IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Volume 59, Issue 1 | Spring 2024

MOUNTAIN LIGHT

The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society

ISHS LEADING THE AMERICA250 IN IDAHO COMMEMORATION

IDAHO HISTORY RECIPROCAL MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

SHPO LAUNCHES NEW IDAHO CULTURAL RESOURCE INFORMATION SYSTEM

2024 LEGISLATIVE PROGRAM

During this year's legislative session, the Idaho State Historical Society created several opportunities to engage with the legislature, sharing Idaho's history through unique artifacts and exhibits, receptions, and other opportunities to inform members of the ISHS's mission, vision, and future plans. | **More on Page 3** |

CONTENTS

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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

ISHS BOARD OF TRUSTEES

The Idaho State Historical Society Board of Trustees is the policy-making and governance body for the agency, is appointed by the Governor, and has all of the powers and duties established by the Constitution of the State of Idaho. Trustees provide a statewide perspective that informs agency services and serve as a vital communication link to communities.

Don Pischner
District 1, Coeur d'Alene
Dr. Amy Canfield
District 2, Lewiston
Bill Butticci, Chair
District 3, Emmett
Mary Ann Arnold
District 4, Boise
Justin Vipperman
District 5, Wendell
W. James (Jim) Johnston
District 6, Pocatello
Dr. Cheryl O'Brien
District 7, Idaho Falls

FOUNDATION FOR IDAHO HISTORY

The Foundation for Idaho History is the fundraising engine that powers the Idaho State Historical Society, ensuring that Idaho's stories are uncovered, illuminated, and passed along to future generations.

FOUNDATION for IDAHO HISTORY

Jessica Anderson
Mary Ann Arnold, President
Bill Butticci
Roy Eiguren
Dixie Grant
Carol Hoidal
Jim Johnston
Garrett Kitamura
David Leroy
Bill March
Mikkel McBride
Mari Ramos
Evelyn Self
Neal Squires
Justin Vipperman

AFFILIATE BOARDS

Archaeological Survey of Idaho Board

Franklin Pioneer Association and the City of Franklin

Friends of Stricker Ranch, Hansen

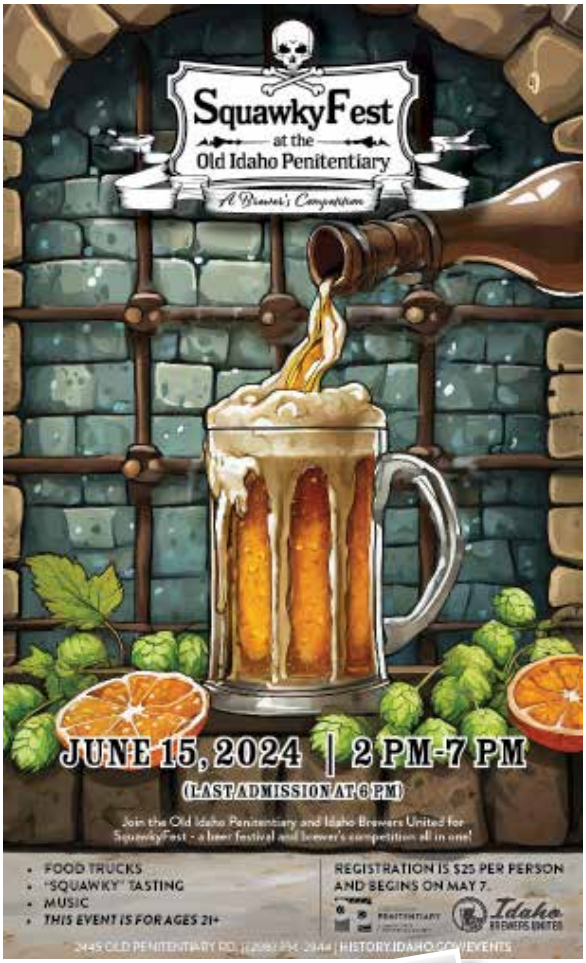
Governor's Lewis and Clark Trail Committee

