

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

JOHN HAILEY

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Born in Tennessee and growing up there and in Missouri, John Hailey crossed the plains to Oregon at the age of 18. Two years later, he served as an officer in the Rogue River War. He joined the gold rush to the Idaho mines in 1862, where he became a packer and stage driver. After building up a substantial stage line, he went into stockraising. One of the most popular men in the territory, he was persuaded in 1872 to serve a term in Congress, but decided he didn't want another, although he could have been reelected easily. He was persuaded in 1880 to run for the territorial legislature where he served as president of the council. After the Republicans unexpectedly took control of Idaho in the election of 1882, Hailey was summoned by his party as the Democratic candidate with a chance to win, and was elected to a second congressional term in 1884. That was the point where the anti-Mormons took over and disfranchised every Mormon in the territory: in 1886, therefore, Hailey (who was not a Mormon) no longer could rely upon the solid Mormon Democratic vote, and had to straddle the Mormon franchise issue. He still ran strong, and his North Idaho supporters concluded that he was defeated only by fraud in their part of the territory. He retired from politics, but accepted a position as warden of the Idaho State Penitentiary in 1899, and served in that position until 1901. Finally in 1907, he took over the management of the Idaho State Historical Society when that organization became a state-supported government agency, and continued in that capacity for the rest of his life. In 1910, he published his History of Idaho, a useful compilation of information relating to the pioneer days of Idaho.

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