Preserving Main:

History and Urban Renewal of Boise’s West Main Street

Jacey Brain

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Committee:

Dr. Todd Shallat (chair)

Dr. Leslie Madsen-Brooks

Terri Schorzman
Abstract

The 1000 block of Main stands as the last complete block of Boise’s historic Main Street before urban renewal changed the landscape of the city’s downtown core. Located between two historic hotels, the 1901 Idanha and the 1910 Owyhee, the block reminds pedestrians of the bustling streetcar era. Depressed for years, the block area was once busy with commerce and local politics. Oregon Short Line brought travelers to Downtown Boise at the nearby Tenth Street Depot. Although some facades have changed, the block’s historic buildings remain mostly intact. The 1000 block, or “Gem Block” and the Mercantile District surrounding it represent an opportunity for heritage education and designation of a historical district. Main Street programs have strengthened downtown areas throughout the country. The mixed-use elements and older buildings provide the foundation for successful Main Street revitalization. Initial steps have been taken by local historians and city planners to reinforce the block’s historical identity through walking tours, street improvements and public artwork. Expanding these efforts would pave the way for larger components of a successful Main Street program.
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The 1000 block of Main Street contains some of Boise’s most historic buildings, including the Gem Block, the Alaska Center, and the Beckwith Building, which houses Hannifins Cigar. These buildings stand as the last remains of the turn-of-the-century hotel and mercantile district next to the railroad, and they remind many of Boise’s development from a frontier town into a more mature state capital. The block, long depressed, once thrived as a commercial district. Historical preservation can help revive commerce within the area. Many cities use historic preservation to revive their Main Streets. The most successful projects repurpose old buildings. The 1000 block, with its trolley-era storefronts and walkable streetscape, has the key elements for a successful Main Street revitalization project.

Once a string of mercantile houses and hotels near the Oregon Short Line’s Tenth Street rail depot comprised the 1000 block. Around 1890, buildings began replacing the feed lots and corrals on the east side of Main, bringing a post office, a grocery store and several other shops and businesses to the area. In 1910, on sidewalks between the city’s two most important hotels, the block jumped with retail, small hotels, and a public meeting hall. Noted architect W.S. Campbell designed the Idanha Hotel, constructed in 1900. Soon after, merchants fully occupied both sides of the block, adding more commercial space and lodging. Many prominent figures in Idaho history held office space in the area, including Harry Morrison and Morris Knudsen.
Hannifins still displays the pot-bellied stove that heated the shop during the Great Depression, and many of Idaho’s most important men have purchased cigars there. The history of transportation in downtown Boise can be traced through this block, from its adjacency to the Oregon Short Line Depot, to the bustle of the horse-drawn carriages, to the age of the streetcar, the dominant mode of transportation in the area by 1915. The 1000 block of West Main Street, from the Idanha Hotel to the Owyhee Plaza Hotel, is the last remnant of the trolley streetscape without surface parking. Listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the block remains unprotected by city preservation zoning. Other structures stand just outside of the 1000 block, bringing additional historical importance and vitality to the area. These landmarks, including the 1910 Empire Building and the 1971 Boise Plaza, are not included in any currently historical districts. When combined with the 1000 block, these buildings form a larger “Mercantile District.” Today most of the buildings’ facades remain in good condition. This district represents a major opportunity for heritage education and could be revitalized by reinforcing the cultural identity of the block.

Along with Dr. Todd Shallat and Boise State University’s College of Social Science and Public Affairs, I have completed initial work to gauge public and private interest in urban renewal of the block. In Fall 2010, we submitted a Neighborhood Reinvestment Grant application to Boise Planning & Development Services. The grant would have funded a historical walking tour brochure of the block, as well as a public art kiosk, street signage and banners. These components would bring a cultural identity to the block, beginning the process of turning the area into a historical district. After the grant application was denied due to concerns regarding the naming and branding of the district, I applied for a grant through the Boise City Department of Arts & History in July 2011. Through this grant program I received $1,200 to
complete the Mercantile District walking tour brochure.

As the Capital City Development Corporation completed street improvements on the 1000 block in Summer 2013, they funded and installed a series of public art pieces designed by local artist ward Hooper. Hooper’s designs represented the history of the block. These improvements, combined with the published walking tour brochure, form the base of a potential urban renewal program benefitting the Mercantile District. Now that progress has been made toward branding and naming the block and district, other elements of our original grant application should be pushed forward. These components would strengthen the cultural and historical identity of the district.

