

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

LAFAYETTE CARTEE
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Lafayette Cartee made several diverse, but important, contributions to the physical development and beauty of Boise. As Idaho Territory's first Surveyor General, he surveyed the public lands in Idaho and established the initial point for surveys at a spot near Boise at the intersection of the first parallel and first meridian. His avocation as a nurseryman resulted in the introduction of a wide variety of fruit trees, flowers, and shrubs to the Boise Valley.

Cartee was born December 2, 1823, in Syracuse, New York. He attended St. John's College in Cincinnati, Ohio, and taught mathematics there. He later returned to New York, then moved to Coudersport, Pennsylvania, where he was an architect and builder. In 1848, Cartee joined the rush to California; the following year moving to Oregon City where he opened an office as a surveyor and general engineer. One of his major jobs was superintendent and engineer of the construction in 1862 by the Oregon Steam Navigation Company of a railroad line along the Columbia River. He also served in the Oregon legislature, including two terms as speaker of the house.

Cartee married Mary Bell at Ceres, Pennsylvania, in 1855, and they had four children: Carrie (later Mrs. Fremont Wood), Ella, Ross, and Mary. After his wife's death in 1862 at The Dalles, Cartee came to Idaho. He erected the first sawmill at Rocky Bar in 1863, and attempted to bring in the first quartz mill, but the freight train was reportedly attacked by Indians and the mill was abandoned. He brought his family to Boise in 1866 and began construction of an impressive home on Grove Street. He was appointed Surveyor General in 1866, serving until about 1880.

Cartee began his nursery work soon after moving to Boise, building the city's first greenhouse in 1871. For the next twenty years he imported trees, flowers, and shrubs from the Eastern United States and from China, India, and Japan. Bringing tender trees and plants to early Boise was a major and risky undertaking, as they could be shipped by rail only as far as Kelton, Utah, then had to be hauled by freight wagon. Cartee planted most of his twenty-four acres between Grove Street and the river, and grew enough fruit and vegetables to produce 30,000 cans a year in his cannery. His nursery and orchard were important sources of plants and trees for many Boise Valley growers between 1870 and 1890.

Lafayette Cartee, who possessed the seemingly contradictory titles of "General" and "father of the nursery business in Idaho," died in Boise on September 2, 1891.

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