Historic Sites Review Board

Idaho Geographic Names Advisory Council

J. Howard Bradbury Logging Museum and the City of Pierce

State Historical Records Advisory Board



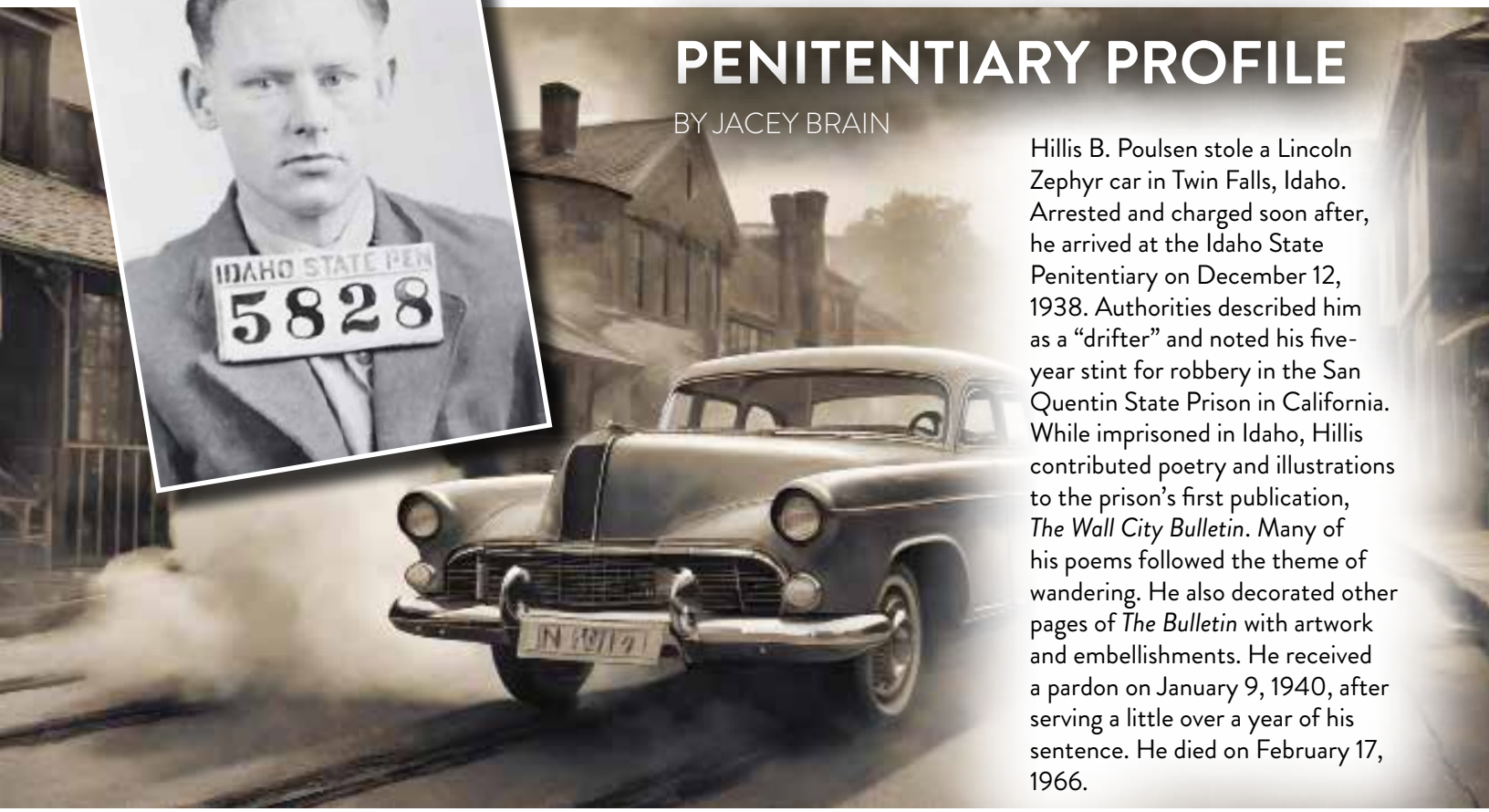
SQUAWKYFEST RETURNS

BY ALEXANDRA POLIDORI

Unlock a taste of ingenuity and resourcefulness at the Old Idaho Penitentiary's second annual SquawkyFest, on June 15, 2024, where breweries showcase their creativity by crafting their version of "squawky." Squawky is the name of the prison-made alcohol that incarcerated individuals 'brewed' at the penitentiary. The term "squawky" is unique to Idaho's prisons and may have derived from everyone squawking like birds once they got a few cups in. Resourceful incarcerated individuals could collect ingredients from the prison farms, dining hall, or canning plant to use in their own squawky. Popular squawky elements included apples, oranges, potatoes, grapefruit, and prunes. Add some yeast and sugar, let it ferment for a few days, and you have squawky!

Hosted by the Old Idaho Penitentiary in partnership with Idaho Brewers United, SquawkyFest is a beer festival and brewer's competition all in one. Each brewery will unveil its unique interpretation of "squawky," offering a glimpse into the clandestine world of homemade prison brews. Guests are invited to venture behind the prison walls, explore a world where brewing knows no limits, and vote on their favorite version of squawky. In addition, each brewery and cidery will have one of their seasonal drinks available for purchase, and local food stands and vendors will be on site.

Admission is $25 and includes site entry and exhibits, additional historical aspects of squawky, music, and a tasting cup for the squawky contest. Beer tokens are available at the site for $4 each (or 4 for $15), and limited edition SquawkyFest merchandise will be available for purchase.



PENITENTIARY PROFILE

BY JACEY BRAIN

Hillis B. Poulsen stole a Lincoln Zephyr car in Twin Falls, Idaho. Arrested and charged soon after, he arrived at the Idaho State Penitentiary on December 12, 1938. Authorities described him as a “drifter” and noted his five-year stint for robbery in the San Quentin State Prison in California. While imprisoned in Idaho, Hillis contributed poetry and illustrations to the prison’s first publication, *The Wall City Bulletin*. Many of his poems followed the theme of wandering. He also decorated other pages of *The Bulletin* with artwork and embellishments. He received a pardon on January 9, 1940, after serving a little over a year of his sentence. He died on February 17, 1966.

LEGISLATIVE SESSION RECAP

BY JANET L. GALLIMORE

During this year's legislative session, the Idaho State Historical Society created several opportunities to engage with the legislature, sharing Idaho's history through unique artifacts and exhibits, receptions, and other moments to inform members of the ISHS's mission, vision, and future plans.

ISHS submitted the agency's FY 25 proposed annual budget and line-item requests in September. The ISHS budget hearing was held on January 10, and the budget setting was February 16, 2024. The agency's FY 25 budget includes funds to support America250 in Idaho, which is part of the national commemoration for America's 250th anniversary in 2026. ISHS is leading the efforts at the state level.

ISHS staff held a special tour on November 9 for members of the Joint Finance Appropriations Committee (JFAC) at the collections storage warehouses, where the collections team curates over 50,000 unique historical artifacts. The tour provided an opportunity to showcase the unique items in the collection that span centuries and the dedicated staff that take great care in preserving these items for future generations. This tour also illustrates the need for a Collections and Archives Stewardship facility, which ISHS will add to the Idaho History Center.

On January 9, as part of a longstanding tradition during the legislative session, the ISHS presented a one-of-a-kind artifact from the collection to JFAC, the House, and the Senate. This year's artifact was Lafayette Cartee's original *Map of Public Surveys to Accompany Report to Commissioner of the General Land Office*, 1873, which the collections team carefully ushered throughout the chambers at the Idaho State Capitol for a brief overview and photo op.

Above: ISHS Executive Director Janet L. Gallimore and staff present the Cartee map to JFAC members.
Left: ISHS staff posing with the Cartee map in the Idaho State Capitol Rotunda.

The Idaho Capitol Commission approved the Capitol Curation program for FY 24 on August 17, 2023. This includes the *Shaping the GEM State* exhibition of 13 Cartee Maps in the Garden Level and the *Roots of Capitol History* in Statutory Hall.

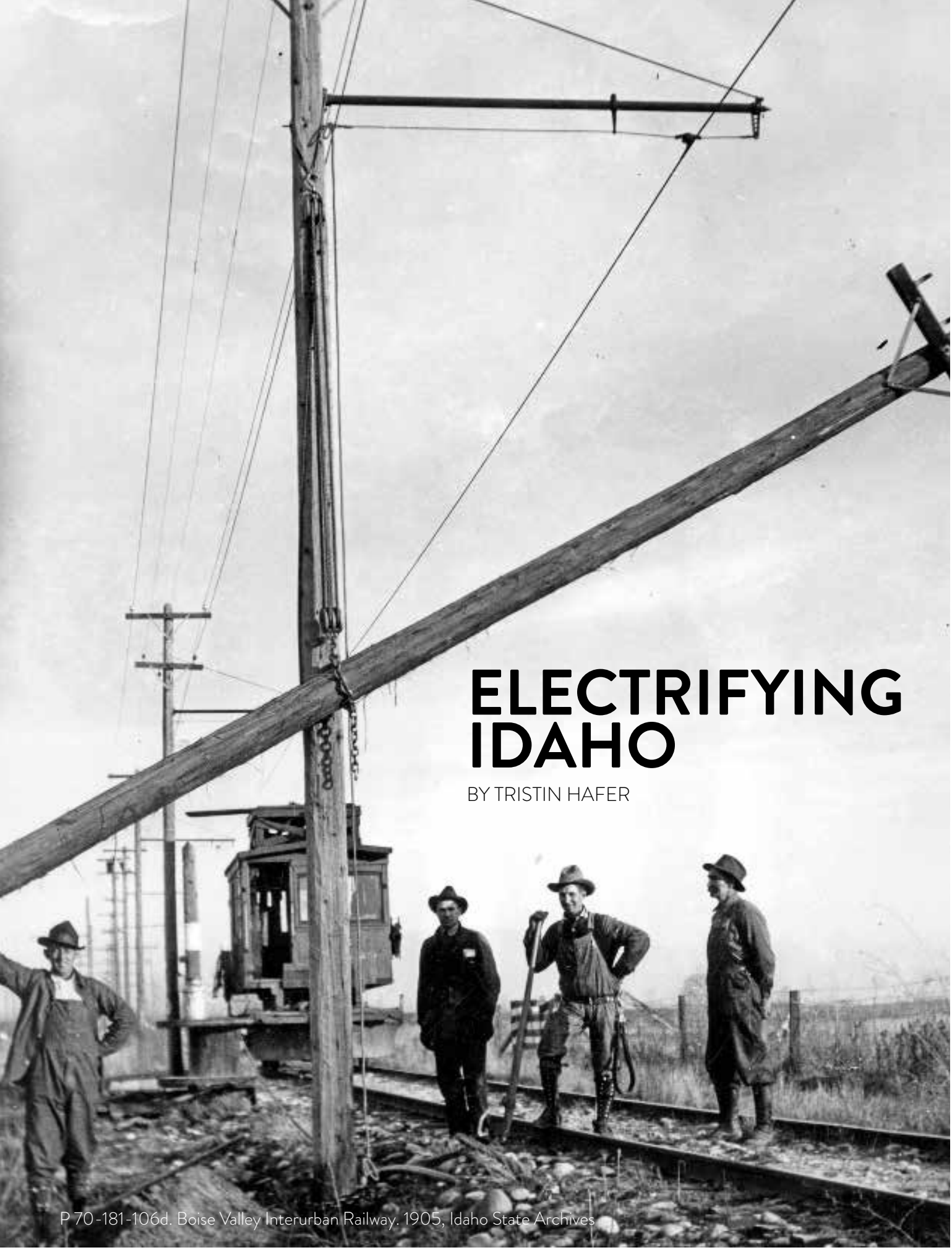
The ISHS hosted the Idaho Legisladies for a meeting and Idaho State Museum tour led by Executive Director Gallimore on January 11, 2024. We were privileged to host First Lady Teresa Little's annual meeting of the Legisladies, partners, and constitutional officers at the Idaho State House, where guests learned the history of the Capitol Collections in Statuary Hall and got a preview of the plans for America250 in Idaho.