Before examining the history of Boise’s West Main Street and the 1000 block, the National Main Street Center’s program ideology should be discussed. After looking at Main Street programs and the importance of Main Streets to the vitality of cities, the 1000 block’s history and current state can be examined and used as the foundation for future revitalization projects. After discussing how the Oregon Short Line and the electric streetcar system brought people to Downtown Boise, landmarks within the Mercantile District will be discussed individually. Finally, recommendations will be made to continue reviving the busy atmosphere the area once possessed.
MAIN STREET PROGRAMS

The National Trust for Historic Preservation’s National Main Street Center has worked with communities across the country for decades to revitalize and reinforce the importance of cities’ central commercial districts and downtown areas. It has helped support Main Street programs and Main Street components within larger planning and preservation efforts. The Trust launched the program in 1977 as concerns mounted regarding failing downtown areas in communities throughout the United States. In the pilot program, the National Trust received grant funding from manufacturing firm Bird and Son to implement Main Street programs in three cities of varied sizes – Galesburg, Illinois, Madison, Indiana, and Hot Springs, South Dakota. For each of the three communities, the Trust hired a full-time program manager to promote the downtown area’s importance and subsequent project events. The managers also gathered monetary support from local business owners and city representatives to spend on downtown improvements.¹

The economies of each of the three selected downtown areas improved, and the process cemented the Main Street Program’s approach for future projects. Their system includes forming private-public partnerships and hiring a full-time project manager to head an established program organization that runs programs, follows an incremental process, and maintains regulations for
quality design. Building on these principles, the pilot programs made sure the private sector put more money into the restoration and re-use of existing structures than into managing the Main Street Program itself. In the process, older properties were restored and re-used, preserving historic buildings and reinforcing the historical identity of each community. After their success in the pilot cities, the National Trust established the National Main Street Center (NMSC) to spread the program’s philosophy to other areas of the U.S. With a proven history of accomplishment behind them, they continue to help coordinate and support Main Street Programs throughout the country.²

In order to understand the importance of Boise’s Mercantile District (or Lower Main Street Commercial District, as Richard Briggs called the area in his 1980 National Register of Historic Places nomination application) to the history of Downtown Boise, it is important to understand why Main Street areas are such a vital part of cohesive, healthy cities. The National Trust for Historic Preservation focuses on the downtown cores of cities rather than suburbs or modern shopping malls. According to their philosophy, Main Streets are “economic engine, the big stage the core of the community. Our Main Streets tell us who we are and who we were, and how the past has shaped us.”³

Since the postwar boom of suburban neighborhoods in the 1950s, city planners and preservationists have written about the decline of the “city” or archetypal Main Street and downtown center. These authors have noted that revitalizing these areas can improve a city’s economy and the daily lives of its citizens. In Jane Jacobs’ 1961 book, *The Death and Life of Great American Cities*, she discussed the decay of downtown areas at the time. City planners and developers focused more on suburban areas brought about by the abundance of automobiles. She argued that a successful downtown core should be used for a variety of reasons and by a diverse
group of people. One component of her hypothesis stated that a district should serve more than one or two demographics. An area can reach its full economic and social potential if it is used at different times of day.\textsuperscript{4} In addition, she argued that a successful district must include old buildings. These old buildings need not be grand, expertly maintained examples of fine architecture. Older buildings do not require the costs a businesses and residents face that support new construction. Jacobs noted that a vital downtown core does not require only older buildings either. A mixture of old and new is key, but new development should come about as a result of economic success rather than as an answer to failure.\textsuperscript{5}

According to social critic James Howard Kunstler, America’s traditional mixed-use neighborhood format reigned until after World War II when suburban sprawl became the norm for new development. Sprawl accommodated the new postwar family structure and their desires to use their wealth and claim individual spaces to live in. In his 1996 book \textit{Home from Nowhere: Remaking Our Everyday World for the 21st Century}, he called this the “victory disease.”\textsuperscript{6} He argued that after 1945, shared outdoor spaces, or the “public realm,” became unappealing and even non-existent in some places. Many suburbs did not plan for sidewalks, lampposts and benches. While America developed without a focus on the public realm, its people subconsciously reminisced about its Main Street heritage. After all, by 1955 the Walt Disney Company was able to capitalize on the public’s fondness for its dying Main Streets by greeting theme park visitors with an idealized replica of the heart of an American town.\textsuperscript{7}

A few years later, in a 2000 book titled \textit{Suburban Nation: The Rise of Sprawl and the Decline of the American Dream} by city planners Andres Duany, Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk and Jeff Speck, they continued Jane Jacobs’ tradition of advocating for mixed use in neighborhoods. According to them, the successful center should include retail shops and services such as dry
cleaners to serve its residents and visitors. In addition, the district should balance offices and workplaces with residential space, allowing people to work and live in an area. While people may not live and work in the same neighborhood, allowing for both will increase the desire of some workers to live closer and some residents to work closer to the district, causing an increase in the area’s economic health over time.

