

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

### HISTORICAL SOCIETY'S MUSEUM LOCATIONS

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The Idaho State Historical Society has had several homes. The following is a brief history of its moves and expansions.

The Historical Society of the State of Idaho was created by the Ninth Session of the Idaho Legislature. At the time the act was passed, March 12, 1907--the office of the Historical Society of Idaho Pioneers was located in the old Pinney Building on Eighth Street. The beginning collection of the Historical Society of Idaho Pioneers was first displayed in the home of Ella Cartee Reed, who maintained it and kept it open to the public until the state recognized the Society and provided space for them. When the act became effective May 7, 1907, the Society moved into state quarters.

This Act provided that the State should "take over the property and accumulations of the Historical Society of Idaho Pioneers. It also provided that the governor should appoint three trustees who should have the management of the affairs of the Society, and that said Trustees should appoint a Librarian to take charge of the property, relics, curios, etc., and to gather more including the gathering of and compiling history of the early settlement and development of Idaho under the supervision of the Trustees."

The governor appointed the Trustees and designated the **Senate Chamber in [Territorial] Capital Building** as a temporary place for the State Historical room. The Trustees appointed a Librarian. The accumulation of the Historical Society of Idaho Pioneers was moved into the State Historical room on May 7th, last and placed on exhibition, so that all who come may see. Volume 1, Number 1, Idaho State Historical Society Bulletin, April 1, 1908

[The Territorial Capitol Building, built in 1885, stood on the block where the east wing of the Capitol Building is now. The new State Capitol Building was started in 1906, and completed in 1912 with the wings added in 1919 and 1920. It was torn down previous to the construction of the wings.

On April 21, 1909, the furniture relics and appurtenances in my charge were moved into a suitable room in the **old school building, commonly called the Capitol Annex**. Here everything was properly arranged for the inspection of the public. In addition to rooms on the second floor filled with historical matter and relics, the State has fitted up two rooms on the third floor with agricultural products of Idaho. I am exhibiting these in connection with the historical exhibit. These exhibits make a very creditable showing. John Hailey, Librarian, Second Biennial Report, 1909-1910

[The old school building, more commonly known now as the old Central School, was on the property west of the present Capitol Building, and was torn down to accommodate the building of the west wing.]

We are a little behind time in getting this report out, but the delay was caused by our having to move the Historical fixtures, relics, etc., from what is known as the Capitol Annex, into the **old Capitol Building**. This has been quite a task, we have been two weeks moving and fitting up new quarters assigned us, which is in the room formerly occupied by the **Supreme Court**, they having moved into the new Capitol building. John Hailey, Librarian and Secretary, Third Biennial Report, 1911-1912

[This was actually a move back to the first location of the museum when it became a state entity.]

During these years we have had to move three times. We now occupy five rooms in the old Capitol Building and many thousands of people have visited these historical rooms. All seem well pleased with the time spent looking over our collection.

We now have these five rooms pretty well filled up and will soon need more room. For the first two or three years, we often felt embarrassed when people from other states, that had so much more to exhibit than we had, came in to see ours; but now we are no longer ashamed to have all come and see our State exhibit, for we think it is interesting and instructive. John Hailey, Librarian and Secretary, Fifth Biennial Report, 1915-1916

The completion of the Capitol Building necessitated the removal of the Society and its

belongings, and it has been temporarily assigned quarters on the lower floor of the west wing [of the **Capitol Building**]. The interesting collection of ores, bound newspapers, books and pamphlets pertaining to Idaho's early history, mounted native animals and birds, pictures of our early pioneers, and others prominent in our history and other curios and relics, is now stored in a space totally inadequate to properly display them or safely care for them; the portion of the building used is not fitted in any way for the permanent home of the society and the objects sought to be attained by its organization cannot be there successfully accomplished. We are assured, however, that those in charge of the Capitol Building are impressed with the necessity of suitable rooms for the Society's purposes and will cooperate heartily in all attempts to secure them. James H. Hawley, Henry H. Hoff, Aaron F. Parker, Trustees, Seventh Biennial Report, 1919-1920

I do not need to remind you of the value of all pictures pertaining to the history of our State, whether past or present, or the impossibility of keeping them piled in a vault.

