IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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MOUNTAIN LIGHT

The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society

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The Idaho State Historical Society is an extraordinary system of cultural and historic resources comprised of the Idaho State Museum and Old Idaho Penitentiary, Idaho State Archives and Records Center, State Historic Preservation Office, and Historic Sites Program. Our vision is to make history essential and accessible through dynamic and gratifying services that inspire, enrich, and engage all Idahoans.

Janet L. Gallimore
Executive Director and State Historic Preservation Officer

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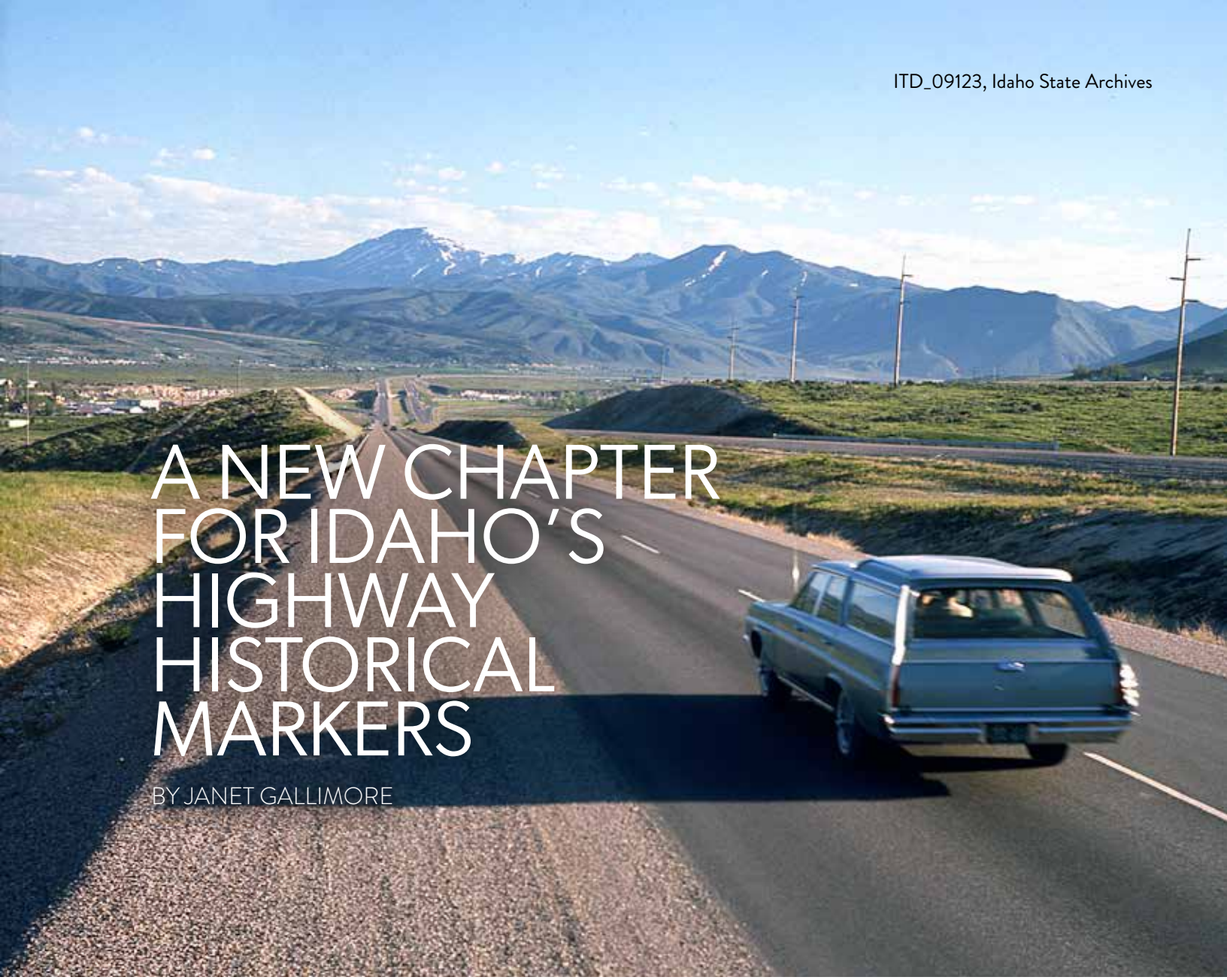

