



IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
REFERENCE SERIES

**CHARLES BENJAMIN ROSS**

Number 413

1971

C. Ben Ross (December 27, 1876-March 31, 1946) born and reared on a Boise Valley farm near Roswell, and commenced his political career in 1914 when he was elected, as a Democrat in a Republican county, to the first of three terms as Canyon County commissioner. Then as an Idaho State Farm Bureau organizer, he lectured and made friends all over the state. Settling in Pocatello, he put in six years (1924 to 1930) as mayor prior to winning election in 1930 as governor of Idaho. In 1931, he managed to get a factionally-divided Republican legislature to restore the state direct primary (which had been repealed in 1919 to thwart the Nonpartisan League), and before he was through he had pushed through a series of measures established Idaho's modern tax structure (income tax, gasoline tax, and sales tax, with the property tax minimized). A sales tax referendum in 1936 suspended that revenue device, however, until 1965, when the state finally got bold enough to try it again. Ross also had to maintain emergency relief programs and other state-level features of the New Deal. He worked out some humanitarian tax and debt moratorium protections, particularly for farmers who had faced severe economic depression since 1920, and who had fallen into additional economic disaster after 1930. An independent leader who opposed his party organization, he ran into Democratic factional difficulties before the end of his last term as governor, and fared badly in his campaign in 1936 to replace Borah in the United States Senate. In 1939 he got the Democratic nomination for a fourth term as governor, but went into political retirement after he was denied that office. Before these setbacks, though, he had made a considerable impact upon Idaho during the depression, and he is numbered among the state's more influential governors.