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IDAHO SOLDIERS HOME (Advertiser Column By Nancy DeHamer)

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In 1970, the buildings of the Idaho Soldiers Home stood empty and unused in a park-like setting on State Street. The apparent peacefulness of the scene was a marked contrast to the controversy that had been raging over the site.

The Home was begun in 1893 for the purpose of providing shelter and care for veterans of the Civil War. The state legislature appropriated \$25,000 for the cost of the building. Boise citizens raised \$4,791 which was used for purchasing forty acres of farmland west of Boise. The building was formally opened May 1, 1895, with a resident population of ten. This figure grew rapidly, until by 1903 and 1904 the Home averaged ninety-two residents.

In October of 1901 the main building was destroyed by fire. The residents were temporarily housed in the Boise Barracks. In his report, the superintendent recommended that the site of the home be changed. He described the land the home was on as primarily waste land and marsh. There were problems with the water supply, with water collecting in the basements, and with the drainage (which was described as "miserable"). Perhaps unfortunately, the Superintendent's recommendation was not followed, and the Home was rebuilt on the same site with insurance money. The distinctive features of the building were the Russo-Byzantine towers, in the center of the front and on both ends. The flag was flown from the center tower. A photograph in the Idaho State Historical Society's Collection shows the main building with its beautiful towers.

The sewage problems had been "solved" by 1903 with a 6-inch pipe which ran 1,600 feet from the main building to the Boise River. Throughout the years other improvements and modifications were made. A new hospital was erected in 1905 (replacing a smaller one built in 1899), and a new barracks in 1909. A park was planned and planted in the northeast four acres of the grounds in 1913.

Veterans groups were always interested in the home and provided help and support. At the request of the ladies of the GAR the name of the barracks was changed to Lincoln Hall in 1915. A Lincoln oak was planted in front of the building and a life-size statue of Lincoln was placed there also. The statue was dedicated on February 12, 1915. Another photograph in the Historical Society Collection shows the statue at a ceremony on July 11 of that year.

On October 4, 1917, the main building was again hit by fire. The building was repaired but, in the remodeling, lost its Russo-Byzantine towers. As time went on the Civil War veterans died and the population of the Home was made up primarily of Spanish-American War veterans,

and later veterans of World War I. The home was constantly being renovated and repaired. Plumbing, heating, and sewage problems abounded. The 1942 Superintendent's report contained the same old complaint: "The plumbing throughout the institution is old and at best is only in fair condition, requiring frequent repairs." The walls were painted and repainted. Much of the maintenance work and the work on the Home's farm was done by residents. Gradually, conditions worsened to the point that it became apparent that a new home would be needed.

So on November 11, 1966, a new home on the Veterans Administration grounds was dedicated. The old Home was left to sit in silence. The superintendent in 1901 had paid tribute to the Home and to the people of Idaho when he said:

When it is considered that Idaho did not furnish a soldier for the war of the rebellion, it shows a generous and patriotic impulse of its people that they should build, equip and maintain a Home in every way creditable for the brave boys, many of them now aged and in want, who went forth from other states to defend the honor of the flag.

This Home is a memento of the heroism and self sacrifice of a generation soon to pass from the state of action forever.

Idaho will do well to cherish with pride and foster with care the Home of the veteran soldier.

An addition to the "new" Old Soldiers Home was dedicated on the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month, November 11, 1980, the exact time of the signing of the Armistice ending World War I. The 2.2-million-dollar project added an 80-bed skilled nursing wing and, for the first time in Idaho's veterans' facilities, a 10-bed women's residence.

The buildings on the old site on State Street were razed and, on March 3, 1976, groundbreaking ceremonies were held for the beginning of the \$429,000 38-acre Veterans Park. Trails and a wildlife sanctuary were among the plans for the park. On July 4 of the bicentennial year, a dedication ceremony was held at the still uncompleted park. On November 1, 1976, the Statesman reported the park was now completed and open for everyone to enjoy. The Idaho POW-MIA organization commissioned a sculpture by Alfred Kober, a BSU faculty member, to stand in the park.

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