ITD_09123, Idaho State Archives

A NEW CHAPTER FOR IDAHO'S HIGHWAY HISTORICAL MARKERS

BY JANET GALLIMORE

Farragut State Park – A new roadside marker rises beneath Idaho's towering pines, but this sign is more than metal and words. It signals a new era for Idaho's celebrated highway marker program, which has guided travelers through the state's history for nearly seventy years.

Community members, state leaders, and historians gathered at Farragut State Park, alongside staff at the Idaho State Historical Society (ISHS) and the Idaho Transportation Department (ITD) to unveil the first of Idaho's newly redesigned markers. The moment was about more than raising a sign, it was about raising a story.

Since 1956, Idaho's highway historical markers have been silent companions for travelers. They dot roadsides in towns, at river crossings, and along scenic byways, offering quick glimpses into the state's identity. Their subjects range widely, encompassing Indigenous history, early exploration, pioneer settlement, mining booms, military posts, natural wonders, and transportation milestones.

These signs do more than provide facts. They encourage travelers to pause, read, and reflect, connecting landscapes to the people who shaped them. They remind us that every mile of highway has a story, that history is not confined to museums and archives but lives in the places we move through every day.

[Continued on page 3]

Courtesy of Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation

US-95 White Bird Hill pre-rehabilitation, credit Idaho Transportation Department

[Continued from page 2]

Shortly after ITD began the highway marker program, they initiated a partnership with the ISHS. The arrangement was simple but effective: the Historical Society researched and wrote the text, and ITD fabricated, installed, and maintained the markers. The original design, created by ITD artist George Bowditch, became a familiar sight across Idaho. Over the years, distinguished historians including Merle Wells, Larry Jones, and most recently, Keith Petersen, crafted the narratives.

Yet time took its toll. Many signs had weathered physically, their paint fading and their panels warped. Some stories became outdated as historical research advanced, and others lacked the context needed to fully reflect Idaho's past. Recognizing this, ISHS and ITD committed to a major revitalization effort: updating, expanding, and re-envisioning the program for a new generation of Idahoans and visitors.

The new design strikes a balance between durability and beauty. It incorporates Idaho's natural icons like the mountain bluebird and the syringa, while improving readability and visibility for drivers and pedestrians. Local experts have reviewed every marker to ensure accuracy and broad representation, with updated text that captures high-level scholarship.

Beyond preservation, the project aims for expansion. Over the next several years, ITD will install one hundred new markers across the state. These additions will highlight stories previously untold: local industries, cultural traditions, overlooked communities, and more recent chapters of Idaho's past. The expansion ensures that the program better represents voices that have shaped the Gem State.

A new partner has joined the effort to increase accessibility to the markers: Visit Idaho, the tourism division of the Idaho Department of Commerce. This integration was funded in part by a $3.2 million federal economic development grant, awarded to ITD in 2022. The funding supports not only the technology but also translation services and long-term maintenance of a digital companion system.

Together, ISHS, ITD, and Visit Idaho are weaving technology into history. Each new or updated sign will feature a QR code, connecting travelers to a digital platform.

By scanning with a smartphone, visitors access expanded content, including multimedia storytelling, translated text, and details about nearby restaurants, lodging, trails, and museums. This digital bridge ensures the markers do more than educate; they also invite travelers to linger, explore, and invest in the local communities they pass through.

Central to the refresh is the work of Keith Petersen, Idaho's former State Historian. Petersen led a comprehensive review of every marker in the state, examining where corrections were needed, where interpretations could be expanded, and where new perspectives can deepen the story.

