

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY FACILITIES (Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

Number 717

1970

[This column was written in 1970 with brief update notes at the end.] This is a time of celebration and commemoration for the Idaho State Historical Society. Within a month, it is both observing the twentieth anniversary of the opening of the museum in Julia Davis Park and dedicating the new State Library and Archives building in which its research materials are now housed.

The Society was formally established in May of 1907, child of both the Historical Society of Idaho Pioneers [founded in 1881] and the historical department of the Columbian Club [set up in 1902]. Its first home was the Senate chamber of the old capitol building, one of a series of "temporary" homes that the Society's collections were stuffed into. Its first librarian [a title later changed to state historian and, still later, to director] was John Hailey, who had come west in 1853 and to Boise in 1866. Hailey was a good research subject all by himself: he had run major stage and pony express lines, brought the first sheep into the Boise Basin in 1879, was one of the founders of the town of Hailey, and served twice as Idaho's territorial delegate to Congress. His tenure at the Historical Society lasted until his death in 1921 at the age of 85.

Meanwhile, the Society kept moving. In April of 1909, it went into two rooms in the "Capitol Annex," the old Central School building. There, the librarian also supervised a two-room agricultural exhibit. In 1912 a return trip was made to the capitol's Supreme Court chamber; this eventually became a five-room suite. In 1920, the collections were moved again--into "temporary" quarters in the basement of the west wing of the Statehouse. There they stayed for thirty years, marked by the elegant elk shown in one of the photographs in its collection.

Such quarters provided no storage space for objects, which at this time included not only "historical" items but also many fossils, preserved specimens of snakes, and other items better suited to a museum of natural history. As a result, the interior of the museum was, to say the least, a bit crowded. Another picture in the collection shows the exhibits as they appeared in 1924, with jammed cases and inadequate lighting.

It is not surprising that the librarian and board of trustees were already agitating for a new building. During the 1931-32 biennium, the city offered land in Julia Davis Park for a

museum; but planning did not begin until 1941, when money was finally obtained from both the state and the federal government.

Unfortunately, only the basement walls had been constructed when the War Board ordered construction stopped in early 1942, and there the shell sat until funds were finally appropriated in 1949 to complete the museum. And on December 16, 1950, the structure was dedicated.

Enormous growth and change took place in the next twenty years; as the staff expanded in size and professional training. By 1963, parts of the building had already been walled off and decked in to provide more storage and research space. Once again agitation for new space began, and once again it took a long time to begin to fill the needs. But last year a 20,000-square foot storage center was completed behind the Highways-Law Enforcement building. And on November 23, 1970, the new Library and Archives building in the Capitol Mall complex was dedicated. This modern and well-lighted building houses the museum's former basement residents, the State Library, Genealogical Library, and State Archives, as well as the Society's own library and manuscripts collections. The museum was remodeled so that it is--really for the first time--solely a museum structure.

In 1976, an addition to the State Library building gave the Idaho State Historical Library much needed expansion room. The photograph files were moved to the library and made more accessible to researchers and the public in general. Most Idaho newspapers have been microfilmed and are available for viewing.

On January 15 and 16, 1983, grand opening activities for the addition to the 1950 museum building were held. The addition doubled the display area, giving much easier access for the handicapped and a chance for many more items in the collection to be displayed.