

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### BOISE HARDWARE STORES (Advertiser Column By Nancy DeHamer)

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General stores, their proprietors, and wares have been discussed at various times in this column. We have neglected, however, a type of business closely related to the general store, the hardware store. Hardware stores were begun for the same reasons as general stores; to supply miners, farmers, and townspeople with the things they needed, while at the same time making a profit.

In 1865 Boise had twenty-one general stores and only one hardware store. This store was owned by G. H. Chick, who was advertising stoves, pumps, lead, pipes, gold retorts, copper, zinc, brass and japanned and tinware. All of these goods were to be sold "low for cash." Many of these same things were sold in the general stores, but perhaps the early hardware store was successful because it provided a larger selection of tools and other items, without trying to provide everything that anyone could want in one store.

One of Boise's most successful hardware stores for many years was Frank R. Coffin's. Coffin came to Idaho in 1862, settling in Boise in 1866. In 1873 he bought an existing hardware and tin business. His business prospered and he soon became known as the leading hardware merchant of Idaho. By the 1880's he was in partnership with his brother, Sherman Coffin, and they had started branch stores in other areas of the state. Mining equipment was still sold, but a large variety of other goods and services were also offered. They carried a full stock of iron, steel, stoves, wagons, agricultural implements, cutlery,

sporting goods, plows, mixed paints, oils, glass, barbed wire, and wagon wood stock. In addition Frank Coffin, a tinsmith, manufactured a large amount of tinware in the company's tin and sheet iron shop. The company was also involved in the plumbing business as they were laying pipes connecting the city with the Eastman waterworks. Another important part of their business was driving wells and mounting pumps. The Statesman noted in an article describing the store in 1883 that "A look through this establishment, where 35,000 or 40,000 pounds of hardware will be received and stored, without making any apparent difference in their stock, is always a surprise to strangers visiting the Capital city, and full of interest to everyone who has any pride in the growth of Idaho."

A photograph in the Idaho State Historical Society files shows a sketch of the store as it appeared in 1883; another shows it as it appeared in 1894 at the time of a Pioneer Reunion. Shortly after this reunion the store was torn down and Coffin erected a new building on the same corner of 8th and Main, which he called the Pioneer Building. The Pioneer Building was torn down as part of Boise's Urban Renewal Program in 1970.

In 1905 Coffin sold his hardware business to Andrew E. Carlson, who formed Carlson-Lusk Hardware Store. (Coffin became president of the Boise City National Bank in 1905.) Carlson-Lusk continued to carry on the extensive business developed by Coffin.

A photograph showing the crowded interior of a part of the Carlson-Lusk Store sometime between 1905 and 1915 is most interesting. It is evident from the picture that they carried something that every member of the family would be interested in.