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ESMERALDA

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When Idaho's territorial legislature set about organizing counties for an area (inhabited mostly by Indians) larger than Texas, not too much information was available concerning vast tracts of mountains and plains. Following Boise Basin gold discoveries of 1862, a new district of South Boise mines had emerged. A separate county was needed, so a huge central mountain area was set aside, with all its mines on its western edge. Some legislative member had heard that a town of Esmeralda had been started in or near Alturas County's South Boise mines, so it was designated as county seat, February 4, 1864.

That turned out to be a poor choice. Less than a year after it had started, Esmeralda had become a ghost town. Located just west of lower Feather River, where mining did not begin for many years, Esmeralda (later revived as Featherville) was adjacent to Junction Bar. But little was going on there either. So when Alturas County was organized, April 4, 1864, that process took place in Rocky Bar, a mining center. Esmeralda was long forgotten when Featherville finally emerged on that same site. Since there was an 1864 Esmeralda mine less than a mile from Rocky Bar, that location may have accounted for legislative confusion concerning where to place Alturas County's government.

(This information has not been edited.)

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