The ISHS continues collaborating with tribal partners on updates to its Historical Highway Markers content revisions pursuant to tribal history. Director Gallimore and Deputy SHPO Tricia Canaday are also consulting with the Smithsonian Museum of Natural History to return the Braden collection under the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act.

While in Washington, D.C., ISHS staff met with Idaho's congressional delegation, seeking support for reauthorizing the Historic Preservation Fund, annual SHPO appropriation, and grants to support museums, archives, historic preservation, and the America250 commemoration.

ISHS continues to seek opportunities to engage with Idaho's legislature to strengthen relationships, create understanding, and provide insight into staff's unique and critical work in preserving and promoting Idaho's invaluable historical assets. We are grateful for Idaho's elected officials and continually appreciate the engagement and genuine interest from members who support Idaho history.

Top: ISHS staff transport the Cartee map from the House Chambers to the Senate Chambers.
Middle: Table setting at the annual Legisladies Luncheon held at the Idaho State Capitol.
Bottom: Capitol Curator Emily Sears presenting at the 2024 Legisladies Luncheon.



ELECTRIFYING IDAHO

BY TRISTIN HAFER

P 70-181-106d. Boise Valley Interurban Railway. 1905, Idaho State Archives

Idaho's history is deeply intertwined with the saga of the American West, characterized by pioneers seeking fortune and fresh starts. As the region witnessed an influx of settlers, technological advancements from the east swiftly followed. Among these advancements, electricity emerged as a pivotal force shaping Idaho's landscape and industries. From engineering hydroelectric projects to groundbreaking nuclear experiments, Idaho's journey through the realm of electricity offers a compelling narrative of innovation.

In 1887, the Capital Light, Motor, and Gas Company constructed Boise's first hydroelectric plant, marking a significant milestone in Idaho's electrification. Utilizing water from the Ridenbaugh Canal, this plant illuminated the city's street lamps, captivating the populace with the brilliance of electric lamps. By 1900, Capital Light would also power the city's first electric railway in downtown Boise. Concurrently, the Philadelphia Mining and Smelting Co. spearheaded efforts to power the Philadelphia Smelter in Sun Valley, further implementing the integration of electricity into Idaho's burgeoning mining industry.

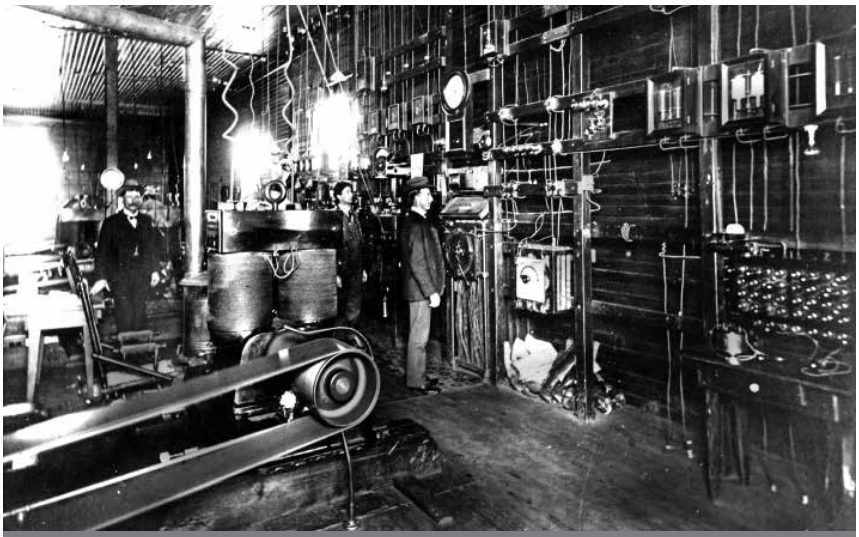
Idaho mines heavily relied on local resources such as wood and coal to power their operations. However, mines in Owyhee County faced a fuel shortage, leading miners to rip up old stumps from already cut trees to sustain their operations. This energy deficiency posed a growing challenge for companies like Trade Dollar and Blackjack Mining Co. In 1899, recognizing the urgent need for a solution, the Trade Dollar Company commissioned engineers A. D. Foote and A. J. Wiley to construct the region's first hydroelectric dam on the Snake River. Endorsed by engineers who had previously designed the Niagara Falls dams, the project commenced, aiming to bring power to Silver City. By 1901, over 28 miles of power lines were laid across the Owyhee countryside, electrifying the mining town and resulting in one of the most productive years for Owyhee's silver and gold mines. More hydroelectric dams began to be constructed on the Snake River, electrifying more rural areas. As Idaho's mining industry declined, Idaho's agricultural sector took advantage of the newly available energy.

Idaho's agricultural sector experienced a transformation with the emergence of electricity, particularly by deploying deep well pumps tapping into the Idaho aquifer. This transformed arid landscapes into fertile farmland, liberating farmers from dependence on traditional irrigation methods. If farmers had the land and access to the power grid, they could drill down to the aquifer to irrigate their land. Access to electricity became synonymous with agricultural prosperity.

