



IDAHO STATE  
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## IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY REFERENCE SERIES

### ALTURAS COUNTY

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The word "altura" is Spanish, and means "mountain summit," or, more generally, "height" or "loftiness." Used in the plural, it also may mean "heavens." But "mountain summits" or "mountainous heights" was the meaning intended—out of the several possible definitions—when the name "Alturas" was applied to one of the original counties of Idaho, February 4, 1864, by the first session of the territorial legislature. Included in the original boundaries of Alturas were eight of the present counties of Idaho, plus substantial parts of six others, and smaller parts of two or three more. (The counties coming entirely from Alturas are Elmore, Camas, Blaine, Ada, and Owyhee. Those mostly from original Alturas are Clark, Jefferson, and Custer; those with substantial portions from Alturas are Power, Bingham, and Bonneville; and those with small portions from Alturas are Boise, Lemhi, and Fremont.) In 1864, Alturas County was larger than the states of Maryland, New Jersey, and Delaware combined, although it was not the largest county in Idaho then. Until 1880, settlement of Alturas County—enormous as it was in area—was confined principally to the two adjacent mining camps of Rocky Bar and Atlanta. Rocky Bar served as county seat from April 4, 1864, until July 6, 1882. But after the 1880 mining rush to Wood River brought in thousands of new inhabitants, most of the population was near Hailey and Bellevue, and Hailey became county seat.

An extremely hard-fought Alturas County division battle came to a head in the last session of the territorial legislature in 1889, when Elmore and Logan Counties were established from parts of Alturas. Logan County, with Bellevue for its county seat, was the main bone of contention. Two years later, the legislature attempted to return the Bellevue area to Alturas by replacing Alturas and Logan Counties with two new ones to be known as Alta and Lincoln. But the supreme Court struck down the Alta and Lincoln measures. Then in 1895, the legislature approached the problem indirectly. Alturas and Logan were combined temporarily into a county called Blaine. Then, two weeks later, Blaine county was divided, and the Lincoln County which the legislature had tried unsuccessfully to establish in 1891 was created all over again. Hailey, which had been county seat of Alturas, continued as county seat of Blaine, while Shoshone was designated as county seat of Lincoln. The effect of these changes was to move the east-west county line that had run between Hailey and Bellevue south, where it became the present northern boundary of Lincoln County; to move the county seat of Logan (which became Lincoln) from Bellevue to Shoshone; and to change the name of Alturas County to Blaine—the name of a prominent congressman who had run for President in 1884.

Of our original counties in 1864, Alturas is the only one whose name has disappeared entirely during all the many county boundary changes since Idaho's beginning.

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