Equally important were the contributions of local voices like tribal historians, community elders, site managers, museum staff, and residents who shared knowledge, oral histories, and documents. Their insights ensured that each marker reflects not just scholarly accuracy but also lived meaning. The Farragut sign unveiling is a product of that collaborative spirit, where state agencies and communities worked hand in hand to honor Idaho's layered past.

In an era of fast travel, where roadsides blur past and information overload is constant, roadside markers encourage us to slow down and take a moment to appreciate the surroundings. They prompt us to stand still, to read, and to connect with the land beneath our feet. They are touchstones for community pride, educational tools for families, and gateways for heritage tourism.

D1 historical sign Farragut, credit Idaho Transportation Department

They also showcase community resilience and identity. They remind Idahoans and visitors alike that history is not just dates and events, but stories of people—Indigenous communities, settlers, laborers, entrepreneurs—whose experiences shaped the state's landscapes and culture.

The unveiling at Farragut State Park is both a celebration and a promise to come. It celebrates the decades-long success of the highway marker program and the dedication of those who have kept it alive. And it promises a future where Idaho's history is more visible, more accurate, and more accessible than ever before.

Thanks to the collaboration of ISHS, ITD, Visit Idaho, historians, and community partners, Idaho's historic markers will continue to stand as invitations beckoning travelers to pause, to reflect, and to discover the deeper stories written into the roadsides of the Gem State.


P1960-171-4 RGB Farragut Naval Training Base, Idaho State Archives

The project is ambitious but carefully phased. All updated markers in ITD District 1, which includes North Idaho, are scheduled to be installed by the end of 2025. Other districts across the state will follow, with the full program expected to be complete by 2027. By then, Idaho will have refreshed and expanded its existing inventory by a hundred new signs, each with digital connectivity. As one new sign now gleams under the Idaho sky, it signals the beginning of a much larger journey: one that will stretch across the state, along highways and backroads, connecting people to the land and to one another through the power of story.

3_P1973-221-1501 Irrigation - Ditch Builders, Idaho State Archives

1_AR3 Bx1Folder89 Payette Valley Apples, Idaho State Archives

America250 in Idaho Kicks Off at the Idaho State Archives

BY ANGIE DAVIS

In October 2025, the Idaho State Archives will proudly launch its contribution to the America250 in Idaho commemoration with the debut of "Fruitful Idaho," a compelling new exhibit that honors the state's rich agricultural legacy. As the nation prepares to celebrate 250 years of independence, this exhibit explores how farming and food production played a vital role in settling Idaho and securing its place in the expanding United States during a time marked by opportunity and upheaval.

A series of federal land policies designed to encourage westward expansion and agricultural development shaped the permanent settlement of Idaho. The Homestead Act of 1862 offered settlers 160 acres of public land, provided they improved and lived on it for five years as an incentive that drew thousands to the American West. To further support settlement in arid regions, the Desert Land Act of 1877 allowed individuals to acquire up to 640 acres of land if they irrigated it within three years. The Carey Act of 1894 expanded on this by enabling private companies to construct irrigation systems and sell the reclaimed land to settlers, fostering the growth of entire communities. Finally, the Reclamation Act of 1902 established federal funding for large-scale irrigation projects, transforming Idaho's high desert into productive farmland. Together, these policies laid the foundation for Idaho's agricultural economy and helped secure its place as a vital part of the U.S. economy.

As early as 1905, a diversion dam and canal system were built on the Payette River approximately 15 miles north of the current dam site. Remnants of these early concrete canal walls are still visible along the highway today. These early efforts were driven by the pressing need to irrigate fertile but arid lands, laying the groundwork for more extensive federal reclamation projects that followed. Many early canals in southwestern Idaho were built by privately incorporated companies, with assistance from the Desert Land Act and later the Carey Act, including those along the Payette River.