Idaho's quest for energy innovation reached new heights with the establishment of the Idaho National Laboratory (INL), a hub of nuclear research and development. In 1955, the small town of Arco gained global recognition as the first city to be powered by nuclear energy for one hour, marking a historic milestone in the evolution of power generation. However, tragedy struck in 1961 with the SL-1 nuclear meltdown. This accident underscored the risks associated with nuclear experimentation and prompted a reevaluation of safety protocols.

Presently, Idaho grapples with the complexities of renewable energy, balancing environmental concerns with energy needs. While initiatives to harness wind and solar power promise a sustainable future, they also raise valid concerns regarding wildlife habitat preservation and historical site conservation. The debate surrounding the proposed installation of wind turbines near the Minidoka National Historic Site exemplifies the balance between progress and preservation in Idaho's energy landscape. Debates have even arisen over whether the dams located on the Snake River should remain due to their effects on the local wildlife and cultural sites they have impacted.

Idaho's history with electricity illustrates the spirit of innovation. From humble beginnings powering streetlamps to pioneering nuclear experiments, the state's journey through the realm of electricity reflects an ever-growing need to innovate. However, new concerns over how we generate our energy have entered the historic conversation, leading to new dialogue on how Idaho can preserve its natural and historic landscapes while innovating how electric power is generated within the state. As Idaho embraces renewable energy solutions and explores new frontiers in power generation, the legacy of its electrification journey serves as a testament to the ingenuity of its people.



63-112-2 Boise Electric Power Plants (Power plant south of Boise River - later Baxter Foundry), Idaho State Archives

COMMEMORATING THE NATION'S 250TH

BY HANNALORE HEIN

On July 4, 2026, our nation will commemorate the 250th anniversary of the founding of the United States. The Congressional America250 Caucus, established by Congress in 2016, includes Idaho's US Congressman Mike Simpson and US Senator Jim Risch.

This is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for the state of Idaho to participate in a national commemoration that embraces Idaho's role in American history and underscores the state's commitment to the fundamental values of freedom and self-governance that shaped America.

WHY IT MATTERS TO IDAHOANS

America250 in Idaho provides an opportunity for Idahoans to participate in commemorating the ideals of the American Revolution—equality, liberty, and justice.

America250 in Idaho advances Idahoans' knowledge of our great state, fostering a shared sense of pride, belonging, and ownership in shaping the state's future.

America250 in Idaho ensures a legacy for future generations. By commemorating Idaho's significance, we preserve and pass down a wealth of historical, cultural, and natural heritage to inspire and educate those yet to come.

PRESERVING IDAHO'S HISTORICAL LEGACY

America250 in Idaho offers a platform to honor and preserve the state's historical significance, emphasizing its role in shaping the nation's story and ensuring Idaho's unique contributions to America's growth are recognized and cherished for future generations.

HONORING OUR FOUNDING IDEALS

America250 in Idaho celebrates the spirit of freedom, echoing the principles of the American Revolution, honoring the foundations upon which our nation was built, and promoting the enduring values of liberty and justice.

CONTINUING THE REVOLUTION'S LEGACY

Commemorating Idaho in alignment with the ideals of the American Revolution serves as a call to continue the revolution's unfinished business—advancing equality, liberty, and justice. It inspires ongoing efforts to ensure that these foundational principles persist and evolve for future generations of Idahoans.

IDAHO'S JOURNEY, AMERICA'S LEGACY

WHY IT MATTERS TO AMERICA

As America approaches its 250th anniversary, reflections on pivotal moments become essential in commemorating its rich history. The American Revolution, a catalyst for liberty, stands as a cornerstone event, igniting a fervor for independence symbolized by the Declaration of Independence. The visionaries behind these seminal documents, the Founding Fathers, embodied resilience, forging a nation on democratic ideals. Commemorating America's 250th anniversary provides an opportunity to honor sacrifices, celebrate enduring freedom, and reaffirm defining values.

In the heart of the American West, the state of Idaho prepares to commemorate the nation's 250th anniversary:

Idaho State Historical Society: Statewide grants for local history, a website to serve as a resource hub, and statewide oral history initiative.
Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation: A book on rural, historic Idaho places, scenic byways, and state parks.
Idaho Public Television: A documentary on rural, historic Idaho places, scenic byways, and state parks and an updated Idaho history series for school-aged children.
Institute for Advancing American Values: Civics and American Thought Education courses for high school and college students and the public.

CONNECTING THROUGH POSTCARDS AT THE OLD IDAHO PENITENTIARY

BY ANTHONY PARRY & ALEXANDRA POLIDORI

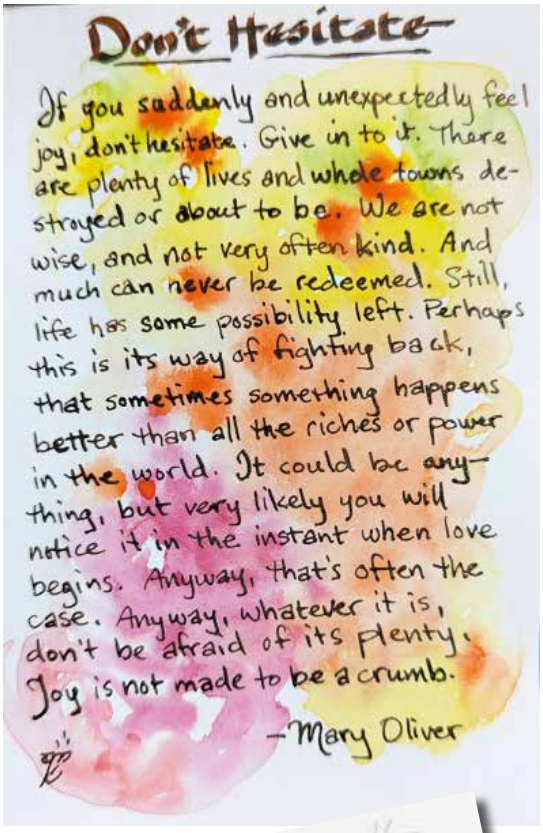
Mail holds immense importance for incarcerated individuals, serving as a vital link to the world beyond prison walls. The prison files preserved at the Idaho State Archives are rich with letters that offer glimpses into the emotions and struggles of Old Idaho Penitentiary residents. These heartfelt communications provided encouragement and support and demonstrated the power of positive communication in maintaining morale.

