

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### BOISE CEMETERIES (Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

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In every new community, some basic institutions have to be established just to keep life running smoothly. Some of these institutions are obvious: schools, banks, a post office, general stores, some sort of medical service. But some of them may not be so obvious to those of us who have never helped to found a town. One such institution, which we tend to be most aware of around Memorial Day, is a cemetery.

A Boise newspaper editor, in April of 1869--almost six years after the founding of the city--wrote that "Our burial place is badly located on an open field of sand and sagebrush at the foot of the hills," on the eastern edge of the Fort Boise military reservation near what is now Reserve Street. Not only did the editor feel that this was not a particularly attractive or safe place for a cemetery, but also he was concerned about the loose stock that wandered through knocking down both shrubbery and grave markers. He urged a private subscription to purchase a new site or at least maintain the old.

Although a committee was formed on July 24, 1869, to "enclose and beautify" the cemetery and planned an "amateur parlor entertainment" to raise funds, apparently little else was done. A letter to the editor of the paper in August of 1870, a full year after the well-reviewed parlor entertainment, asked just what had been done with the funds raised. In 1872, the Odd Fellows and Masons banded together to purchase a small plot of ground for a private cemetery east of town. This cemetery, which we know as Pioneer Cemetery, is shown in a photograph in the

Idaho State Historical Society's Collection as it appears today.

In it are buried some of the most distinguished citizens of Boise's first decades.

The city fathers were finally forced to take some action on the cemetery problem in 1881, when the federal government ordered the closing of the public cemeteries on the reservation (by this time there was also a Catholic cemetery there). A committee was set up to choose a new site, and in the spring of 1882 the city purchased eighty acres south of the river from William H. Ridenbaugh for \$2,000. Thirteen acres were promptly resold: five to Ada County, for \$200, for a public burying ground and eight to the Roman Catholic Diocese, for \$300 for a Catholic cemetery.

Although the newspaper editor was concerned at first about the cemetery's location on the other side of the river from town, he reported in June 1883 that arrangements had been made with the owner of the Ninth Street toll bridge to let all those with business at the cemetery--both funeral parties and visitors--pass across free of charge. He also reported that "the new cemetery is remote enough from all possible encroachment of city growth."

Eighty-seven years later [1970], this comment seems somewhat shortsighted. It was Morris Hill Cemetery--named for Ridenbaugh's uncle--that he spoke of, and that cemetery's eighty acres are now surrounded by busy city life. Still, the cemetery remains a quiet sanctuary. And it too holds its share of notable citizens, although few of their monuments are so readily found as is William E. Borah's imposing marker.