4_P1991-37-124 three men in irrigation ditch, Idaho State Archives

Launched in 1902, the Boise-Payette Project was the Bureau of Reclamation's first undertaking, setting the stage for irrigation projects across the West. Designed to harness the waters of the Boise and Payette Rivers, the project aimed to transform Idaho's arid lands into fertile farmland through large-scale irrigation. Its centerpiece, the construction of Arrowrock Dam, the tallest dam in the world at the time of its completion in 1915, was a groundbreaking engineering feat that enabled the irrigation of tens of thousands of acres in the Treasure Valley. The project not only spurred agricultural growth and permanent settlement in southwestern Idaho but also set a precedent for federal reclamation efforts across the American West, demonstrating the transformative power of water infrastructure in shaping regional economies and communities.

In 1924, the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation completed the Black Canyon Dam, a crucial component of the Boise Project that supplied water and hydroelectric power to farms and communities across southwestern Idaho. Located five miles northeast of Emmett in Gem County, the dam is a concrete gravity structure that stands 183 feet tall and spans nearly 1,900 feet across the Payette River. Its primary purpose was to divert water into the Black Canyon and North Side Main Canals, enabling the irrigation of tens of thousands of acres in the Payette Division. Together, these developments highlight how watershed regions are not just geographic features, but dynamic engines of agricultural growth, technical innovation, and community identity.

5_P1979-95-46-Wooden Flume - Black Canyon Dam 1908, Idaho State Archives

"Fruitful Idaho" showcases a range of historical records preserved at the Idaho State Archives that, together, illuminate this story of agricultural development in the state. The following collections highlight how farming shaped Idaho's settlement patterns, water policies, and economic foundations, revealing agriculture's enduring significance to the state's identity and prosperity today:

6_P1974-126-2B Caldwell Irrigation - Black Canyon Irrigation Project, Idaho State Archives

"Private Enterprise, Public Promise"
AR20 Collection
Passed in 1894, the Carey Act allowed private companies to build irrigation systems and sell the land to settlers. This collection at the Idaho State Archives includes maps, correspondence, photographic materials, and land entry files that document how this policy shaped Idaho's agricultural frontier. Of all the states in the Western US, Idaho had the most successful uses of the Carey Act policies, and these records document the challenges and ambitions of early irrigation efforts and the settlers who made Idaho home.

8_P1971-141-13 Payette, ID (Fruit Culture Santa Rosa Orchards), Idaho State Archives

"Who Owns the Water?"
Snake River Basin Adjudication (AR697)
The Snake River Basin Adjudication (SRBA) was a monumental legal process to determine water rights across southern Idaho. These records reflect decades of negotiation, litigation, and resolution, highlighting the enduring importance of water in Idaho's economy and environment. The SRBA collection offers a window into how water law continues to shape the state's future.

"Branding the Bounty"
Agricultural Label Collection (MS908 Ganske Collection, MS938 Mary Trail Collection, and MS945 Twin Heart Brand)
Colorful fruit crate labels from the Payette River Valley tell a story of pride, identity, and economic success. These labels, used to market apples, pears, and other crops, reflect the region's transformation through irrigation and reclamation. They are more than marketing; they are cultural artifacts that celebrate Idaho's agricultural heritage.

Watershed regions have been central to Idaho's agricultural history, providing the lifeblood of settlement in an arid landscape. The Snake River Basin—one of the West's largest watersheds—drew federal and state investment through the Carey Act of 1894 and the Reclamation Act of 1902, spurring irrigation projects that transformed valleys into farmland. The Snake River Basin Adjudication later reinforced their importance by legally defining water rights, ensuring equitable and sustainable access. These efforts fueled thriving agricultural economies, particularly in the Payette River Valley, that remain celebrated today. "Fruitful Idaho" invites you to reflect on the enduring impact of Idaho agriculture and its role in shaping the American story.

Tricia Canaday and SHPO staff members in City of Rocks, 2023

GOODBYE TO DEPUTY SHPO TRICIA CANADAY

BY SHPO STAFF

This summer, the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) and the Idaho State Historical Society bid farewell to Tricia Canaday, who retired from her position as Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer and Administrator.