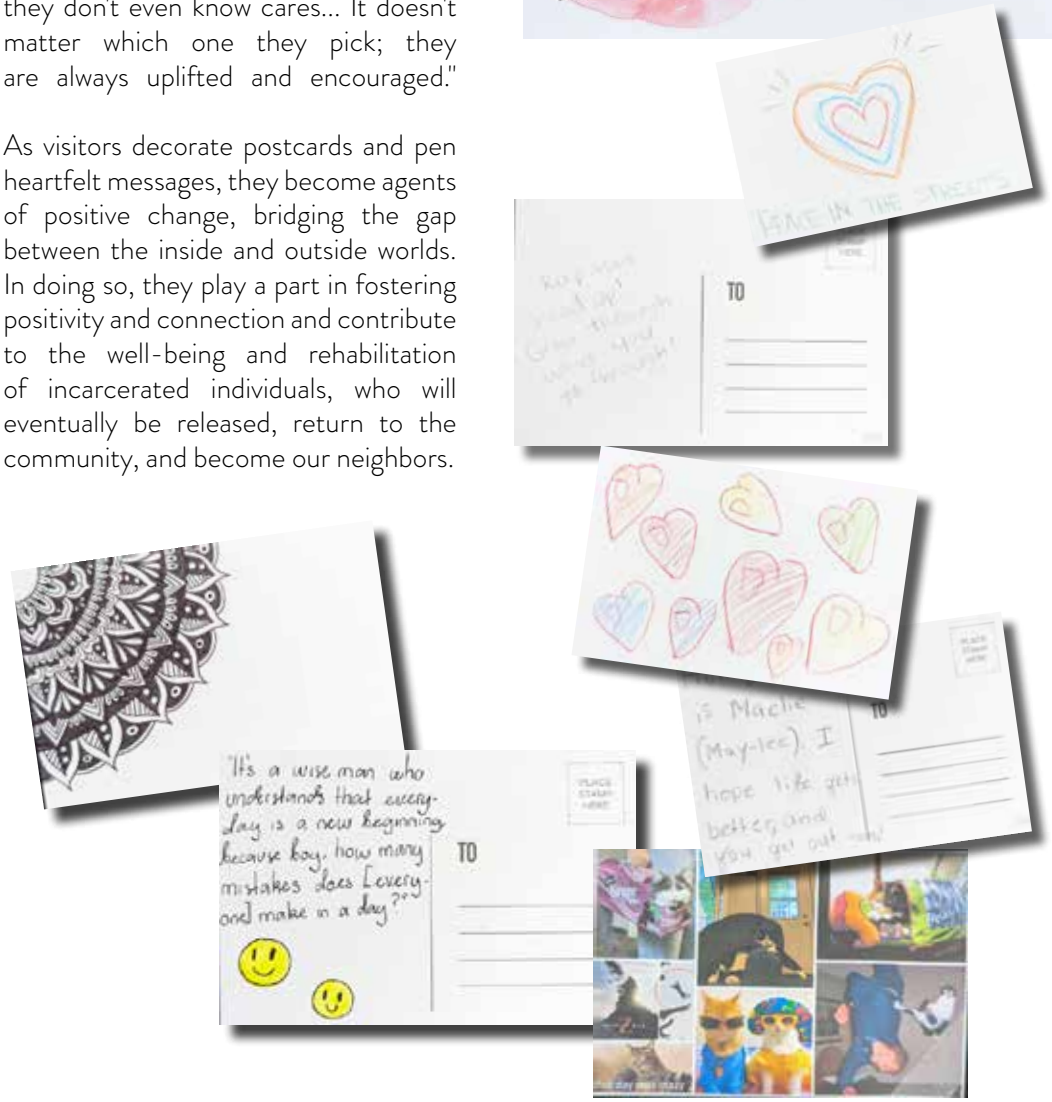
Raymond May, the final warden of the prison, stressed the significance of staying in touch with the outside world for prisoners' rehabilitation. He wrote, "To completely exclude a person from family contact is to offer him an inevitable means to divorce himself from society after his release completely. To avert this end, the administration has taken the necessary steps to encourage the keeping of family ties through more liberalized mail-visiting privileges." Today, this tradition continues through a unique activity at the Old Idaho Penitentiary in collaboration with the Idaho Department of Correction.

Visitors to the site are invited to decorate postcards and write messages of love, encouragement, and humor. Completed postcards are placed in the historic mailbox once used by prison staff, reviewed, and sent to various institutions across the state to brighten up prison cells and common areas and contribute to the residents' sense of self-worth and connection to the outside world.

The Idaho Department of Correction recognizes the importance of positive communication in rehabilitation and reintegration efforts for current residents. Encouraging family and community ties through writing is crucial for their success upon release. Volunteer Services Coordinator and chaplain of the South Idaho Correctional Institution, Mark Eckenrode, testified that the inspirational cards received at the institution "are a true blessing to the residents here in the prison. Some look forward to receiving them and are always inspired that someone they don't even know cares... It doesn't matter which one they pick; they are always uplifted and encouraged."

As visitors decorate postcards and pen heartfelt messages, they become agents of positive change, bridging the gap between the inside and outside worlds. In doing so, they play a part in fostering positivity and connection and contribute to the well-being and rehabilitation of incarcerated individuals, who will eventually be released, return to the community, and become our neighbors.





IDAHO HISTORY RECIPROCAL MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

BY SETH WHEELER

Established in 2020, the Idaho History Reciprocal Membership Program grants members complimentary entry to 13 statewide organizations, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of Idaho's cultural and historical landscape. Delve into immersive museum exhibits, traverse iconic historic sites, and marvel at a diverse array of unique artifacts, all while contributing to the missions of these invaluable organizations.

With your membership to a participating museum or historic site, you unlock access to additional entities across the state, from the rugged expanses of northern Idaho to the tranquil valleys of the south. Additionally, members can indulge in various supplementary perks designed to enhance their experience and further deepen their connection to Idaho's rich heritage. Whether you're a history enthusiast or simply a curious traveler, the Idaho History Reciprocal Membership Program offers an unparalleled opportunity to embark on a captivating journey through Idaho's past.

Start planning your next history adventure today and enjoy experiences that promise to enlighten, inspire, and enrich your understanding of our beautiful state.

For more information, contact the Idaho State Historical Society Membership and Volunteer Coordinator at (208) 514-2331 or email at shsmembership@ishs.idaho.gov.

PARTICIPATING SITES

NORTH

1. POST FALLS HISTORICAL MUSEUM **POST FALLS**
2. MUSEUM OF NORTH IDAHO **COEUR D' ALENE**
3. MCCONNELL MANSION HISTORIC HOUSE MUSEUM **MOSCOW**
4. WHITE SPRING RANCH MUSEUM **GENESEE**
5. NEZ PERCE COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY & MUSEUM **LEWISTON**

CENTRAL

6. LEMHI COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM **SALMON**
7. GEM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY **EMMETT**
8. IDAHO STATE MUSEUM **BOISE**
9. OLD IDAHO PENITENTIARY **BOISE**