We have some fine specimens of early pioneer and historical furniture connected with the early history of Idaho, which we cannot properly display. We have utilized the basement hallway, both as to walls and floor, for some of our mounted specimens, but they should have better light and also be protected from unavoidable dirt and dust to preserve them.

The State Historical Society has outgrown its present quarters more than twice over, and needs much additional floor space, either by removal to a large suite of rooms in the present Capitol building or in a building of its own. Failing in this, it is necessary that more space be allowed the Society by the addition of rooms adjacent to the present location. But, in whatever way it is accomplished, the need is urgent. Ella C. Reed, Librarian, Eighth Biennial Report, 1921-1922

#### **ADDITIONAL ROOM FOR SOCIETY PURPOSES**

The cramped-up quarters assigned the Society and its belongings upon the completion of the Capitol Building and the removal of the Society belongings there, made it impossible to properly care for and display our exhibits until additional room was provided

in the spring of 1924. While the strain was thereby greatly lessened, the remedy provided was by no means adequate, and we have undisplayed exhibits at the present time that would fill space equal to that acquired last spring. The people of Idaho are awakening to the importance of our Department and the possibilities of its future. Many valuable relics of the past are now awaiting action by the Society which will result in their immediate delivery. While the exigencies of the future will undoubtedly necessitate in the days soon to come, the erection and maintenance of a fire-proof building for the use of this Society, either solely or in conjunction with other departments, we realize that the time is not opportune for insisting upon immediate action thereon. In the meantime we urge that our present quarters should be extended by including all the room lately occupied by the Adjutant General, and other rooms contiguous thereto. This could be accomplished, as we understand it, without particular cost, or serious inconvenience to other departments. The efforts we are making to insure the future good of every part of the State and its people. We are not working for the present only, but for the future. The accumulations of this Society will profit the succeeding generations in an ever-increasing ratio. This Society should have preference, we submit, over ordinary routine matters when it comes to providing room actually necessary for both present and future purposes. James H. Hawley, Montie B. Gwinn, Frank A. Fenn, Trustees, Ninth Biennial Report, 1923-1924

Again we are compelled to complain of our cramped-up quarters. The original space allotted our society in the Capitol Building was so limited that it became impossible to properly care for and display our exhibits, until the spring of 1924. The additional space then granted us, and the further room assigned us in 1925, has long since been filled. . . .

It has been suggested heretofore that this society should have a separate building in which to place its rapidly increasing exhibits. The necessity for this becomes apparent after slight reflections. The uniform experience of those engaged in this class of work in the older states, has shown the necessity of a Historical Society, having control of its own building, in charge of its own officers, and not under the jurisdiction of any branch of the State government, except the general supervision exercised by the Chief Executive. There is not sufficient room in the present Capitol Building to accommodate all of the state

offices who properly should have their headquarters there. . . . We would suggest that if the present is considered an opportune time for a betterment of this kind, that a building be erected by the State, one story of which would be used for the accommodation of the Supreme Court and its Judges and the State Library, and the rest of the building be devoted to the uses and purposes of the State Historical Society. James H. Hawley, Edward H. Peasley, Donald A. Callahan, Trustees, Tenth Biennial Report, 1925-1926

The city of Boise has offered a site for a building in Julia Davis Park at some future time. The matter of securing location and title to this is being sponsored by the Sons and Daughters of Idaho Pioneers.

This society at a regular meeting, February 2, 1932, went on record as unanimously endorsing this move. Althea E. Fouch, Secretary-Librarian, Thirteenth Biennial Report, 1931-1932

The crying need for more room in which to display the folk-lore which is available, but not forthcoming under present conditions, remains the same. However, the present administration favors a new Museum whenever funds are available. We trust the time is not far distant. . . .

It becomes a duty to again remind you of the crowded condition of our State Museum in the Statehouse basement and of the necessity of a suitable building, the delay of which has caused many valuable relics to be housed in permanent exhibits that otherwise would be ours for the asking. However, our loyal citizens in a few short years would fill such a building with worthwhile historical lore which would be on exhibition for future generations.

