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MOSES ALEXANDER'S BOISE STORE (Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

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The tall, pleasant-looking gentleman who is the subject of this week's column was one of the most interesting and influential men in the growth of Boise and of Idaho. His name was Moses Alexander; he served two terms as mayor of Boise and two terms as governor of Idaho, and he established one of the best-known chains of stores in Southern Idaho and eastern Oregon.

Alexander was born in a small town in Bavaria in 1853. When he was fourteen he came to the United States by himself, living for a year with a much older, married sister in New York before moving on to live with a relative in Chillicothe, Missouri. In that small, Midwestern community he rapidly became fluent in English and thoroughly "Americanized." He joined with his relative in a dry-goods store in Chillicothe, first as a clerk and then as a part owner, and then in 1891, after more than twenty years in Missouri, he headed west to build a new life.

In later years, Alexander said that he was really on his way to Alaska when he came to the Boise Valley and was captivated by its people and the opportunities for growth there. Much as one hates to spoil a good story, it is worth noting that on his way to Boise he also stopped in Pocatello and purchased some building lots in that newly laid-out town as an investment! At any rate, he sank roots in Boise very rapidly, and a year after his arrival he brought his wife and four children to the rapidly growing city.

Building on his Missouri experience, Alexander promptly opened a men's clothing store. Its first home was at the corner of 7th and Main, and that little building can be seen in a photograph in the Idaho State Historical Society files. As his business grew, he built his family a lovely home at 304 State Street, a graceful, tree-shaded house that has escaped the fate of many of Boise's nineteenth-century homes and still houses members of the Alexander family. He also began to establish branch stores in nearby communities, eventually going as far away as Blackfoot, Idaho, and Baker, Oregon.

The main store's second home, built in 1906, shows somewhat blurrily in an ISHS file photo. Looking west down Main Street. It stood on the southwest corner of Ninth and Main, diagonally across from the third home of Alexander's. This building has not been drastically changed or remodeled since its construction in

1924; it has always been a graceful, attractive white structure, carefully planned by its owner both inside and out.

But Moses Alexander did not confine his activities to his business. Four years after his arrival in Boise he was one of the founders of Congregation Beth Israel and helped raise funds for its temple at Eleventh and State. Since the congregation had no rabbi, he helped in the services for many years. In 1897 he was elected mayor of Boise; after another term was skipped, he was reelected in 1901. During both administrations, he was very deeply concerned with civic improvements and concentrated especially on seeing that sidewalks were built and streets paved the growing city. He was also worried about structural weaknesses in the Cottonwood flume that posed a serious flood threat. During his second administration, with his support as well as that of many citizens, the Boise Public Library was established and a Carnegie grant obtained to build a then-suitable structure to house it.

In 1914, the climax of Alexander's political and community service was reached: he was elected governor of Idaho, the only Democrat to win in the state elections that year, and became as well the first elected Jewish Governor in the United States. His campaigning was lively, and his platform style--striding back and forth waving his arms--caused considerable comment. He was reelected governor in 1916 and guided his state through the chaotic years of World War I with skill. After the second term he retired to his business again, although he was a delegate to the Democratic national conventions in 1920, 1924, and 1928 and ran again for governor (disastrously--the Democratic party was the third party!) in 1922. When he died in 1932, Calvin Cobb, publisher of the Statesman and often an opponent of Alexander's policies, said of him:

In a sense Governor Alexander was one of the last remaining links which bound the past with the present, for most of those prominent men with whom he worked to transform Boise from a rude, frontier post to a bustling, modern and beautiful little city preceded him in death. The earliest pioneers had come before them.

They took up the work of the community where the first pioneers left off and the debt we owe them cannot be estimated.