Originally from Wisconsin, Tricia made Boise her home in 1995, and since then, she has been a cornerstone of preservation work in the state. She began as the Historic Preservation Planner for the City of Boise and joined the Idaho SHPO in 2000, where she served the public for nearly three decades in several roles. As an Architectural Historian, Tricia oversaw nominations to the National Register of Historic Places for many of Idaho's unique and special places. As Outreach Historian, she connected Idahoans to their shared history.

As SHPO Administrator since 2018, Tricia has been at the table for some of Idaho's most challenging consultations, coordinating federal partnerships, state agencies, tribal governments, and grassroots advocates with dependable leadership and a forward-thinking approach. Her leadership has not only preserved buildings, landscapes, and stories, but also strengthened relationships and policy on both the state and national levels.

Tricia Canaday presenting at the Old Idaho Penitentiary, 2012

Over the course of her 25-year career at SHPO, she has accomplished a great deal, including the launch of the Idaho Cultural Resource Information System (ICRIS), which has transformed the way SHPO conducts much of its work and enables the public to access records regarding the state's historic places. She also worked to renew Idaho's Highway Historical Markers in collaboration with the Idaho Transportation Department, tribes, and local communities. She has worked toward and successfully completed the repatriation of Native American materials at the Smithsonian. She also led the initiative to restore the U.S. Assay Office. These are just a few of her many achievements.

Tricia has also served on the board of the National Conference of State Historic Preservation Officers (NCSHPO), was the recipient of the 2019 Western Museums Association Impact award for her work with Idaho tribes, and, most recently, was awarded Preservation Idaho's Distinguished Preservationist award.

Tricia has left an indelible mark on Idaho, garnering respect for preservation work in this state. She has also left her mark on our staff, and we will miss her dearly.

Currently, Outreach Historian Dan Everhart serves as the Interim SHPO Administrator.

Did you know you could access SHPO's reference library?

The staff at SHPO recently rehoused their reference collection in a new space following the completion of the U.S. Assay Office renovation. The library is now open to researchers and the public during regular business hours.

The Idaho SHPO library aims to be a comprehensive source of materials on the history, cultures, architecture, archaeology, anthropology, and cultural resource laws related to the state of Idaho and its surrounding region. The collection provides pertinent and useful resources for staff to advise and assist federal agencies, researchers, historic preservation partners, and the interested public.

The library collection comprises over 1,700 materials, including books, reports, and periodicals. The library is for reference only; hence, items may not be checked out. However, the entire SHPO library has been catalogued and is available to browse online at catalog.history.idaho.gov by filtering location to the State Historic Preservation Office.

This work is all thanks to our unofficial Librarian, SHPO Archaeologist Launi Ellering, who reorganized and catalogued our entire library and continues to support its maintenance; accessioning and deaccessioning materials as needed.

Patriot Day/America250 in Idaho kickoff at the Idaho State Capitol

BY HANNALORE HEIN

AMERICA250:

Celebrating the Declaration of Independence

BY HANNALORE HEIN

The Idaho State Historical Society is proud of its involvement in coordinating events, activities, and programs for the America250 in Idaho commemoration, channeling the energy, authenticity, and historical literacy that define our agency's regular work. America250 in Idaho is part of a national commemoration that celebrates, honors, and recognizes the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence in 2026. The commemoration aims to advance the ideals of the American Revolution – equality, liberty, and justice – through meaningful community engagement while recognizing Idaho's journey in America's legacy.

This significant milestone offers Idahoans a unique opportunity for engagement and collaboration. This spring, the America250 in Idaho Task Force, a coalition of state agencies and constitutional offices, hosted the "Two Lights for Tomorrow" kickoff on April 18-19, honoring the midnight ride of Paul Revere and inviting Idahoans to recognize their state's role in the evolving American story. The event featured remarks from dignitaries, elected officials, and the State Regent of the Daughters of the American Revolution, in addition to musical performances from Opera Idaho's Children's Chorus and Boise State University's student string quartet. As part of the event, Governor Brad Little and First Lady Teresa Little ceremoniously lit two lanterns, paying homage to the two lights that patriots hung in the steeple of the North Church in Boston to warn of the impending British invasion. Our Two Lights for Tomorrow event was one of nearly 22,000 events nationwide where Americans came together to honor the remarkable acts of courage, patriotism, and unity displayed during Paul Revere's midnight ride ahead of the battles of Lexington and Concord, which signified the start of the American Revolutionary War.

