

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

NEW PLYMOUTH

Number 984

January 1993

More than one Idaho community was founded as a model for an irrigated farm settlement, but New Plymouth is exceptional among them. In 1894, a National Irrigation Congress that met in Denver that year decided to find a site where a small town could be developed to show how that kind of planning and accomplishment could best be done. Unlike many new townsite promotions that aspired to create large new commercial centers, this one would retain those advantages available in a small rural setting of several hundred people. After a survey of possibilities in eight western reclamation sites, a Payette Valley location was chosen.

Prominent leaders and planners from Boston, Cleveland, and Chicago arranged for prospective participants to assemble in Chicago to organize that venture in March, and by May they had a colony of 250 families enlisted to participate. By September this group had reached and organized New Plymouth. In 1896, after only one year of planning, crops were planted and farming began.

A town plat was designed with a central arch, surrounded by one acre holdings for each family arranged around it. Then farms of ten to forty acres surrounded that center. Parks and public buildings were interspersed among family holdings adjacent to New Plymouth's business center. All of that elaborate planning still is reflected in New Plymouth's eventual development. Later growth has somewhat exceeded New Plymouth's original specifications, but it retains its initial small town design and atmosphere. Because of its location in a fruit and vegetable area, New Plymouth--like Payette, Fruitland, Emmett, and other area communities developed a number of processing and shipping plants for prunes, apples, cherries, peaches, pears, grapes, and a variety of grains and vegetables. It achieved its purpose of demonstrating what model irrigated farming could do during an era before large state and federal projects got underway.

(This information has not been edited.)

Publications--450 N. 4th Street, Boise, ID 83702--208-334-3428