

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### EARLY BOISE SCHOOLS (Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

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It is intriguing to look back to the very earliest days of public schools in Boise. The system has a long and honorable history, and many of its monuments are still very much in use today [1970].

Although the first public school in Boise was opened in June of 1865, the first school building was constructed in 1868. It stood at Ninth and State streets, on the west side of the block which houses the old Carnegie Library building. There is a photograph of it in the Idaho Historical Society's files. In a lengthy report published in the newspaper during 1873, County Superintendent J. H. Whitson described the building as being unfit for school use; its two rooms were seriously overcrowded, ventilation was poor, and the pupils' poor learning--despite good teaching--was surely attributable to the deplorable conditions and the three-month term. Superintendent Whitson criticized the citizens of Boise for their lack of interest in public education: a well-publicized public meeting with the superintendent had turned out one father and a few mothers. The leading members of the community were sending their children [and their money] to "select," or private, schools and were ignoring the needs of the city as a whole.

In fact, the financial situation was so bad that the city school closed for three years. Not without a fight, however, for the city first split itself into four separate school districts to take advantage of a territorial fund apportioned on a per-pupil basis but weighted in favor of small districts. Since the

enrollment in 1873 was forty-eight students, the new districts must have been small indeed.

Once the school reopened, however, matters improved rapidly. In 1881 the old brick building was closed and the first Central School opened at Eighth and Jefferson. It was replaced in 1895 by another Central School, and that building was soon supplemented by other elementary schools. One of the earliest in the city was Lincoln School. It was designed by J. L. Tourtellotte, also architect of the Statehouse. It stood at Fourth and Idaho until 1958 although it was replaced by the "new" Lincoln School on Fort Street in 1950.

The first formal high school curriculum was started in 1883, but the first separate high school was not built until 1902. It is shown, in its considerable glory in a photograph in the Idaho State Historical Society's Collection. However, its career was a very short one, for the east wing of the present Boise High School was built in 1908 and the west wing in 1912. Obviously, high school enrollment grew rapidly in the early years of this century--as did the city's whole population.

Another interesting school picture from the files of the Idaho State Historical Society was taken about 1910, in Boise. More than that, we do not know for sure. But we would guess that it was taken on these youngsters' very first day of school. They are young, well-scrubbed, and surely eager to begin learning to read the books stacked at the front of their rows of desks. There are a few apprehensive looks, however; and one little girl in the right-hand row has brought a stuffed toy, in a doll dress, to keep her company!