SOUTH

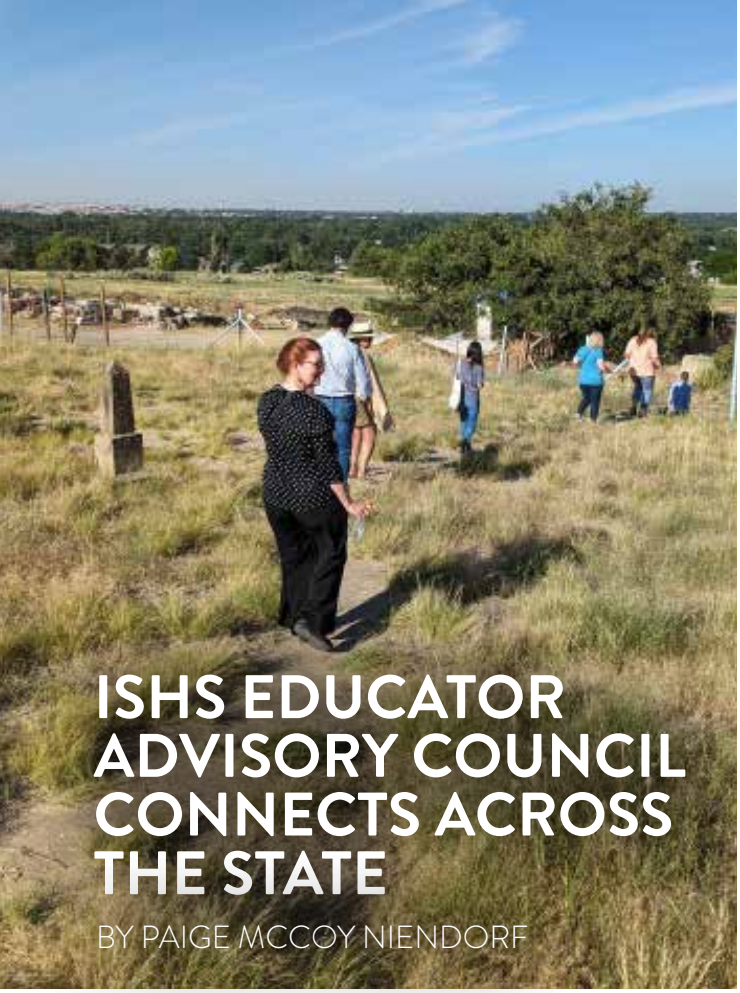
10. HAGERMAN VALLEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM **HAGERMAN**
11. TWIN FALLS COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MUSEUM **TWIN FALLS**

EAST

12. BANNOCK COUNTY HISTORICAL MUSEUM **POCATELLO**
13. BINGHAM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY **BLACKFOOT**

RECIPROCAL MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS

- **Free admission to participating museums around Idaho.**
- **Optional subscription to the Idaho State Historical Society (ISHS) monthly Histor-E newsletter.**
- **15% discount at ISHS gift shops.**
- **Discount for youth education programs and family activities at ISHS sites.**
- **Same discount as ISHS members listed on website.**
- **Discount varies by program.**
- **Each site may provide additional benefits at their own discretion.**



ISHS EDUCATOR ADVISORY COUNCIL CONNECTS ACROSS THE STATE

BY PAIGE MCCOY NIENDORF

Educators from schools across Idaho came to Boise in late July 2023 to visit agency sites, meet staff, and network with each other as part of the Idaho State Historical Society's (ISHS) Educator Advisory Council (EAC).

The EAC helps the ISHS develop programs and experiences for students, families, and teachers that serve the complex needs of today's classrooms. In 2022, the ISHS re-launched the council after the program paused during the pandemic.

EAC members serve a two-year term and act as ISHS ambassadors in their schools and communities. The 2022-2024 EAC cohort represents third grade through college levels and locations ranging from Moscow to Rexburg to the Treasure Valley.

During the 2022-2023 school year, the council met four times through virtual meetings. ISHS staff presented educational programs and resources and received feedback and suggestions from the EAC. After noticing the need for in-person connections to staff, agency sites, and other members, ISHS staff worked to bring the teachers to Boise. **"It was incredibly inspiring to meet our state's professional historians, see their hard work and dedication, as well as explore the 'behind the scenes' areas,"** said Vicki Chase, a teacher in Blackfoot. **"It was food for the soul to see what goes into preserving the history and heritage of our state."**

Those in-person tours included a look behind the curtain of the State Historic Preservation Office, the Old Idaho Penitentiary, the Idaho State Archives, and the Idaho State Museum. EAC members entered the vaults in the archives and the collections storage facility and toured the Old Pen cemetery and the historic neighborhood surrounding the State Historic Preservation Office.

"I loved the in-person tours that really helped me to have a deeper and more vivid understanding of the ISHS and how to apply these resources to the education field," said Meichun Lin, who teaches at Riverstone International School in Boise. Lin also emphasized how valuable it was to connect to other educators in the state after only seeing them on screens for so long.

Educators also met and connected with ISHS employees who do not work in education. EAC members ate meals with the ISHS Executive Director, registrars, historic preservation specialists, and visitor services staff, learning more about their jobs and how they support the agency's mission.

"The staff is incredibly engaging, dedicated, knowledgeable, and helpful," said Chase. **"Idaho can be proud to have such amazing professionals manning the helm of preserving our history."** EAC members also offered program feedback during the meeting, reviewing educational handouts and educator resources for the Idaho State Museum. Educators brainstormed and recommended an updated self-guided field trip activity handout for the museum. Members took back what they learned during the meeting to their classrooms as they began their school year.

"I am so grateful for this opportunity and I'm super excited to utilize the resources available as I make plans for the 2023-2024 school year," said Stacie Pollard, a Glenns Ferry teacher.

This cohort will continue to assist ISHS for the rest of the school year, but ISHS will look for new EAC members in spring 2024. For more information, please visit history.idaho.gov/educational-resources.

Top: EAC members tour the Old Idaho Penitentiary cemetery.
Bottom: EAC members tour the State Historic Preservation Office.

IT'S ALIVE: INTRODUCING THE IDAHO CULTURAL RESOURCE INFORMATION SYSTEM

BY DAN EVERHART

After ten years of planning and a year and a half of development, the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) unveiled a groundbreaking initiative set to revolutionize the preservation and management of cultural resource records across the state: the Idaho Cultural Resource Information System (ICRIS). Officially released in January 2024, this innovative platform represents a significant step forward in making cultural resource information available to all Idahoans. ICRIS serves as a comprehensive digital repository, housing a vast array of data on cultural resources throughout Idaho. From archaeological sites to historic buildings and landscapes to traditional cultural properties, ICRIS aims to catalog these invaluable assets in a standardized format and make them available to professionals and the public.

ICRIS is more than just a database; it's a powerful tool for guiding preservation efforts across the state. By centralizing data on cultural resources, ICRIS enables stakeholders to make informed decisions about land use planning, development projects, and resource management strategies. Whether identifying sensitive areas for preservation or evaluating the potential impacts of proposed activities, ICRIS provides invaluable insights to guide responsible stewardship of Idaho's historic resources.

The development of ICRIS represents a convergence of cutting-edge technology and a commitment to historic preservation. Advanced Geographic Information System (GIS) capabilities form the backbone of ICRIS, allowing for the spatial analysis and visualization of cultural resources in their geographic context. This spatial perspective is essential for understanding the interconnectedness of historic resources and their broader landscape settings.

