

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

WILLIAM JOHN MCCONNELL

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William E. McConnell, first United States Senator from Idaho and later governor of the state, came to Idaho originally in 1863 from Oregon. He farmed and ran a pack string in southern Idaho and served as deputy U.S. marshal for Idaho from 1865 to 1867. He then returned to Oregon, where he was a cattleman and served in the State Senate in 1882. In 1886 he returned to Idaho and settled in Moscow with his family. In 1889 he served as a member of the Constitutional Convention, and the first state legislature elected him United States Senator for the short term from December of 1890 to March of 1891. He was elected governor of Idaho in 1892 and reelected in 1894. After leaving that office, he was appointed Indian inspector--a position he held from July of 1897 to July of 1901. In 1909 President Taft appointed him an immigration inspector at Moscow, and he held that federal position until his death in 1925.

Foundation work on the McConnell house began in early July, 1886, with local teams hauling rock. By late August, the *Moscow Mirror* reported that the house was almost completed and went on to add, "Its appearance indicates comfort and elegance and we are of the opinion that when it is finished it will be a structure of which Moscow may be proud." (August 27, 1886). The family finally moved in in late December of that year, and the house soon became a well-known social center.

McConnell's service as governor of Idaho apparently did not help his business operations. In 1893, he was forced to close his store in Moscow and declare bankruptcy, but he managed to pay all of his debts. In order to save their home, Mrs. McConnell declared a homestead on the house in 1893. They finally sold the house in 1901, and the building has changed hands twice since then. It now houses a local historical museum.

Architecturally, the McConnell house is important since no other house in Idaho has survived in the Eastlake design. Historically, the home is important for its associations with Governor McConnell.

Set on a large corner lot in Moscow, the McConnell house is a large, two-story clapboard dwelling of striking design. Despite alterations both inside and out, the house retains its general style and character which is best described as Eastlake. The tall, narrow look favored by late nineteenth-century architects is achieved in a series of two-story bays topped with sharp gables. The windows and doors are also quite tall, adding to the vertical effect. Band-sawn decoration is profuse, particularly in the gables, front porch, and around the windows. Elaborate brackets, with curled edges and cut-out design, support the wide eaves, small roofs over the entryways and the narrow ledges which encircle the bays at midpoint.

Prepared by Nancy Renk

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