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Although some early Idaho trappers had (or had access to) small libraries, most literary resources remained unavailable until settlement brought superior possibilities for library development. Fort Hall had at least a few library volumes in use during its early fur trade years, but very few patrons were available to appreciate those cultural resources.¹ During that era, Henry Harmon Spalding and Marcus Whitman had considerable difficulty transporting some literary volumes across southern Idaho in a wagon, which they got only as far as Fort Boise in 1836. Whether Fort Boise wound up with some of those books or whether missionaries had modest libraries at Lapwai and Kamiah, any such operations certainly remained very limited. In 1839, Spalding began to print books in Nez Perce, but that venture remained relatively small scale at a time when no other Pacific Northwest publishers had started to produce anything at all.²

Oregon Trail travelers normally could not bring extensive book collections with them, but mining communities did better. Even though roads had not reached Idaho's early camps, Florence had a rental library operating in 1862.³ Mining communities that had heavy freight service offered better possibilities. As a major service center for important mining camps, Boise profited from gaining access to publications on a large scale. People interested in having modest private libraries could bring in or acquire books that they were interested in, and places like Placerville and Idaho City had private circulating libraries when settlement was just beginning in Boise in 1863. Pioneer City still had one in 1869.⁴

Sam Houston's circulating library operation, with outlets that opened in Placerville and Idaho City just when winter was about to arrive in 1863, offered inactive miners an abundance of literature. His venture got a favorable reception. Commenting upon Houston's "library of 2000 volumes," T. J. Butler noted that "Books and newspapers are much cheaper and better companions during the long Winter evenings, than any likely to be met with in the streets or bar-rooms of the city. Patronize the library."⁵ A large number of subscribers adopted his advice. Four years later, Bishop Daniel Sylvester Tuttle noted, October 27, 1867, that volumes by John Stuart Mill, Herbert Spencer, Ernest Renan, and Henry Thomas Buckle were "prominent and much bethumbed" in Idaho City's circulating library. He noticed that "these clever men of intellect here are all tinctured with rationalism."⁶ Boise had that same kind of population with an equal need for library resources.

Boise, in fact, had several kinds of early libraries. One, which originated in Lewiston, was Idaho's territorial library. Benjamin F. Lamkin, in his capacity as auditor, was designated territorial librarian by legislative action approved January 29, 1864. A territorial archive, including complete files of all Idaho newspapers maintained by Idaho's territorial secretary, was created January 22, 1864. Legislation effective December 24, 1864, transferred those institutions from Lewiston to Boise. Boise also had a circulating library that Lamkin, who had served as territorial auditor from October 10, 1863 to January 13, 1866, operated in connection with his Boise bookstore and other commercial enterprises. By 1869, however, he was having trouble getting borrowers to return their overdue books. Too many were six months delinquent.⁷

Attorneys who needed law libraries were outstanding pioneers in developing personal collections that were not limited to professional volumes. Idaho's initial public library--a territorial law library established in Boise in 1866 served legal needs.⁸ Another early government library arrived in Boise in 1870. An infantry company at Fort Boise invested \$1,200 in a thousand books that were brought out in February. Those volumes were intended for reading pleasure of those stationed there.⁹ No competing public library movement had serious prospects for success for more than another decade. A few other community library possibilities gained support during that era: as early as March 5, 1866, for example, a benefit concert provided revenue to start a Sunday school library.¹⁰ After all, churches needed libraries more than most saloons did. For that matter, advantages of developing a city public library did not pass unnoticed. Boise had such firmly entrenched opposition to providing city government of any kind that attention naturally was not given to investing any city funds in a library. But some kind of nongovernmental public library had support that gained press notice at times: early *Capital Chronicle*, 27 November 1869, and *Idaho Statesman*, 11 March 1871, endorsements offer bipartisan examples. But finding a librarian and funding book acquisitions through some kind of local charitable enterprise proved unfeasible during Boise's early years as an isolated pioneer settlement. A national economic Panic of 1873 and widespread mining retrenchment during that era did not help either.

Boise's extensive saloons could have added library facilities to enhance their recreational opportunities, and Boise's most skillful and energetic joker--Jimmy Hart--referred to his saloon as a reading room in 1875 when he sponsored a debate regarding Henry Ward Beecher's notorious scandals.¹¹ Both elements, those who frequented saloons and those who opposed any such activity, participated in a major way in Boise's library movement, and their efforts finally were combined to achieve community library service. A Boise City Library and Literary Association began a series of meetings in May 1882, with Fremont Wood, a prominent attorney and later judge, contributing his office for that effort.¹² Literary clubs and circles that were flourishing by 1882 added support for such efforts.¹³

