

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Assay Office

AND/OR COMMON

Assay Office

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

210 Main Street

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Boise

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

VICINITY OF

STATE

Idaho

CODE

16

COUNTY

Ada

CODE

001

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	PUBLIC ACQUISITION	ACCESSIBLE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT
		<input type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL
			<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY
			<input type="checkbox"/> PARK
			<input type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
			<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
			<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
			<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
			<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Idaho State Historical Society

STREET & NUMBER

610 North Julia Davis Drive

CITY, TOWN

Boise

VICINITY OF

STATE

Idaho

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Ada County Courthouse

STREET & NUMBER

CITY, TOWN

Boise

STATE

Idaho

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Historic American Buildings Survey

DATE

1974

FEDERAL STATE COUNTY LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

Division of Prints and Photographs, Library of Congress

CITY, TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED	(interior primarily)	

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Alexander Rossi donated all of Block 35 of the original Townsite of Boise City, a tract 300 by 280 feet and bounded by Main, Second, Idaho, and Third Streets, to the Federal Government for the site of the Assay Office. The transfer of property was finally processed December 11, 1869, and at that time the block was only a "dry plat of desert sagebrush," but it was slightly elevated and one of the best locations in the town, even if it was rather far from the business district.

Ground was broken in June 1870 and by July 1871 construction had met the architect's specifications. John R. McBride, former Congressman from Oregon and Chief Justice of the Idaho Territorial Court, had personally visited the Secretary of the Treasury in Washington to persuade him to expedite construction of the Assay Office in Boise. McBride offered to erect the building himself with the appropriated sum. Having accomplished this, McBride was appointed Superintendent of the Assay Office.

Completed a total cost of \$76,925.33, as John A. Hussey wrote, "The new Assay Office was the pride of Boise and of all Idaho. Man's search for wealth in the earth was the dominant theme of pioneer life in the territory, and the Assay Office was the symbol of national and local interest in Idaho's mines."

The building was only 46 by 48 feet in dimension, yet it was certainly one of the earliest monumental (for its size) buildings in the inland region of the Pacific Northwest, and its dignity, style and substantial stone construction contrasted sharply with the many log and wooden buildings in the new territorial capital.

The Assay Office is about 45 feet high, composed of two stories plus a basement, topped by a low hip roof with a small central cupola (ventilator). There are two tall chimneys in the rear and two smaller chimneys rise from each of the side walls. The exterior was constructed of local Boise sandstone, and the walls are more than two feet thick. The face of coursed rustic stone contrasts with the ashlar quoining of the corners and windows. Applied decoration was held to a minimum, being largely confined to classic pediments over the front entrance and the front upper center window. Another interesting feature is the bracketing of the eaves by the projection of the rafter timbers.

Protection of the building and its contents was provided by heavy iron bars placed outside all the front and side windows. The rear wall was of solid stone except for a door and one upper window, also barred. The doors were equipped with protective interior iron cages. Boise residents donated and planted the trees and shrubs which landscape the block.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1870-1933 (period as Assay Office) BUILDER/ARCHITECT under direction of A.B. Mullet, Supervising Architect of the Treasury
 STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE builder-John R. McBride

Erected by the United States Government in 1870-71, the Boise Assay Office was the most important example of public architecture in Idaho until the 20th century. The building is a symbol of the importance of mining in the political, social, economic and legal development of Idaho and the Far West, and also bears testimony to Federal encouragement of mining in that territory.

The discovery of gold on the Clearwater River by Captain Elias Davidson Pierce in 1860, brought a rush of miners to northern Idaho in 1861. This strike was followed by the opening of new placer mines, on the Salmon River in 1862, and then in the Boise Basin in 1863. Considerable rushes followed both of these discoveries. With a population of some 20,656 miners, Idaho was established as a territory on March 4, 1863.

These Idaho placer mines were at first exceedingly rich. Between 1861 and 1866, Idaho's gold output totaled somewhere between \$42,000,000 and \$52,000,000, or about 19% of the United States total production during this period. This yield placed Idaho third, after California and Nevada, in gold production during the 1861-66 period.

The Idaho miners, however, were isolated by great distances and mountains from the rest of the country, and they therefore found it difficult to dispose of their products except at heavy cost. As a result, as early as 1864 there was a strong demand for a Federal mint or assay office in Idaho. By an Act approved February 19, 1869, Congress responded and appropriated \$75,000 to erect a U.S. Assay Office in Boise.

Plans and specifications for the building were drawn up under the direction of Alfred B. Mullet, Supervising Architect of the Treasury Department and construction began in July 1870. The new Assay Office was substantially completed by June 1871, but a delay in the receipt of the machinery prevented the first assay from being made until March 2, 1872.

By this date, the rich surface placers had been largely worked out and Idaho gold production underwent a considerable slump until 1883, when reports of gold led to a rush to the Coeur d'Alene region of northern Idaho. Gold production doubled in 1884. The transcontinental railroads, together with considerable amounts of Eastern and San Francisco capital, reached Idaho in 1887. Deep mine shafts were sunk to reach the quartz veins, stamp mills and smelters were erected, and new mines, producing silver and lead, were opened.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

see continuation sheet

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY approximately 2 acres latitude 43° 36' 41" longitude 116° 11' 45"
 UTM REFERENCES

A	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	B	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
C	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING	D	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

see continuation sheet

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Blanche Higgins Schroer, Landmark Review Project; Charles W. Snell, 1964, 1966

ORGANIZATION

Historic Sites Survey, National Park Service

DATE

April 1, 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1100 L Street NW.

