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IDAHO BEFORE STATEHOOD

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For more than half a century after Lewis and Clark explored the interior Pacific Northwest (1805-1806), the only white men who lived in the Idaho wilderness were a few fur traders missionaries. Thousands of emigrants crossed southern Idaho over the Oregon and California Trails in search of new farmlands or gold mines after 1840. But until 1860, none of them settled in Idaho. Mormon colonists expanding northward in the Cache Valley crossed the Utah boundary in the spring of 1860, and settled Franklin--Idaho's oldest town. That same fall, E. D. Pierce's small party of prospectors found gold in the Clearwater country and established the town of Pierce in December. Fabulous gold rushes to Clearwater country and to the Salmon River founded a new mineral empire which expanded southward with a still greater Boise Basin gold rush commencing in 1862. Mining excitement over such a large part of the mountainous country of what then was eastern Washington brought problems of politics and government which could be solved only by establishing a new territory of Idaho, March 4, 1863. At first, Idaho included Montana and practically all of Wyoming as well. Then with the creation of Montana in 1864 and Wyoming in 1868, Idaho received permanent boundaries.

Established during the tumult of the Civil War, Idaho was the scene of intense partisan strife during and following the national conflict. By the time the war was over, enough Confederate refugees had fled to Idaho to make the new territory strongly southern in sympathy. Not until 1882 did the Democratic party lose its control of Idaho territorial elections. During those first two decades, Idaho went through a succession of gold rushes followed by a decline during the national Panic of 1873. Some of the early mining communities quickly became ghost towns-- or near ghost towns--while others continued to flourish. Many placer camps were given over largely to the Chinese by 1869, and the census the next year showed that the majority of Idaho miners (3,853 out of 6,572) were Orientals. Placer mining continued in Boise Basin for many years after the gold rush had subsided. Fewer men were needed after 1869 when placer mining consisted mainly in a few large operations. Hydraulic giants, fed with

water carried through miles of flumes, continued to wash down hillsides that contained gold. And in the Basin, as well as in other important camps such as Rocky Bar and Silver City, lode mining (in which gold and silver ore was brought out through a system of tunnels and shafts that penetrated deeply into underground rock) went through an initial boom after the War, declined, and then revived after 1882. Aside from the mining towns themselves, other communities (places such as Lewiston, Boise, and Salmon) which served the mines experienced the same kind of cycle. After the prosperity of the gold rush, they faced hard times during the mining decline and the Panic of 1873. Just as the national depression was ending, a series of Indian wars (1877-1879) continued to disrupt progress in Idaho. Then with widespread railroad construction in Idaho that came with the return of good times nationally, these towns--along with many other communities which sprang up as transportation improved--began to grow again.

Irrigated farming--which traced back in a small way to 1839 at H. H. Spalding's Nez Perce mission, and had begun to serve Mormon communities at Fort Lemhi (1855-1858), Franklin, and Bear Lake Valley--expanded significantly during the early mining era.

Mining stability that came with long-term placer and lode where practically no one had suspected that farming was possible.

Large scale stock raising also commenced before the end of the gold rush period: demand for cattle to supply large mining camps had been so great that herds were driven in from as far away as California and Texas. Then by 1866, just at the time that cattlemen found the great plains north of Texas a suitable winter (as well as summer) range, Idaho stockmen began to own large herds. Although located in a somewhat different kind of country, the Idaho cattle business went through just about the same fluctuations that marked the growth and decline of the open range farther east. Winter disasters to Idaho cattle after 1886 were not so severe as those of the plains. National railroad building and marketing conditions had affected Idaho as well as the rest of the West, yet large tracts of Idaho lands, unsuitable even for irrigated farming, continued to support herds of livestock after the long drives of great plains cattle had come to an end.

New towns, new farms, and new mines--all made possible by railroad building that provided improved transportation to all parts of Idaho by 1884--brought a pattern of rapid growth which led to Idaho's admission as a state in 1890. Gold and silver lode mining became more practical when rail transportation reduced the isolation of the mines from machinery and operating supplies. More important, large scale base metal mining could commence. By 1880 a mining rush to Wood River (primarily a lead-silver area) began to transform the

development of south central Idaho, where rich lode mines in the Yankee Fork country already had laid foundations for a new empire in that region. Then by 1884, by far the most important of Idaho's mining areas--the Coeur d'Alene region--began to show promise as a lead-silver-zinc district that could be once rail service was available. Destined to become the major silver producer of the United States, this area contributed greatly to the economic development of nearby eastern Washington, as well as to the stability of Idaho's growth long after statehood was achieved.

More than two decades of bitter sectional controversy pitted North against South Idaho, and very nearly prevented admission as a state. A clash over permanent location of the capital in 1864 had grown into a North Idaho demand to join eastern Washington in a new territory to be called Columbia; after this failed, various boundary plans were current for two decades; finally a scheme to divide Idaho between Washington Nevada gained currency in 1886, and the Washington-Nevada combination was strong enough to get the first stage of the project, the annexation of North Idaho to Washington, both houses of Congress by March 2, 1887. Only by a desperate last minute appeal to President Grover Cleveland did Governor E. A. Stevenson get the breakup of Idaho delayed until the next session of Congress. By 1888 Congress was disposed to save Idaho, and a state admission movement got underway. North Idaho, placated in part by location of the university in Moscow, joined in the drive for statehood; the national political climate turned fortunate for Idaho; and the territory was admitted as third state, July 3, 1890. The Senate passed the Idaho Admission Bill on July 1, 1890 at 2:30 p.m. The President signed the bill on July 3, 1890 at 10 a.m.

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