Just before extension of railroad service to a point close to Boise made a public library movement more feasible, a shocking fire destroyed Edward J. Curtis' valuable private collection, October 19, 1882, and brought renewed notice to library needs.¹⁴ Curtis had previously served as territorial law librarian while he was territorial secretary,

with frequent periods as Idaho's acting governor. He soon returned to that position, in which he resumed his importance in Idaho's public library history. After 1882, possibilities for a community public library in Boise held greater promise. Two propositions emerged late in 1883. By that time, Boise gained a railroad station at Kuna, only fifteen miles from town. Large new irrigation projects also promised to stimulate local growth. So on October 14, L. A. Bank delivered a lecture on Boise's need for a public library, and a Free Library Association was organized three days later.¹⁵ Another national economic panic of February, 1884, attended that project and set back Boise's railroad, irrigation, and general community development. A month later, J. W. Daniels, in charge of Boise's school system, followed with a fund-raising entertainment designed to finance a 400 volume Boise High School library.¹⁶ He at least had a staff and a room to accommodate a second public library in Boise, although it was designed for student access rather than general public use. A general public library had to be deferred.

Later in 1884, a novel approach to Boise's library sponsorship got more public notice than support. By that time, a national Women's Christian Temperance Union campaign was getting underway to provide reading rooms that would offer an alternative to saloons as places for entertainment. A library in Idaho Falls (then known as Eagle Rock) flourished in response to that suggestion. Boise had a local chapter of Women's Christian Temperance Union crusaders against alcoholism. All through November, they developed plans to provide a free reading room as part of their ambitious program to improve community values.¹⁷ Some kind of municipal federation of saloon keepers would have reflected local sentiment much more accurately. Unlike churches, saloons formed one of Boise's most well established and respected local institutions. As a result, Jonas W. Brown had practically no associates as a prominent community leader who preferred an anti-saloon league approach to cultural needs of that era. In reviewing Boise's hesitant response to starting a public library as a WCTU venture, Milton Kelly's *Idaho Statesman* indicated, December 2, 1884, that an independent library agency, disconnected from other causes, could succeed--and ought to be employed right away. A decade later, something like that approach actually worked. Meanwhile, a lack of anyone able to serve as a city librarian delayed an otherwise promising public library movement.

Efforts to attract public library support continued unabated after 1884. On January 28, 1886, Boise's fire department met for that purpose and furnished a hall to house a city library. At that point, all they needed was books and a librarian. Liberal donations of materials and city council funding for salaries to employ a librarian and a janitor enabled their fire department's public library to begin service. A large crowd attended an opening ceremony, February 10. Patrons could use that facility each evening that their volunteer firemen were not assembled in a meeting.¹⁸ Maintained as a city public library, that reading room got by on a very modest budget. A \$30 bookcase and janitorial services provided by James H. Twogood, amounting to \$10 a month, covered most of that operation. Extra nights of service required fifty cents each. That raised total cost to as much as \$16 or \$17.50 for some months.¹⁹ Although patronage

declined during winter months, Boise continued to show pride in maintaining Idaho's only free public library, "equipped with books and periodicals, and made comfortable with furnishings, equaled by few towns the size of Boise in the Union."²⁰

Boise added yet another specialized library in 1886. By that time, Idaho's territorial penitentiary overflowed with prominent Mormon leaders who had been sentenced to six-month terms for unlawful cohabitation with their plural wives. (They could have cohabited legally with as many women as they wanted to so long as they did not marry them, and anyone else could have cohabited legally with Mormon plural wives, but during that era of anti-Mormon crusading, a concerted effort to disrupt Mormon church administration by sending their leaders to prison in Boise brought about an odd situation.) A prison library was organized to accommodate a sudden increase in population of that institution. Funded with small fees collected from visitors, it began with a book collection donated by E. J. Curtis, who had done more than anyone else to start libraries in Boise. Newspapers already were donating current issues for prisoners to read, and books formed a welcome addition.²¹ That library continued on after a sudden Mormon influx ended, and was regarded as a particularly valuable institution.

While Idaho was achieving admission as a state in 1890, Boise's Women's Christian Temperance Union free reading room was gaining an improved status. More newspapers were added to its current collection, along with an extra table, so that men and women could have their own seating accommodations.²² As many as forty-four users a day--with a total of 2,472 between October 1, 1889 and January 24, 1890--enjoyed its privileges, and benefit concerts covered its monthly operating costs.²³ These amounted to less than \$60. They included \$20 for a librarian's salary; another \$20 for rent; \$9 for wood and oil winter heat; and \$4 or \$5 for reading material.²⁴ A particularly successful opera house performance, March 1, 1890, brought increased resources required for a more permanent, enlarged operation. Public meetings, with special efforts to attract business support, also helped.²⁵ On April 1, a larger and more accessible location became available on Main Street adjacent to Peter Sonna's store. There an increased book collection required donations of more shelf space for their new downtown site that a saddlery formerly had occupied. Their expanded operation served also as a children's library.²⁶

