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THE BAPTIST CHURCH IN BOISE (Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

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Among the earliest Protestant denominations to form a congregation in the frontier city of Boise was the Baptist church. Its first building was at the northwest corner of 9th and Idaho and was occupied in January of 1866--thus becoming the second church building in the city.

The plans for the church had been laid the year before by the Rev. Hiram Hamilton, who had come to Boise from Idaho City to form a parish. According to the Statesman, Mr. Hamilton managed to raise \$2,000 toward the building of a church in only one or two hours, and the editor was clearly pleased because such actions encouraged "humanizing influences" in the town. Recognizing that other denominations which could not yet build their own churches might wish nonetheless to hold services in a church when ministers came to town, Mr. Hamilton assured the editor that "this is not too holy a place for other denominations to hold service in, when it is not in use by his own congregation."

In the spring of 1867, Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton began a school--the Boise Valley Seminary--in the church. They both taught standard subjects (and five languages were offered!), and there were also teachers of vocal and instrumental music and of penmanship. It was hoped, newspaper ads stated, that a boarding department would be opened in the fall; meanwhile, suitable housing in private homes could be arranged. The education program was expanded in the fall, but somewhat differently: an evening school was begun for those who had to work during the day.

The Baptist church proceeded quietly for about a decade, with its various activities being reported in the city's papers.

But in 1878, having lost its minister and most of its congregation, it became indirectly involved in an old-fashioned political hassle. Territorial Governor Mason Brayman, who regarded himself as the leading Baptist in the Mississippi Valley, had apparently offered to help the local congregation (and its parent body, the American Baptist Home Mission Society, which actually owned the church building) by buying the lot adjoining the church, on which it had an option for several years. The deed was to be put in Brayman's name, but he would turn it over to the congregation when it could reimburse him.

However, Statesman editor Milton Kelly-- devoted enemy of Brayman, whose actions he mistrusted with good cause--accused Brayman of selling the lot at a profit to a group of Presbyterians who were trying to form a parish of their own, rather than holding it for the Baptists. Brayman apparently suggested to the Presbyterians that he would be glad to join their church if it would not ruin his reputation with the Baptist folks back home. Kelly's attack spread from Brayman himself (who almost certainly had done just what he was accused of, to make money) to the Presbyterians; but had the denominational positions been reversed, he probably would have attacked the Baptists as strongly as he did the Presbyterians.

For three years after this unfortunate fuss, there was no Baptist church in Boise. But in March of 1881 the Rev. D. J. Pierce was sent by the Home Mission Society to try to form a new congregation. In letters in the paper, Pierce urged all who were interested to give not only their money but their time and talents to the struggling church. And he was successful. That summer, a full-time minister came again to the church, and ever since the First Baptist Church has been a steady as well as significant part of life in Boise.

The Idaho State Historical Society has no pictures in its files of the first First Baptist Church (or of the controversial property next to it). There is a picture showing the congregation's second home, which was at 10th and Jefferson and was dedicated on January 29, 1892. In 1929, the church purchased lots at Thirteenth and Washington streets, and in 1946, it sold the old church property with the promise the church would move in 1948. It did--but only the basement of the new church was completed by moving day, July 4. There is also a picture showing the interior of the Jefferson Street church during the campaign for funds to complete the new structure. Another picture shows the current first Baptist Church as it appeared about the time of its dedication on April 16, 1950. One familiar element is missing--the steeple, which was not set in place until 1960.