Your Board has seen fit to condemn and rid itself of a few moth-eaten birds, animals, etc.; others have been cleaned and fumigated. E. H. Peasley, Byrd Trego, Mrs. A. H. Oversmith, Trustees, Seventeenth Biennial Report, 1939-1940

The State has furnished rooms in the basement of the Capitol Building for the use of the Society but the space is entirely inadequate to properly care for and house the many valuable objects and material in the hands of the Society. By reason of lack of space to properly care for them, the Society has lost and is losing the opportunity to acquire many valuable collections which should be acquired and retained, and to in some way preserve the memory of many locations of

great interest in different parts of the State. Provision should be made by the incoming Session of the Legislature to permit this broader field of endeavor to be carried on. Frank Martin, James H. Wickersham, Harry Moore, Trustees, Eighteenth Biennial Report, 1941-1942

An interesting sidelight from an Idaho Statesman article of May 10, 1942:

#### GOVERNOR OFFERS STATE HISTORICAL BUILDING TO ARMY

Governor Clark offered Saturday to complete a state historical building now being constructed in Boise by the Work Projects Administration and turn it over to the Army for administrative use.

The governor advised Lt. Col. Harry R. Schuppner, Army engineer stationed at Boise, that the building was "now partly constructed and the materials are practically all on the ground for its completion."

"Due to Army activities in this area it was my idea that you might like to consider taking over this building for the duration," he added.

Some of the materials might be a loss were construction to be stopped, the governor said.

Obviously, this offer was not accepted and construction did not begin again for several years.

. . . we urge that you use your influence in securing the completion of the building located in Julia Davis Park, together with a maintenance fund suitable to the needs of the Board.

. . . we urge that you use your best efforts in securing the completion of the building in Julia Davis Park, which the state is under obligation to build in accordance with the contract with the city of Boise. So far the State has spent around \$18,000, besides the Government money expended.

The building, when completed, will attract hundreds of visitors, unable now to find the Museum in its present location. E. H. Peasley, E. B. Smith, Mrs. M. B. Nash, Trustees, Nineteenth Biennial Report, 1943-44

The projected building of a separate State Historical Museum in Julia Davis Park, which was authorized by act of legislature in its 1939 session and upon which work was started about November 1, 1941, but which had to be discontinued under the regulations

of the National War Board after the completion of only the basement walls, should be again taken up and the building brought up to completion at the earliest possible date. . . . Homer E. Martin, Ed H. Peasley, Mrs. Sam H. Hays, Trustees, Twentieth Biennial Report, 1945-1946

The 1949 legislature appropriated money to finish the building, and construction was recommenced in 1949 with the building finally being finished and accepted by the state in the fall of 1950.

The moving of the contents of the Museum from the state House to its new quarters was a tremendous task and then, waiting for the new cases and the floor finish, delayed the opening until December 16, 1950. Governor Robbins [sic], at that date accepted and dedicated the building. . . .

The City named the street in front of the Museum, Parkway Drive and the new address is 610 Parkway Drive.

. . . Right now the Museum is the **show place** of Idaho. Mrs. Francis Neitzel, Mr. Claude Marcus, Mr. William Ames, Trustees, Twenty-second Biennial Report, 1949-1950

In 1956, the museum began the long process of becoming a modern museum, telling the story of Idaho, instead of just a repository of collected items.

The modernization of the displays in the handsome museum building is a primary object, dictated by the strong belief that the Society must use its objects and ideas. It is therefore not enough for the museum merely to house its things; it must make them teach Idaho's history and future. . . .

As rapidly as it can be done, the museum's displays will be brought closer and closer to the purpose set up by the legislature in 1907--to deal with the history of Idaho and the Pacific Northwest. Additional funds are badly needed for these plans, though, especially funds usable for the salary of a skilled man. H. J. Swinney, Director, Twenty-fifth Biennial Report, 1955-1956

There were always, as now, unexpected problems cropping up.