Two Lights for Tomorrow event at the Idaho State Capitol

Over the course of the summer, the America250 in Idaho Task Force has been advancing agency projects, such as the Idaho State Department of Education's "Spirit of US: K–12 Statewide Commemorative Program," which will run throughout the 2025-2026 school year.

This program invites students to submit original work based on rotating themes of American foundational values. Another forthcoming program, "Salute to America," supported by the Idaho Commission on the Arts and the Idaho Musical Educators Association, is scheduled to commence in the fall of 2025. The program invites Idaho high school bands to perform patriotic music throughout the school year. In partnership with the Idaho Department of Parks & Recreation, we gathered for unique events at Three Island Crossing State Park in August and at Bruneau Dunes State Park in September, two unique landscapes where history and memory converge. These events brought key stakeholders and community members together to spark discussion about frontiers, opportunity, and freedom, and to celebrate the ideas that have shaped our future.

America250 in Idaho public event at Three Island Crossing State Park

To further advance our commemoration, we plan to launch content campaigns for our America250 in Idaho social media accounts on Instagram and Facebook (@america250inidaho) this fall, and in an effort to provide a tangible, hands-on experience for students to align their learning to the America250 in Idaho commemoration, we invited two student interns to do research and writing for these channels. Alex Provant, a recent graduate of the College of Idaho, and Ashlynne Campbell, a junior at the College of Southern Idaho, worked over the course of the summer to investigate ways that revolutionary ideals manifested in the American West. Their reflection of this experience is below:

Alex: "As an America250 intern with the Idaho State Historical Society, my work doing research and writing social media posts allowed me to share my passion for history by highlighting Idaho's place in America's story. I was able to learn a great deal about both the principles and events that shaped the American Revolution, and how these laid the foundation for the later creation of the State of Idaho, and being able to weave these two stories together was a very rewarding experience that showed me how to think about history in new ways. Working with the ISHS this summer helped me develop my skills as a historian, and I am looking forward to using them in future jobs and educational endeavours."

Ashlynne: "The America250 internship offered me an introduction to historical work and time for personal reflection on my writing skills. Through research on the Revolutionary War and Idaho's past, the experience revealed challenges in crafting concise, engaging social media content. It highlighted the importance of active voice and dynamic tone in my prose. The process required extensive editing and word-smithing to craft hooks that capture and retain the public's attention. I learned throughout the internship that I much rather enjoy writing long-form essays, but appreciated the opportunity to practice my writing and to learn more about research methodology."

The Idaho State Historical Society will continue to advance the America250 in Idaho commemoration, so watch our agency's communication channels for more information about events and other signature programs, and visit the America250 in Idaho website (www.america250.idaho.gov) to learn more.

MOMENTS THAT MADE US

Our story was never inevitable. We shaped it at every turn.

TheirStory

Left: America250 in Idaho intern Alex Provant
Right: America250 in Idaho intern Ashlynne Campbell

Cecil Alden Smith's Twenty Mule Team, 1934, on view in Sagebrush & Brushstrokes exhibit. ISHS, 1988.004.0035

THE IDAHO STATE MUSEUM
A YEAR IN REVIEW

BY SARAH PHILLIPS

Ballet Folklorico Mexico Lindo performing at our Fiesta Community Day

ISHS staff at our High Tea & History event

The past year has been one of growth, connection, and impact for the Idaho State Museum. Through the work of our dedicated staff, partners, and visitors, we have continued to make Idaho's history accessible and engaging for communities across the state.

