

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

PINCKNEY LUGENBEEL AND FORT BOISE  
(Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

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Boise's citizens are aware that the city houses a Veterans Administration Hospital, a soldiers' home, and a federal office building. They may even be aware that there is an oddly-shaped city park tucked away in the area of Sixth and Fort streets. But they may not be aware that the land on which these are located (a huge rectangle, which explains the odd shape of the park in its corner) is really the foundation of the city of Boise.

As Boise Basin mining grew in the mid-1860's, and as emigration increased on the Oregon Trail at the same time, it became necessary to establish a military post in the southwestern part of what is now Idaho. On June 28, 1863, Major Pinckney Lugenbeel and three companies of infantry from Fort Walla Walla arrived in the Boise Valley. And on July 4, 1863, the major selected a site for Fort Boise, lying at the foot of the hills with a stream-Cottonwood Creek--running through it. Three days later, eight residents of the valley met to lay out a plan for Boise City, to be located between the fort and the river.

Ever since then, the fort has played a varied role in the city's life. One of the earliest ties between city and fort was social; in 1865, "about fifty couples partook of the hospitalities of the officers at Fort Boise on Christmas evening.

It was the First Annual Sociable given at the Fort, and was every way worthy of the liberality of Uncle Sam's 'boys in blue.'

The supper was well and tastefully gotten up, moistened with much wine. The spacious hall was brilliantly illuminated and tastefully decorated with flags and evergreens, and at either end large fireplaces piled with blazing fir wood gave it the appearance and air of comfort rarely seen outside of a New England sitting room."

Of course, the fort's military purpose was important to the growing city too. In 1877, troops moved through the fort in preparation for the Bannock War; the local paper reported that "never before has Fort Boise presented so brave and warlike an appearance." A few days after this movement, Indians who had been engaged by the fort's commander as scouts entertained the residents of the fort and citizens of the community with a war dance!

The local editor was also concerned about economic and wise use of the fort by the Army. In 1878, he urged that the fort be

made a central supply point and garrison for all of southern and central Idaho and eastern Oregon; in 1879, he expressed great concern that the fort was not being properly financed and supplied--especially given the continuing danger of Indian attacks on settlers in the area. The paper kept up with other details of life at the fort as well: a most unpopular name change in 1879 from Fort Boise to Boise Barracks; a scandal over flour brought in at inflated prices; and such lighter matters as parties, variety shows, and target practice contests at the fort by citizens of the community.

The post continued to serve as a social center of the community until its abandonment by the Army in 1912. In 1912 a Public Health Service hospital was built on the post, and in 1922 this institution became the VA Hospital which remains on the site.

The Idaho Historical Society has a picture of Major Lugenbeel in its files, probably taken several years after he founded the fort. A photograph of the post itself taken about 1890 from the hills behind the city shows houses in the foreground now used for doctors' residences. Other photos shows the quiet post cemetery tucked away behind the main part of the fort on Cottonwood Creek.