

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### EARLY BOISE PHARMACISTS (Advertiser Column By Nancy DeHamer)

Number 701

1970

As Boise became a settled community, many people discovered that a good profit lay in selling products which were useful to the miners of the Boise Basin and to the citizens of the rapidly growing city. One such business was the drugstore, whose history we can see in pictures in the files of the Idaho State Historical Society.

As early as 1865 the City Drug Store was advertising drugs and medicines, paints, oils, window glass, quicksilver, hair dye, hair oil, tooth brushes, nail brushes, combs, stationery, patent medicines, perfumery, dental and surgical instruments, and all articles usually kept in a first class drug store.

As the population grew, the pharmacy became an increasingly important part of the drugstore. Advertisements often contained the assurance that doctors' prescriptions would be filled by a qualified pharmacist day or night.

William H. Nye was one such pharmacist; in 1869 he became owner and proprietor of Nye's Drug Store after serving as a pharmacist for two years. The store is shown as it appeared in an Idaho State Historical Society's photo from about 1880 to 1885 at the corner of 8th and Main. That Nye was well thought of in the community was evident from an event in November 1870. It seems that a certain G. W. Matthews committed suicide by taking a large dose of laudanum. The coroner's jury interviewed the two town druggists--one of them Nye--in an attempt to discover how the man obtained the poison. The jury did not name a guilty party, but it did recommend that the legislature make it illegal to sell a potentially poisonous drug without a prescription. The local editor was not so kind as the jury; he listed all the evidence and concluded by pointing out that:

Nye is not in the habit of selling poisonous drugs except upon prescription; that Roberts is in the habit of selling anything he has to sell to any one who will buy. Most everyone will draw his own conclusions as to where that poison came from.

Dispensing drugs was an important function of the drugstore, but a more pleasant aspect was the soda fountain. The cool drinks and the good ice cream drew young and old--especially on hot summer days. In 1875 Nye purchased a new soda fountain known as the Keystone Soda Apparatus, which was smaller and more convenient than the Arctic fountain already in his store. He planned to take the smaller one to Fourth of July celebrations, picnic grounds, and fairs. The soda fountain shown in the Idaho State Historical Society Collection is probably not the one Nye bought in 1875, but it was used in the Nye-Galbraith Drug Store on 8th Street in the late 1890's.

In 1889, W. S. Whitehead started a drug store on the corner of 8th and Main. Shortly thereafter he moved into the new Capitol Hotel across the street. In 1924 the store was moved again, this time into the Eastman Building. A photograph showing the interior of the drug store, probably at its opening in the Eastman Building in 1924, is also from the ISHS Collection. It looks quite different from those early stores of the 1860's, but it still had one goal--to help and please the public.