The Idaho State Museum welcomed nearly 32,000 visitors in the past year, representing families, students, and community members who came to explore the rich history of our state. From curious travelers passing through Boise to Idahoans attending our first-ever High Tea and History event, we fostered unique experiences that broadened access to the Gem State's rich history. Our museum team worked diligently to ensure each visit was welcoming, captivating, and memorable.

In addition to our general visitation, we also served 11,672 students through programs designed to spark curiosity and inspire lifelong learning. These included Homeschool Day programs, K-12 field trips, Family Second Saturday events, our GEM high school internship program, and Traveling Trunks that brought hands-on history experiences directly into classrooms. Each of these opportunities helped students connect with the people, places, and events that have shaped Idaho.

The Museum also acquired several exciting new items for our permanent collection! Polly Bemis's rifle, dating to the early 1900s, came to us through the Central Idaho Museum. The rifle helps illustrate Polly's resilience after losing her home and husband to a fire in 1922. She later ran a small restaurant in Warren, Idaho, supported by friends and a young Robert Brandenburg, who later received the rifle in gratitude. We also received an extensive collection of Smokey Bear and wildland fire

The Filipino American Association of Idaho at our Blossom Together Community Day

management ephemera, originally developed by the Moscow-based Woodland Catalog, Inc. Starting in the 1980s, the company produced educational products featuring the iconic Smokey Bear and curated a storefront exhibition highlighting the history of fire management outreach. Highlights of the collection include 1960s-era Smokey Bear costumes and products featuring the "Guberif" ("Firebug" spelled backwards), now preserved at the Idaho State Museum thanks to the Fazio family and Central Idaho Museum.

Other remarkable additions include two illustrations by H.M. St. Cyr, an accomplished illustrator who, following a 1903 incarceration in the Old Idaho Penitentiary, befriended John Frederick Adams and gifted him these drawings in gratitude. The Museum also received a collection of clothing, costumes, and ephemera from Aleta Sales Pottenger, a former Miss Boise and lifelong dancer in the Treasure Valley. Her 1976 prom dress reflects the Revolutionary War revival that was popular during the American Bicentennial, and her collection preserves a lifetime of dance performance and teaching experiences.

The past year has brought several exciting additions to our exhibit offerings, each designed to deepen the public's understanding of Idaho's unique heritage.

We were proud to open "Sagebrush and Brushstrokes," an exhibition featuring historic framed art from our permanent collection. This exhibit showcased both the creative expressions of Idaho artists and the breathtaking landscapes of the state.

Another notable highlight was the "Laura Moore Cunningham: A Life Lived for Others" exhibit, guest-curated by Carol McGregor, PhD. This thoughtful exhibition celebrated the life and contributions of an individual whose legacy continues to impact our community, demonstrating the power of personal stories to inspire collective memory.

Collections and Exhibitions staff installing Hidden in Plain Sight exhibit.

In partnership with the Basque Museum, we also opened "Hidden in Plain Sight," an exhibit that sheds light on Basque cultural traditions and identity in the Gem State.

Our portfolio extended beyond the museum walls as well. Over the past year, we opened three new exhibits in the Idaho State Capitol, providing opportunities for visitors and officials to connect with Idaho history in the Capitol of Light.

Our collections, exhibitions, and educational programs connect visitors and communities across the state with the stories that shape us. From Polly Bemis's courage to the iconic legacy of Smokey Bear, these individual stories celebrate resilience, creativity, and community while highlighting what it means to be an Idahoan. Whether experienced through an exhibition, a traveling trunk in a classroom, or a one-of-a-kind event, each encounter inspires curiosity, reflection, and a sense of pride. We continue to serve our statewide community and to preserve, interpret, and share Idaho history in ways that engage, educate, and inspire all.

Students from Idaho celebrate with NHD Executive Director Dr. Cathy Gorn at the awards ceremony for the NHD National Contest, June 12, 2025, at the University of Maryland

NATIONAL HISTORY DAY IN IDAHO WRAPS UP 42ND SUCCESSFUL YEAR

BY MAGGIE FULLERTON

National History Day (NHD) is a student-led academic program that challenges 4th to 12th grade students to conduct original historical research, interpretation, and analysis, and then present their findings in one of five categories: documentary, exhibit, paper, performance, or website. National History Day projects must fit within certain size limits and word counts, which challenges students to refine their research questions, choose the strongest supporting evidence for their historical argument, and deliver their findings in a powerful and succinct way.

