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BOISE SANDSTONE (Advertiser Column by Nancy DeHamer)

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In 1863 when Major Pinckney Lugenbeel chose the site for Fort Boise, which in turn became the site of Boise City, he probably did not realize that he was locating near a formation of sandstone, which would prove to be excellent and lasting building material. Whether intentional or not, Lugenbeel took advantage of his good fortune and used native sandstone in building the quartermaster's building on the fort in 1864. With the exception of a few log cabins built in 1863, this is the oldest building in Boise today.

The sandstone formation that Lugenbeel located was described in an 1898 geological survey of the area. This sandstone occurred as a result of the cementing action of hot siliceous springs on sand. The principal area in the Boise region was Table Rock, although sandstone was present in the eroded foothills from "the Hot Springs on the south to a point northeast of the Natatorium on the north." A map included with the survey indicated that there were six quarries in the area.

The community of Boise did not put the stone to as early use as Lugenbeel did. The citizens were, however, aware of it and viewed it as an economic asset. At various times the local newspaper editor offered suggestions and comments on the stone. In 1865 he suggested that great economic gain could be had by that person who would take the sandstone from the quarry behind the Fort and make grindstones of it. There is no evidence that his suggestion was followed. In 1866 he suggested--after noting that sandstone was being used for curbing and sidewalks--that a secure jail be built with the stone. This suggestion was acted upon. In fact, quarries and the prison were to be linked together for many years.

Today it is difficult to ascertain the exact location of the early quarries. It is known that some were in operation in the foothills near Fort Boise. Two or three were worked by inmates in the hills just above the Old Penitentiary, beginning in the 1870's. When the territorial prison was begun in 1870, a notice printed in the newspapers informed the city residents that the stone quarries east of the city were part of the penitentiary and that "all persons taking out stone . . . will be considered trespassers." Citizens could still obtain stone, however, by placing their orders with the superintendent of the quarry works.

The prison made good use of the stone from their quarries, as they used it for building the walls and buildings of the penitentiary itself. Later, in 1911 and 1912 inmates quarried stone that was used in the school for the deaf and blind in Gooding, and for the State School and

Hospital in Nampa. The administration of the penitentiary considered itself quite enlightened because it allowed the inmates to work outdoors on these projects, rather than forcing them to remain idle in their cells.

The picture file of the Idaho State Historical Society has a number of photographs of the penitentiary stone work, including views of the stone yard at the Idaho State Penitentiary. One shows a horse drawn wagon bringing stone from the quarry. Another showing rough stones in the foreground and some finished tombstones, made by the inmates, in the background. This picture is especially interesting because it shows a stone building, guard tower, and walls, all of which were built from stone quarried by the inmates. Table Rock, the scene of much quarrying activity, is also clearly shown.

Although sandstone was put to early use in Boise, there were those who felt it was not used enough. In 1869 the newspaper editor was lamenting the fact that the sandstone formations were so far from San Francisco and that there was no cheap and easy way to transport the stone any great distance. He felt that the few stone buildings in Boise were not properly appreciated and that the stone was worthy of a great city. In 1870, there were rumors of a marble quarry opening in the hills near Boise. With this news the editor prophesied that "marble fronts will soon rise on Main Street, and the public square will be transformed into a corral of statuary second only in magnificence to the Acropolis." This poetic prophecy was destined to be unfulfilled, but the editor would have surely been pleased in the following years at all of the buildings constructed from locally quarried sandstone, much of which came from Table Rock. The Assay Office built in 1872, the Boise City National Bank, the Union Block, Boise High School, and the Idaho State Capitol building were just a few built of local sandstone.

Quarrying was evidently begun later at Table rock than at other sites, probably because it was less accessible. Roads had to be constructed, and methods of bringing the stone down from the mountain had to be developed. It is known that in 1892 the Jellison Brothers began a quarrying operation on Table Rock. An interesting photograph in the collection was taken in 1904, while the Jellison Brothers were operating their quarry. It can be seen that horse-drawn sledges were used to carry the rock.

In 1906 the Capitol Building Commission purchased thirty-five acres from the Jellisons for \$20,000 for use as a quarry for the new capitol building. The commission knew that it would take several years for the capitol to be completed, and bought the quarry to insure that sandstone of the same grade would be available from the start of construction until completion. The commission contracted with the Idaho Stone Company (another company which also owned land on Table Rock) to quarry and cut the stone for the capitol building. There was some dissatisfaction expressed about this contracting, as some felt that penitentiary inmates should be used for such work. Their main objection to the contracting was that the contractor would attempt to make a profit, whereas prison labor would be virtually free. There is, however, no evidence to show that convict labor was used during the construction of the main portion of the capitol building.

In 1911 the Boise Stone Company offered the Capitol Building Commission \$75,000 for the Jellison quarry, but the state decided not to sell. The Boise Stone Company then bought out the Idaho Stone Company and began operations by initiating several improvements. The major

improvement was the installation of a gravity-operated tram line to transport the stone down the mountain. The force of gravity caused an empty car to be pulled up the track while a car loaded with stone went down the hill. Two pictures show various aspects of the Boise Stone Company's operation. One shows a car being unloaded at the bottom of the hill, with other men working on finishing stones and the other, another view of their operation. Another photograph shows the face of the quarry on Table Rock, obviously in a different location from the other Table Rock photo.

While the Boise Stone Company operated the Table Rock Quarry many buildings throughout Idaho and the West were built from the sandstone. The quarry has been idle since 1940. For today's modern buildings, concrete and steel have replaced stone as a building material. The sandstone buildings remaining are a monument to man's skill and ingenuity in using the natural resources available to him.