

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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Idaho has had a long tradition of mining, agricultural industry (flour mills, sugar beet refineries), sawmills, and large scale construction. Wartime needs, however, brought attention to difficulties in diversifying Idaho's industrial capability to include many kinds of military product that might have offered greater stability during a time of economic dislocation. Lack of coal, iron, and oil resources and remoteness from major population centers sharply limited Idaho's industrial potential. Regardless of these restrictions, Idaho developers set out to attract new kinds of industry after 1946. Trailer, recreational-vehicle, and mobile-home construction became important because of Idaho's location in a large marketing area and because transportation problems for that kind of product could be overcome. Expansion of an earlier twentieth-century phosphate industry strengthened southeastern Idaho's economy. Food processing grew out of large potato and onion dehydrating contracts for wartime needs; Idaho farmers gained new crop outlets, and local industry was diversified and expanded greatly. Forest industries were enlarged, with more complete product utilization and construction of paper and plywood plants. Conversion of Pocatello's large wartime naval gun relining plant increased Idaho's production of heavy equipment. In light industry, computer manufacturing became a prominent feature of Idaho's economy after 1972.

Government construction of highways, dams, airports, and a variety of buildings also helped expand Idaho's industrial potential. A large federal nuclear engineering and testing station between Idaho Falls and Arco provided Idaho's major postwar industrial complex. Nuclear power developed there for submarine motors found applications in commercial ways as well, and although Idaho did not rely upon that source of energy, many other places did. With an assortment of nuclear reactors unmatched in number and variety in American industry, Idaho has thoroughly modern manufacturing applications that compliment more traditional forms.

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