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN

Washington

STATE

D.C.

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL STATE LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

(NATIONAL HISTORIC
LANDMARKS)

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Assay Office

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

On the interior, the first floor contained the assayers' offices, vaults and safes for the storage of bullion, the assaying and melting rooms with their furnaces, the laboratory, and the storage cabinet for "reagents." The upper story was devoted entirely to the living quarters for the chief assayer: parlor, pantry, dining room, kitchen, and three bedrooms. Supply and fuel rooms and guards' quarters were in the brick basement. Two wells in the cellar were later supplemented by water piped in from a local supply.

As early as 1887 the Director of the Mint pointed out that the Assay Building and grounds needed repair and that new equipment was required. Congress made the necessary appropriation, and in 1889 "many much-needed improvements in the way of repairs" were made to the structure and its landscaped setting, including the erection of a new iron fence around the grounds.

The renovation continued during 1890, when new floors were put in the operating rooms and a "hot and cold water system" and incandescent electric lights were installed. In 1898 the melting room was moved from the first floor to the basement. The vacated space became the clerical office work-room. Various improvements to the assaying equipment and apparatus were made during this same period of high deposits.

After the Assay Office was closed, the building was turned over to the U.S. Forest Service as headquarters for the Boise and Payette National Forests, effective in 1933 after several years of planning. The plans drawn up in 1931 were acted upon, and the building was remodeled for office use. On the exterior, the main changes were the removal of the iron bars from the windows and doors, the substitution of steel sash for the original wood window frames and sash, and the piercing of the rear wall for the installation of six new windows. Perhaps at this time one of the large rear chimneys was removed, although this action may have been taken earlier. Inside the building the reverberatory furnaces, the retorts, vaults, and other equipment were removed, and partitions were rearranged.

The Forest Service occupied the building until 1972, when the Idaho State Historical Society assumed ownership. Since then the building has been reroofed and is presently used to house offices and a museum.

Descriptive material taken primarily from John A. Hussey, "Building Most Valuable: The Story of the Idaho Assay Office" Idaho Yesterdays Vol. V, Spring 1961.

This site was not visited by the boundary review team.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE 2

By 1895 deposits in the U.S. Assay Office at Boise reached more than one million dollars for the year, and for the next 11 years these averaged one and one-half million dollars annually. By 1917 the Idaho mines had yielded a total of \$400,000,000 in minerals: one-quarter in gold, one-quarter in silver, and one-half in lead.

The Assay Office continued its operations until June 30, 1933, when it was turned over to the U.S. Forest Service as headquarters for the Boise National Forest. In 1970 the Forest Service vacated the building which is currently maintained by the Idaho Historical Society as a museum.

History from original 1963 and 1964 Historic Sites Survey reports by Charles W. Snell.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

- John A. Hussey, "Building Most Valuable; The Story of the Idaho Assay Office"
Idaho Yesterday (Spring Issue, 1961) Vol. V, No. 1, 2-13.
- Dorothy O. Johnsen and Charles M. Gates, Empire of the Far West (New York, 1975).
- Rodman W. Paul, Mining Frontiers of the Far West 1848-1880 (New York, 1963)
- William S. Greever, The Bonanza West; The Story of the Western Mining Rushes, 1848-1900 (Norman, 1963)
- John A. Hussey, "Former U.S. Assay Office, 210 Main Street, Boise, Idaho,"
NPS report, 10 pp. (San Francisco, April 1961).
- Charles W. Snell, NPS, Historic Sites Survey reports 1963 and 1964.

Item 9. The title of Dorothy Johansen's book is Empire of the Columbia.

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CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 10 PAGE 1

The Assay Office is located in the center of Block 35 in the City of Boise in SE 1/4 NE 1/4 of Section 10, T3N, R2E. The national historic landmark boundary has been drawn around the 300 by 280 foot block which was given to the Federal Government in 1869 for the construction of the assay building. Beginning at the west corner of the intersection of Idaho and Third Streets, the boundary runs along the west curb of Third Street in a southwesterly direction to the intersection of Third and Main Streets; thence in a northwesterly direction along the north curb of Main Street to the intersection of Main and Second Streets; thence in a northeasterly direction along the east curb of Second Street to the intersection of Second and Idaho Streets; thence in a southeasterly direction along the south curb of Idaho to the beginning point.



SOUTH ELEVATION



DRAWN BY MARK J. WELLEN

IDAHO CITY PROJECT 1974
 OFFICE OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION
 UNDER DIRECTION OF THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
 UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

NAME AND LOCATION OF STRUCTURE

UNITED STATES ASSAY OFFICE
 210 MAIN STREET, BOISE, ADA COUNTY, IDAHO

SURVEY NO.

10 101

HISTORIC AMERICAN
 BUILDINGS SURVEY
 SHEET 5 OF 7 SHEETS

DATE OF DRAWING

1974

10 ASSA-1



U. S. Assay Office (1870-71)
210 Main Street
Boise, Idaho

October 8, 1960

Charles W. Snell
Western Region Neg. 1940