

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

VARDIS ALVERO FISHER
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A native of southeastern Idaho, Vardis Fisher grew up on a ranch in Snake River Canyon. A graduate of the University of Utah in 1920, he completed his doctorate in English at the University of Chicago in 1925. Then he spent six years writing three distinguished novels and teaching at the University of Utah and New York University. Returning to Idaho, he became a full-time novelist. Before he was through, he had written thirty-six volumes. Under the New Deal during Depression years, Fisher directed the Idaho's Federal Writers' Project; his Idaho Guide (1936) initiated and set a high standard for a whole national series of state guides. An Idaho Encyclopedia (1938) and Idaho Lore (1939) followed. He regarded his novels as of four kinds: historical, autobiographical, psychological, and in one case, a fable. His autobiographical and historical novels interpret Idaho and the West, but his psychological novels (some of which have a western setting) are general in interpretation, and could just as well have been placed in New York City or anywhere else. His historical novels deal with exploration, fur trade, and mining in the West, and with the Mormons in Utah. Literary historian Ronald Taber points out that "His insistence upon historical, cultural, and psychological fidelity in the historical novel, furthermore, became his most significant contribution to the form of that literary genre." Aside from his books, Vardis began a weekly newspaper column, March 2, 1941, which was published for twenty-seven years. He covered a broad range of subjects, and was regarded by critics as of far more than regional significance.

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