Students investigate primary and secondary sources, exercising historical thinking skills such as sourcing, contextualization, causation, and argumentation. While most of these skills are required standards beginning in 6th grade, NHD students in Idaho as young as 4th grade are getting valuable practice doing active history. The typical project is the result of weeks and even months of hard work.

The annual theme is one of NHD's unique features. For the 2024-2025 school year, that theme was "Rights and Responsibilities in History." Students explored both halves, digging into a variety of civil, political, social, economic, and human rights, while also addressing the associated legal, civic, social, and ethical responsibilities. Over 2500 students in Idaho engaged with the

NHD students at this year's Ice Cream Social

framework during the school year, and ISHS supports those classrooms with lesson plans and resources. ISHS held a two-day professional development workshop in July 2024 to better support teachers kicking off the school year.

The program also includes an optional competition aspect, with regional, state, and national levels. Students compete against others in the same age division and project category. Fourth and fifth-graders are in the youth division and may participate up to the state level in Idaho. Qualifying students in the junior (6th-8th) and senior (9th-12th) divisions may advance to the national level.

The competitive season began in February and March 2025, featuring five in-person regional contests, from Moscow to Idaho Falls to the Treasure Valley, as well as a virtual regional contest open to students statewide. The judges are dedicated groups of teachers, history professionals, and community members from undergraduates to retirees who are interested in supporting students in their local area. The regional events range in size from a few dozen competitors to well over 500; in all, 935 students competed at the regional level.

On April 5, 2025, 347 students competed at the 2025 State Contest, which has been held on the campus of the College of Idaho in Caldwell for several years. Hundreds of students and family members descended on the campus that day from all points of the map, buzzing with nervous excitement. While waiting for final rounds and that afternoon's awards ceremony, they toured campus with a bingo activity or ventured on field trips to the Idaho State Museum and the Old Idaho Penitentiary.

Fifty students from Idaho qualified for the national level, and ultimately 47 made the trip to the NHD National Contest, held every June on the campus of the University of Maryland. Almost 3,000 students from around the world participate in the competition annually, representing 56 different affiliates. Idaho's entries included local history like the conservation plan that saved the peregrine falcon, and the story of Japanese American incarceration during World War II at Minidoka;

NHD students and their families gather before going on a tour of the United States Capitol

NHD students and their families on their way to meet U.S. Senator for Idaho James Risch

national topics like Love Canal's environmental disaster, and the Tuskegee Syphilis Study; and world history topics like the Cyrus Cylinder from ancient Persia, and the French Revolution.

Several Idaho entries earned spots in NHD showcases at the National Museum of American History, the National Museum of African American History and Culture, and the White House Historical Association. Many Idaho students met with Senator James Risch and toured the U.S. Capitol as well.

After the first round of judging, three entries from Idaho made it to the top ten for their categories and moved on to the finals. These included a Junior Individual Website by Weston Rice from Idaho Falls, a Senior Group Documentary by Farren Arnette, Collin Plummer, and Nora Witt from Meridian, and a Senior Individual Performance by Mollie Kennedy from Meridian. Weston won the Outstanding Affiliate medal for Idaho in the Junior Division, with his website on the Provident Hospital in Chicago, the first training hospital for Black nurses and interns. Mollie placed fourth in her category nationally with her performance, which explored the right to legal counsel, and won the Outstanding Affiliate medal for Idaho's Senior Division.

To coincide with the commemoration of the 250th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, NHD's 2026 theme is "Revolution, Reaction, Reform in History." We look forward to helping Idaho's students and teachers throughout their NHD journey this year and seeing their remarkable projects at the competitions next spring.

HISTORY.IDAHO.GOV

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IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MOUNTAIN LIGHT

The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR IDAHO

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