

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

JAMES ALONZO PINNEY
September 1835-February 4, 1914

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James A. Pinney was born in September 1835, in Franklin County, Ohio. His family moved to Iowa City in 1840. In 1850 he and his father went to California where they mined for a year, then the elder Pinney returned home and James went to work as a store clerk. He ran pack trains into Oregon for several years, then returned to Iowa in 1857. In 1859 he headed west again and ran pack trains between California and Oregon.

Pinney went to the northern Idaho gold fields in 1862 and packed supplies from Lewiston to Elk City, Oro Fino, and Florence. He operated a store in Auburn, Oregon, for a short time and then opened a general store with J. W. Stearns in Idaho City in 1863. The store burned down and was rebuilt in May 1865, and again in May 1867. From 1865 to 1872 Pinney also served as Idaho City's postmaster. In 1872 he sold the store to move to Boise and run the book and stationery store on Main Street that he had bought in late 1869.

Pinney was elected mayor of Boise in 1881 and served until 1885. He was reelected mayor in 1889, 1891, and 1905 for two-year terms. His administrations were noted for the progress in the city's growth and services. While he was mayor, the fire station on Main Street was built, the city purchased the land for Morris Hill Cemetery and the main bridge across the river was bought by the city and tolls were abolished. Also during his terms, the Boise city limits were extended for the first time, construction of the city's sewer system was begun, and the city hall was built.

When Peter Sonna's opera house opened in 1888, Pinney was its manager. The experience he gained there and while running a playhouse in Idaho City led him to build his own theater, the Columbia, in 1892. He sold his store in 1902 to devote all of his time to the theater's management. In 1908 he replaced the Columbia with the even grander Pinney Theater.

Pinney married Mary E. Abbott on June 8, 1864, in Idaho City. She died in 1869. On December 17, 1873, he married Mary A. Rodgers. They had four children: Ida Belle, James Rodgers (died 1893), Paralee, and Annise. Pinney died February 4, 1914, in Boise.

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