ICRIS
Idaho Cultural Resource Information System

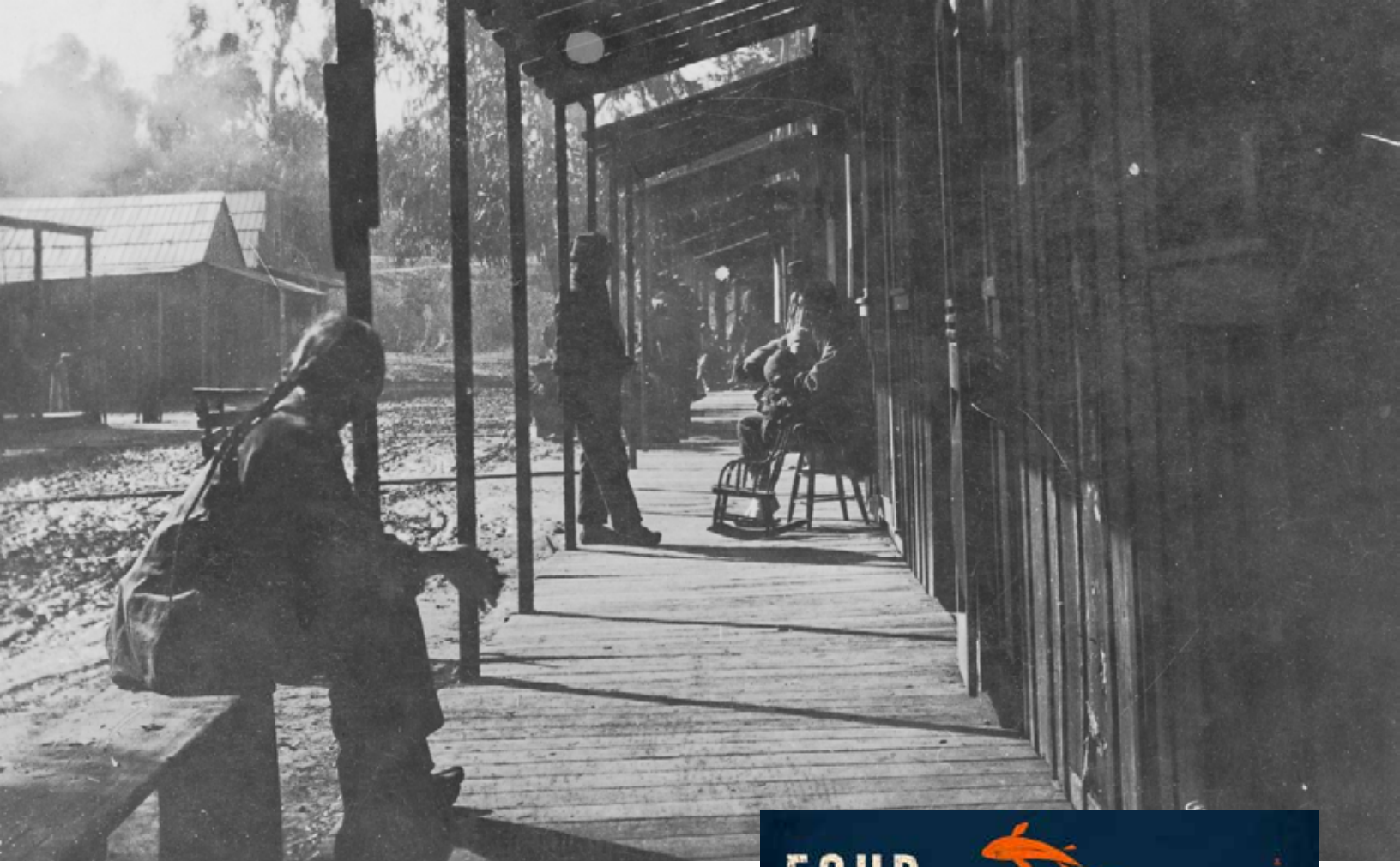
Moreover, ICRIS facilitates collaboration among various state and federal agencies, organizations, and tribal entities involved in the Section 106 process. The Section 106 process, mandated by the National Historic Preservation Act, requires federal agencies to consider the impacts of their actions on historic properties. It involves consultation with stakeholders, including State Historic Preservation Offices and the public, to identify and assess potential effects on cultural resources. This collaborative process explores alternatives to avoid, minimize, or mitigate adverse impacts. ICRIS has significantly streamlined communication and data sharing in the Section 106 process by providing internal SHPO workflow management tools, resulting in efficiencies that will decrease turn-around times for federal project review.

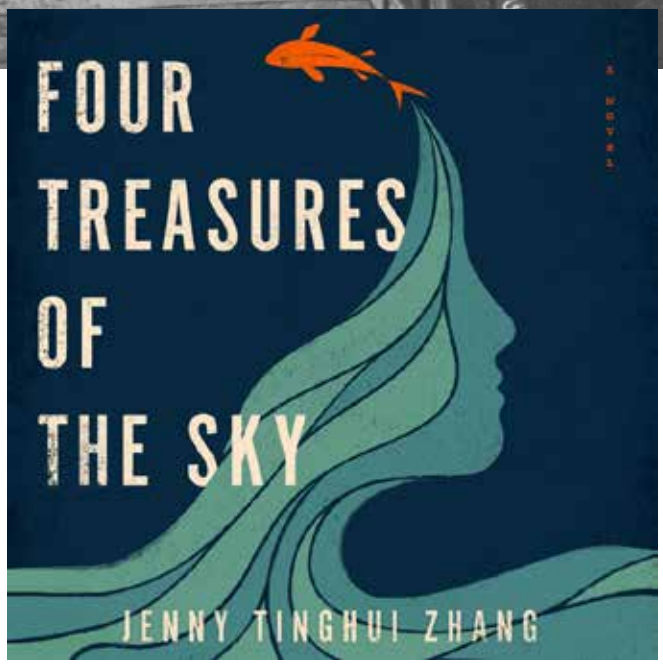
One of the key benefits of ICRIS is its user-friendly interface, designed to facilitate access to information for a wide range of stakeholders, including researchers, historians, archaeologists, land managers, and the general public. Through ICRIS, users can explore interactive maps, access detailed reports, and delve into rich multimedia content. Professionally qualified individuals can create, upload, and track projects, while the public can view unrestricted data through the guest portal. Those interested in learning more about Idaho's cultural resources may find information about Idaho places important to them. These records may include photos, a brief history, and a determination of historical significance.

The launch of ICRIS marks a pivotal moment in Idaho's ongoing commitment to historic preservation. By harnessing the power of technology, the state is not only preserving its past but also laying the foundation for a more informed and sustainable future.

HISTORY.IDAHO.GOV/SHPO/ICRIS

Images taken from the ICRIS program showing areas with historical significance.