During the summer of 1958, structural failures in the ceiling of the lower level became evident, and the

entire area had to be closed for long drawn-out, very noisy, and extremely dusty, repairs. But all's well that ends well: the state building commissioner was cooperative and the constructors were not only competent but careful, and the new ceiling of acoustic tile is a great improvement. Furthermore, we are assured that it is up to stay.

The over-riding problem in the museum is that of cataloging and storage. It has been estimated that the museum owns some 30,000 objects, none of which has ever been cataloged in the modern sense. . . .

. . . Plans have been drawn and budgetary provision made for the construction of adequate storage units behind the temporary partition across the museum floor. Until order is brought of the existing chaos in the storage areas, no successful attack can be made on the long-range development of the museum. H. J. Swinney, Twenty-sixth Biennial Report, 1957-1958

Soon after Mr. Bowditch's arrival on the staff, he began to draw up plans for new storage and work room facilities in the west end of the building. These plans involved "double-decking" a large proportion of the building in order to gain additional storage area.

When complete, the drawings were taken to the Boise-Cascade Corporation, which offered--most generously--to donate the needed lumber, paint, and building materials. . . . The final job includes complete stack space for our library and document collections, with a second large proportion of our smaller objects. . . . H. J. Swinney, Director, Twenty-seventh Biennial Report, 1959-1960

Three major improvements were effected in the museum building during this biennium. After careful investigation of relative costs, we finally decided to clean the walls ourselves. A man with some experience in this kind of work was hired in the summer of 1961, and the necessary scaffolding rented. The entire building was cleaned, and the offices and a few other areas painted. The resulting improvement is wonderful to behold. We had not realized how dingy we had gotten through the years.

At the same time, a complete restudy of electrical circuits was made. Many of the base outlets had been out of order ever since the building was opened, probably due to the fact that the building stood half finished for roughly a decade before it was roofed over and completed. With considerable difficulty, the conduits for all but one of these circuits were

cleared, and new water-proof wiring installed. (In the one exception, a substitute circuit was provided.) This unglamorous job is a necessary preliminary to our project of providing internal lighting for many of our older cases.

The day is not far distant, too, when attention must be given to the suitability of the present building for our program. It now houses both the Historical Society and the State Library, which latter organization occupies some 4,000 square feet in the lower level. The library is severely handicapped by lack of space, and the Historical Society is beginning to be so handicapped also. The great expansion in our archival holdings, as we pick up the duties assigned to us in this field by the legislature in 1947, is beginning to fill available storage space. The expansion of our other divisions is beginning to crowd their areas, too. Before long, some long-range plans must be made for these problems. H. J. Swinney, Director, Twenty-eight Biennial Report, 1961-1962

. . . even more overriding the need for space. Of course we would need more space for new staff members to work in, and it is now hard to see where another desk can be added. But the Society's wealth, its raw material for service to the community, lies in its holdings in physical things: books, manuscripts, pictures, archival holdings, museum objects. These things represent the history of Idaho, and because history never stops, such collections are never complete. The moment a historical agency ceases collecting, it is going backwards. There is no such thing as standing still. We can only attempt to keep up. And as the collections grow, the need for housing and facilities grows with them.

The Society's present building, designed in the late 1930's, and completed in the late 1940's, is a substantial structure, and has served its purpose well.

However, it was designed with the needs of the Idaho Historical Society of the 1930's in mind, and those needs have changed drastically since that time. . . . As originally built, it contained no storage space of any kind; make-shift storage space has had to be installed in it. . . .

It did not contemplate the great increase in the Society's holdings which has been brought on by a program of modernization. And finally, when the present building was designed, the State of Idaho had no archives at all, and all records were being preserved in the office of origin; this alone renders the present

building obsolete.

The day is not coming when the state must face the problem of greatly expanded and improved quarters if it wishes to continue an active historical program. The day has come. . . .