With Boise's continued population growth and Idaho's success in surviving as a territory in spite of severe difficulties characteristic of that era in western development, cultural achievements like library service continued to show promise. Advancing from promise to performance, though, did not come easily; Caldwell opened a college in 1891 and Moscow followed with a university that commenced with a faculty and students in 1892. These institutions clearly required libraries that ought to match Boise's high school library, but that was about as far as Idaho's library resources seemed to be going right after state admission in 1890. Competition between Boise's firemen, WCTU supporters, and another group of socially prominent women who organized a Columbian Club, April 2, 1892 to promote cultural opportunities helped delay local library expansion, which Columbian Club members decided to place on a firm basis in July, 1893.²⁷ When a city hall library room became available for a

Columbian Club facility, Boise's WCTU library was merged into that enterprise, December 10, 1894, and expanded public library services commenced two months later.²⁸

FOOTNOTES

¹Osborne Russell, *Journal of a Trapper* (Boise, 1914), 83.

²Clifford M. Drury, *First White Women Over the Rockies* (Glendale, 1963), 1:85.

³John Machern, "Mining Town Rental Library," *Record*, Washington State University Library (1961), 22:37-42.

⁴*Idaho World* (Idaho City), December 2, 1865, p. 3, c. 1.

⁵*Boise News* (Idaho City), September 29, 1863, p. 3, c. 2.

⁶Daniel Sylvester Tuttle, *Reminiscences of a Missionary Bishop* (New York, 1906), 158.

⁷*Idaho Statesman* (Boise), January 11, 1870, p. 3, c. 3.

⁸Carl F. Bianci, ed., *Justice for the Times* (Boise, 1990), 265.

⁹*Idaho Statesman* (Boise), March 8, 1870, p. 3, c. 2.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, March 3, 1866, p. 2, c. 4; March 6, 1866, p. 2, c. 1.

¹¹*Ibid.*, May 22, 1875, p. 3, c. 1.

¹²*Ibid.*, May 23, 1882, p. 3, c. 1.

¹³*Ibid.*, October 27, 1881, p. 3, c. 1; November 23, 1889, p. 3, c. 2; November 27, 1889, p. 3, c. 2; March 9, 1890, p. 3, c. 1; January 25, 1891, p. 6, c. 4.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, October 21, 1882, p. 5, c. 1.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, October 16, 1883, p. 3, c. 3; October 20, 1883, p. 3, c. 2.

¹⁶*Ibid.*, November 6, 1883, p. 3, c. 3; March 8, 1884, p. 3, c. 1; March 15, 1884, p. 3, c. 3.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, November 22, 1884, p. 3, c. 1, reported a Boise WCTU meeting of November 19, 1884. Cf. Georgina Elton, "Histories of Idaho Public Libraries: Beginning to Firm Establishment," research paper, University of Denver, 1968, p. 63-64.

¹⁸*Idaho Statesman*, February 4, 1886, p. 3, c. 2; February 9, 1886, p. 3, c. 2; February 13, 1886, p. 3, c. 1.

¹⁹Boise City Council Minutes, February 4, March 6, April 1, May 2, 1886.

²⁰*Idaho Statesman*, February 19, 1887, p. 3, c. 1.

²¹Report, Idaho Territorial Controller, 1888; James H. Hawley, *History of Idaho* (Chicago, 1920), 1:319. An *Idaho Statesman* proposal, August 8, 1872, p. 2, c. 2, for a prison library noted that free newspapers already were available for inmates there, but indicated that "we would like to see some of our humanitarian fellow citizens take hold of this little matter and secure a library for this institution. Our prisoners are worse off than those who are kept under some kind of employment. They should have books by all means to while away the dull and tedious hours." Contributions in Boise, Idaho City, and Silver City were anticipated to supply some 200 volumes.

²²*Idaho Statesman*, March 26, 1890, p. 3, c. 2; March 28, p. 3, c. 3.

²³*Ibid.*, January 28, 1890, p. 2, c. 2.

²⁴*Ibid.*, February 28, 1890, p. 3, c. 1.

²⁵*Ibid.*, March 4, 1890, p. 3, c. 1-2; March 16, 1890, p. 3, c. 4; March 19, 1890, p. 3, c. 2.

²⁶*Ibid.*, April 1, 1890, p. 3, c. 3; April 3, 1890, p. 3, c. 3.

²⁷*Ibid.*, July 23, 1893, p. 5, c. 1.

²⁸*Ibid.*, November 2, 1894, p. 3, c. 1; November 13, 1894, p. 3, c. 1; December 11, 1894, p. 6, c. 1; Boise City Council Minutes, December 10, 1894, February 11, 1895.

Information provided by Arthur A. Hart, Gary Bettis, Stephen Smith, and Suzanne Sermon.

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