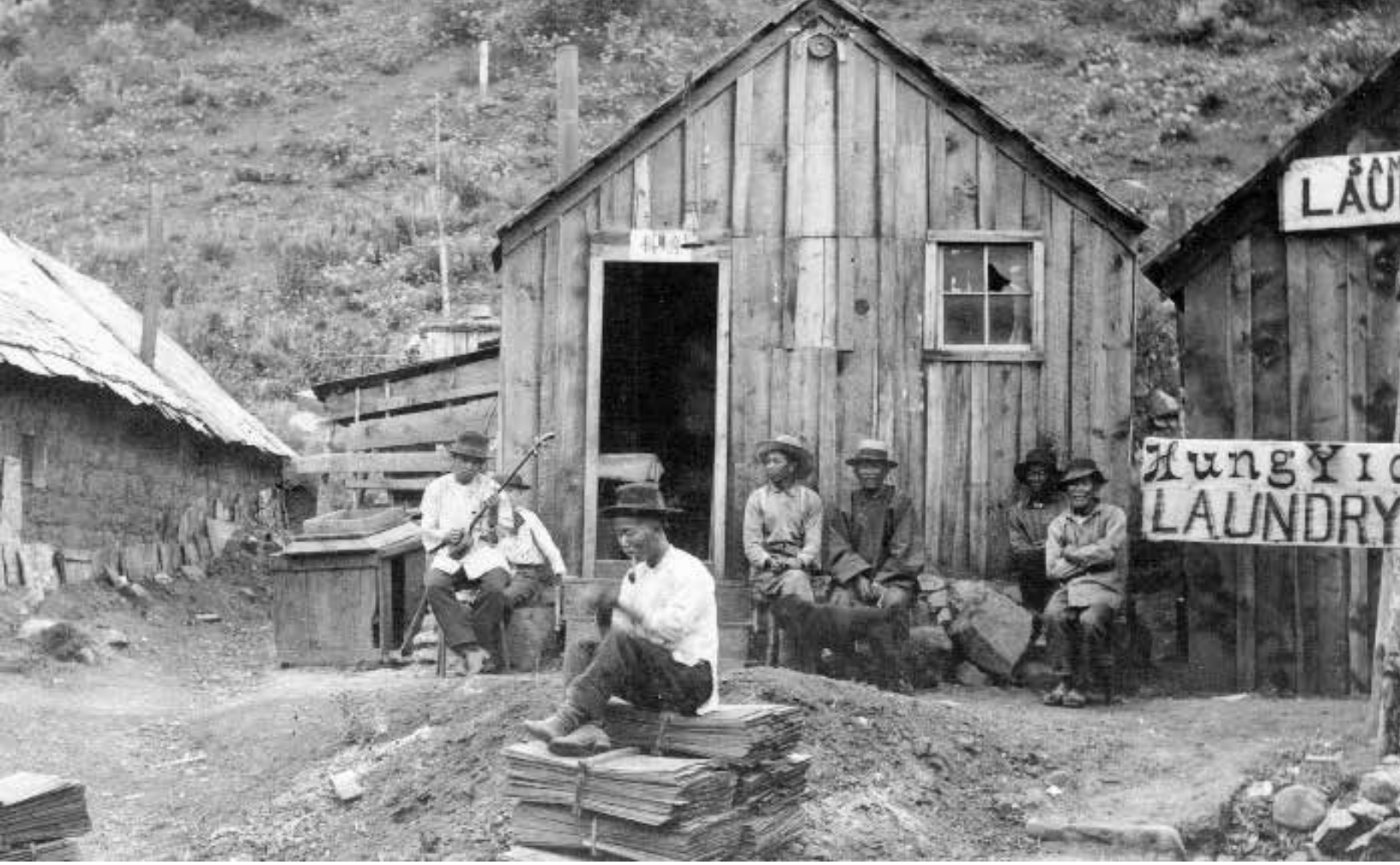
HISTORICAL FICTION AND HIDDEN PERSPECTIVES: USING LITERATURE TO BUILD CAPACITY

BY HANNALORE HEIN

This spring, the City Club of Boise asked me to participate in a panel discussion with Jenny Tinghui Zhang, author of *Four Treasures of the Sky*, as part of its "Hidden Histories" series. "Hidden Histories" allows speakers and presenters to explore and share the history of underrepresented groups. Zhang's debut novel depicts the life of a Chinese girl during the era of Chinese Exclusion in the American West, and portions of the story take place in Idaho during the 1880s. In preparing for this event, I had the opportunity to read the book and expand my knowledge about Idaho's Chinese history. In doing this work, I could not help but think about historical fiction's role in inspiring empathy and understanding in the reader, critical thinking about the past, and how the genre allows us to share the relevance of history with broader audiences.

Many educators see historical fiction as a captivating gateway for students to explore and appreciate history because it offers readers a unique blend of entertainment and education.

Top Left: 76-138-48, Idaho State Archives.
Bottom Left: *Four Treasures of the Sky* book cover.
Top Right: 1983-37-22, Idaho State Archives.



However, this gateway can exist for adults, too. To be considered historical fiction, the piece is generally set in the past and before the author's lifetime or experience. However, historical fiction should also convey respect for historical accuracy and detail, and its intention, beyond providing reading pleasure, should enhance the reader's knowledge of past events, lives, and customs. When authors combine all these elements well, they deliver a tangible opportunity for the reader to become immersed in the vividly reconstructed worlds of the past while developing a more profound interest in history.

Zhang's *Four Treasures of the Sky* gives a glimpse into the experiences of Chinese immigrants—both men and women—whose real experiences impacted the development of the American West. Zhang's storytelling painted a picture of historical events—a lynching of five Chinese that occurred in Pierce, Idaho, in 1885—in a way that leads to a more profound sense of empathy and understanding across time and cultural boundaries. Zhang's lead character, Lin Daiyu, experienced the struggles, triumphs, and complexities that historical actors from that era likely experienced. The life she led throughout the novel and the decisions she made illuminate the challenges that Chinese immigrants faced as they navigated discrimination, exploitation, and the longing for acceptance in a society rife with judgment.

But aside from the potential to develop empathy in the reader, this genre fills gaps in traditional historical narratives by amplifying different perspectives, thus allowing the reader to think critically about the past. For readers who might never pick up a piece of non-fiction about the American West in the 1880s, historical fiction like *Four Treasures of the Sky* explores actual events in a way that inspires curiosity. In telling a fictional story inspired by historical events, the reader can think critically, not just about the elements of the story that are true and supported by the historical record, but also about what experiences may have been like for those stories that *did not* end up in the historical record.

Historical fiction breathes life into the past by combining historical research with imaginative storytelling. It may serve as the avenue that some need to become more interested in the field of history, and this is a space that I think we, as practitioners, should encourage. We must take up all opportunities to elevate the moments, anecdotes, and people from the past. I think there are many opportunities for authors to explore Idaho's history and bring that history to the masses through the genre of historical fiction. I am excited that Zhang's piece, *Four Treasures of the Sky*, is just one more tool in the toolbox that historians, curators, and leaders in this field can utilize to inspire interest in Idaho history.

HISTORY.IDAHO.GOV

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY
2205 Old Penitentiary Road
Boise, ID 83712-8250

Volume 59, Issue 1 | Spring 2024

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

MOUNTAIN LIGHT

The Newsletter of the Idaho State Historical Society

LEAVE A LEGACY FOR IDAHO

The generosity of donors like you helps the Idaho State Historical Society preserve and promote Idaho history. Your gift funds vital educational programs and provides access to history to communities across the Gem State. Consider supporting our student programming by returning the enclosed envelope or visiting our website at History.Idaho.Gov/Donate. Please call us at (208) 334-2682 for assistance.

@IDSTATEHISTORICALSOCIETY | HISTORY.IDAHO.GOV
Costs associated with this publication are available from the Idaho State Historical Society in accordance with Section 60-202, Idaho Code. 4.2022.800.01