A new building must provide space for several essential functions of the Society. . . . H. J. Swinney, Director, Twenty-ninth Biennial Report, 1963-1964

Lack of space to house museum objects, manuscripts and archival acquisitions, growing newspaper files, and expanding library holdings have forced the Society to arrange for more storage outside the museum building. A building leased at Gowen Field in 1959 for object and newspaper storage was filled up by 1966, and some additional low-cost rental space was obtained near the museum. A major storage area, on which construction is scheduled to be completed in December 1966, is being built by the Idaho State Library. This promises to solve our problem of unsatisfactory rented storage areas for newspaper files, for which the State Library is willing to offer storage. Solutions to the museum, office, and storage problems await construction of a Society building which was authorized by the legislature in 1963, provided funds could be raised to supplement appropriations made from the State Permanent Building fund both in 1963 and 1965. Robert L. Damm, Director, Thirtieth Biennial Report, 1965-1966

By the beginning of 1968, a solution for the critical storage problem of the object collections, of the state archives, of the division of manuscripts, and of the division of newspapers could be deferred no longer. . . . The legislature approved the necessary revision of the building fund appropriation to match the present Historical Society and State Library grants with each other, thus making them both available immediately in order (1) to construct a new Library building in the capitol complex to house the State Library, the historical and genealogical libraries of the Idaho State Historical Society, and the State Archives division of manuscripts, and other similar functions of the Society; (2) to construct a 20,000-square-foot storage building for large objects, archives, newspapers, and manuscripts belonging to the Society, and (3) to renovate the present State Museum building for display and museum use, so that the exhibit area might be doubled in size. Plans have been drawn for the storage building, with construction

scheduled to commence before the end of this biennium.

Plans for the library center are almost complete, and construction should be underway early in 1969. Before the end of the next biennium the State Library and the Society libraries and library-related divisions should be in new quarters. The present building then will be devoted to museum display. . . . Merle Wells, Acting Director, Thirty-first Biennial Report, 1966-1968

The new State Library and Archives building was completed in October, 1970, making possible the transfer of the State Library, Idaho Historical Society Library, State Archives, and Genealogical Library from the State Museum. The new structure is located between State and Jefferson streets on Third Street.

A new Storage Center was completed in July, 1969, making possible the consolidation of holdings inadequately provided for in a number of rented locations. The new building is slightly larger than the entire present museum. . . .

A complete renovation of the museum building is currently underway. . . . The entire state museum building will be available for museum functions for the first time since it was built. . . . Arthur A. Hart, Director of the Museum, Thirty-second Biennial Report, 1969-1970

The United State Assay Office, authorized in 1869 and completed in Boise in 1871, is one of Idaho's most important historic buildings. On August 7, 1972, it was formally turned over to Governor Cecil D. Andrus by officials of the United States Forest Service. Thirty-third Biennial Report, 1971-1972

Also in 1971 the cabins were moved across Julia Davis Park to be the beginning of the Pioneer Village. The Logan House was moved from Sixth and Grove streets. The interior renovation of the museum itself with the black ceiling and the new lighting. The moving of the Genealogy Library to the new Library and Archives building allowed the auditorium to be returned to its original use. The model railroad exhibit in the west end of the building began. In 1972 the Chinese exhibit was opened.

A serious lack of exhibit space has handicapped the Museum for several years. We have reached a crisis situation in 1974, with less than one fourth of the Society's superb collections on view. Not only has the Museum run out of space, but the storage center as well. . . . A museum addition, first requested in 1969, could have been built at that time for \$202,000.

It would have nearly doubled available exhibition and educational spaces in the building. By this year, rising costs and inflation had pushed the projected budget to \$350,000. We are hopeful that the Museum's turn will come soon in relieving a serious situation. . . . Thirty-fourth Biennial report, 1973-1974

In 1973 the bank exhibit in the museum was completed.

In 1978 the addition to the Library and Archives building was completed. The moving of the photo collection from the basement of the museum building gave additional space for shifting work space in the museum and freeing additional exhibit space. The locomotive, "Big Mike," displayed for many years in Julia Davis Park, was given into the Historical Society's care.

In 1980 approval was given to the first phase of the addition to the museum building by the Permanent Building Fund Advisory Council. Finally in January of 1983, the grand opening of the new addition to the museum was held.

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