

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### BOISE HOTELS (Advertiser Column By Judith Austin)

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The sale of the Hotel Boise in 1971 prompted a look at both its early history and the first "first-class" hotels in the city of Boise. Any town that is a major business center needs good, comfortable, well-run hotels (or in this era, motels), and the fact that Boise is state capital and the seat of the legislature means that it has a large part-time population too.

A picture in the files of the Idaho State Historical Society shows the Overland Hotel (or House), which stood at 8th and Main.

It was built in 1864 and had its "grand opening" on September 30 of that year. This photograph of the hotel was taken during the 1870's; many pioneer-reunion pictures were taken in front of it.

The graceful veranda and balcony that were among its most attractive features have not yet been completed.

Like many early hotels, the Overland changed hands several times. Judging by newspaper reports, each successive owner let the hotel slide, and the new man was praised for refurbishing it and making it one of the leading hotels east of San Francisco. Its final and most famous owners were the Eastman brothers.

The other well-known territorial hotel in Boise was depicted in a drawing in W. W. Elliott's 1884 "History of Idaho Territory." It was originally called Hart's Exchange, and it was built in 1866 at 7th and Idaho, partly to provide meeting rooms for the Territorial legislature. It was opened with a grand ball on November 22 of that year, and most of the leading businessmen of Boise and nearby communities were on the "Committee of Invitation." A sign of the pioneer aspect of the town appears in the hotel's ads: one could pay \$20 per week for room and board, or one could just eat at the hotel for \$14 per week. Not enough home cooking available!

In 1872, Hart's Exchange underwent its first major remodeling and reopened with another ball; in 1874 a third such festivity was held, as the hotel was sold and then reopened as the Central. Among the improvements made was moving the outhouses farther from the main hotel building!

In 1878, under the Eastmans, the Overland reentered the news; it was doubled in size by the addition of two brick wings, and the whole place was once again refurbished. In August of 1881, a remarkable and wise addition was made: in effect a sprinkling system, as a fire protection device, was laid across

the hotel's roof. The local paper praised the owners for the system (which was made possible by the extension of the waterworks that far in downtown Boise) and urged other businessmen to do the same to their buildings.

The last of Boise's early hotels was the Capital, which opened in January of 1891. It was built by John Lemp and eventually run by Frank Blackringer--a relative by marriage of the Eastmans. Located on the south side of Main between 8th and 9th, it had faded into a semi-office building by the time the Hotel Boise was built; its site is now a parking lot.

At the time of the opening of the Hotel Boise, it was a marvel of modern architecture, designed by the firm which had done the Statehouse and built by a partnership that included the Morrison-Knudsen Construction Company. The marvel of the hotel lay in more than its design, however. It was built by a corporation drawn from the community, and it was opened in 1930--a year not noted for brave business ventures. The lengthy newspaper description of the new structure reflected enormous community pride: it was air-cooled, considered fireproof, and--as a stock prospectus put it--under "scientific management." It is hard now to get a perspective on the whole building, but the reporter noted that "the top of the building is a medley of wild design and many sided spires trusting into the sky. Every top corner of the structure ends in a slender bit of stonework to break the sober effect of straight lines and plain walls." The reporter noted too that the building is constructed as if it were "a huge block of stone which had been hollowed out"--a steel-reinforced concrete shell.

And, as was the case with its predecessors, the Hotel Boise celebrated its opening on December 20 with a grand and elegant dinner-dance for the whole community, led by its most distinguished businessmen and public servants.