

History of Boise

Nestled on a high desert plain in the shadow of the Rocky Mountains with a pristine river flowing through its center, Boise finds its roots from the gold rush days of the 1800s.

In 1834 Fort Boise, owned by the Hudson Bay Company, was established by British fur traders. The fort, now known as Old Fort Boise, was located at the mouth of the Boise River, 40 miles from present day Boise. In 1854, due to frequent Indian raids, the fort was abandoned. Despite this, the military desired to build another fort in the area, but, before this plan could go into effect, gold was discovered in the Boise Basin in 1862. It was now necessary, more than ever, to protect the vast number of travelers coming to the area.

On July 4th, 1863, the military chose a location for the new Fort Boise and construction began soon afterward. A town site was located next to the fort, and with the protection of the military, the town grew quickly. A major reason for this growth, other than the gold rush, was its location along the Oregon Trail

The Oregon Trail was a thoroughfare for thousands of travelers heading for the Oregon Territory. Of all the western roads, the Oregon Trail was the longest at 2,020 miles. It began in Independence, Missouri and ended at Oregon City, Oregon. Its route in Idaho began at the Idaho-Wyoming border, crossed through Bear Valley, turned north toward Fort Hall and then followed the Snake River until it reached the Boise River. It followed the south side of the river winding through what is now the southern part of Boise. To this day, wheel ruts can still be seen along some areas of its path.

Adding to this major thoroughfare were the routes to the Boise Basin and Owyhee mines. These routes crossed the Oregon Trail at the Fort Boise location. Because it was located at these major crossroads, Boise became a prosperous commercial center.

In 1864, when the territorial legislature held its second session in Lewiston, Boise was incorporated as a city and proclaimed the capital of the Idaho Territory. This same year, on July 26, the Idaho Statesman newspaper produced its first publication and became the second newspaper in Idaho. The first was the Idaho World in Idaho City.

After the gold rush, Boise's population declined from 1,658 citizens in 1864 to 995 in 1870. With new construction, including the territorial prison in 1869 and the U.S. Assay Office in 1872, Boise began to grow again. The capitol building was completed in 1886 and in 1887 Boise built a streetcar system. In 1890, Idaho became a state.

In the early 1900s Boise once again enjoyed rapid growth. This growth came with the expansion of irrigation in the valley in 1902. This led to the construction of Arrowrock Dam, the tallest in the world from 1915 to 1932.

In the late 1930s, Boise was graced with the massive migration of Basques from their native home in the Western Pyrenees Mountains. These proud people became shepherders, a large industry at the time, and gradually moved into the mainstream of city life in Boise, bringing their colorful culture with them. Today Boise has the largest concentration of Basques per capita outside the Pyrenees Mountains.

As the Great Depression ravaged many cities in the nation, Boise enjoyed growth. And during World War II, multitudes of airmen trained at Gowen Field, Boise's air base.

Today Boise is still the largest metropolitan community in the state with over 211,000 residents. Numerous international, national, regional and state corporations have their headquarters or a large presence in Boise. Some of these include Boise (formerly Boise Cascade), J.R. Simplot Company, Albertsons/SuperValu, Micron and URS Corporation's Washington Division. Boise is the hub of commerce, banking and government for the state and is located midway between Salt Lake City, UT and Portland, OR.

Laurie McConnell
Communications Manager
Phone: 208-344-7777
1-800-635-5240
lmcconnell@boisecvb.org

