of Ketchum became an early tourist center. Early in 1880 fortune hunters poured into the valley by the thousands, and Ketchum's location attracted others as a base of supply for the upper Wood River mines. Soon the usual service industries sprang up as the mines boomed; the town soon boasted two banks, two hotels, six livery stables, a weekly newspaper, and a dozen or more saloons. Prosperity increased in 1881 as Pennsylvania financiers built the Philadelphia smelter at Ketchum to take advantage of the year-round flow of natural hot water. Daily output from the three furnaces soon exceeded fifty tons base bullion. Lack of adequate transportation between the smelter and the railroad spur to the southeast handicapped the Ketchum industry until 1884, when the Union Pacific extended its Wood River branch line right to the smelter itself. Although in 1885 mineral production in the area was interrupted briefly by labor reaction to low wages and long hours, the Philadelphia smelter operated in full capacity for over a decade.

With the decline of national silver prices after 1890, Ketchum began a temporary decline. Early in 1893 the Philadelphia smelter closed its doors and the surrounding silver mines also stopped production. After that date mining had several ups and downs in the area. Unlike many of its neighboring towns—Galena, Bullion, and others—which completely folded as the mining collapsed, Ketchum survived, although barely, as a supply center for the farmers and sheep ranchers that had been expanding into the upper Wood River Valley since the 1880's. Livestock grazing kept Ketchum in Business through the early decades of the twentieth century; indeed, the town in recent years claims to be the greatest sheep and lamb shipping station in Idaho.

But agricultural activity has been overshadowed in recent years by a highly profitable and ambitious tourist trade. Carl Brandt saw the possibilities of exploiting the natural beauty in 1929; he piped water from the hot springs into town and built a resort which became Ketchum's first tourist attraction. Then Averill Harriman and The Union Pacific