HISTORY AND URBAN RENEWAL OF BOISE’S WEST MAIN STREET

In order to understand how the 1000 block of Main Street fits into this vision of an ideal Main Street core, one must agree with the National Trust for Historic Preservation’s argument as to why these districts are so important – they represent the history and identity of a city and what they grow out of. This is true for Boise’s Mercantile District. The personalities that shaped the vision of Boise worked and traveled through the area frequently. The Oregon Short Line that brought laborers, celebrities, politicians and presidents to Boise stopped a block away at the 1893 Tenth Street depot. The Idanha Hotel became the center of some of the city’s earliest media attention during one of Idaho’s most famous trials. Hannifins Cigar and the Owyhee Hotel’s lounges welcomed local businessmen, politicians and organizations, filling the block with a sense of social importance.

Main Street’s 1000 block captures the city’s early history as no other part of Main Street can. It should be viewed as a snapshot of how most of Main Street once looked - lined with buildings and shops forming a bustling business district before Boise began dismantling its downtown core in the 1970s and 1980s. During the mid-1960s, Boise felt the effects of suburban sprawl on its downtown center as parts of the core began to empty and become neglected. The city attempted to remedy the issue in 1964 through an urban renewal
plan. The City Council-created Boise Redevelopment Agency (B.R.A.) and the 1965 Idaho Urban Renewal Law called for the clearance of several blocks’ worth of buildings considered past the point of rehabilitation. The plan called for the development of a large shopping center over the cleared downtown space. Five different B.R.A. partnerships with developers failed and large-scale retailers did not attach themselves to the plan. Still, many buildings and structures in Downtown Boise were cleared to make way for the mall. As the developments continually stalled, the people of Boise began speaking out against the process. In a June 18, 1972 letter to the Idaho Statesman editor, a concerned Boise citizen wrote, “I resent the joviality displayed each time your newspaper announces the demise of the few remaining Boise landmarks.” They added, “I shudder when I consider that the next victims of the ‘demolition ball’ may well be the Idanha Hotel or the Boise train station.” Boise residents and powerful figures alike, including Senator Frank Church, called for an end to the destruction. Although other cities considered or followed similar plans at the time, Boise became known as “the city that destroyed itself.”

During Boise’s urban renewal era between 1965 and 1974, the Boise Redevelopment Agency acquired twelve city blocks and cleared six of them. Four of the six lots, cleared for construction of the mall itself, became open parking lots. By 1974, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development began phasing out its federal urban renewal programs. The last potential developer of the shopping center backed out of the project in 1985 and Boise began pursuing surveys and plans for mixed-use redevelopment in the area. Today, the 1000 block stands as the only Main Street block with all of its pre-urban renewal historic buildings intact. Some structures have been altered or treated with new facades since then, but the block represents the city’s history and its prominent people by conveying the image and feeling of Boise’s turn of the century Main Street. In addition, the block fits Jane Jacobs and Duany, Plater-
Zyberk and Speck’s descriptions of a successful mixed-use district. It contains old and historic buildings with adjacent modern structures like the 2007 Royal Plaza. The 1000 block’s businesses include a salon, a coffee shop, an art gallery, an Italian restaurant and an ice cream parlor. The block also boasts an investment firm and other office space, and condominiums and apartments. The 1000 block of Boise’s Main Street exudes potential for a successful Main Street program. Some elements of the National Trust’s program are already in place, while others would need to be created. In order to better understand the current state of the 1000 block, its history should be examined and followed by a discussion of the needed elements of the Main Street program.

Early residents of the 1000 block included Nathan and David Falk, businessmen whose descendents Sigmund and Leo Falk would later become major players in the Boise retail market, and Dr. Ephraim Smith, mayor of Boise in 1866. The Boise Canal was constructed through the block in 1865 under the current location of the Smith Building and Safari Motor Inn. Soon, many of the residences in the area became boarding houses. Other businesses including blacksmiths, stables and retail locations formed a Main Street business district.  

Possibly the most significant event contributing to the development of the area was the 1893 opening of the Oregon Short Line Depot at the corner of Tenth and Front Streets. On July 4th, 1891, Walter E. Pierce’s Boise Rapid Transit Company completed an electric streetcar line between Thirteenth Street and Warm Springs Avenue along Main. Boise’s first electric trolley system, it looped only around the Main Street area. The Oregon Short Line would help bring travelers and visitors to and from the area. At the time, Boise residents referred to it as the “Oregon Crooked Line” because it had bypassed the city entirely when the Union Pacific Railroad Company built the line through the region along the Oregon Trail in 1883. The
previous depot, built by the Idaho Central Railway, stood over a mile away from the main part of town, surrounded by dust and minimal activity.16 In order to bring rail service to the downtown area, the Boise City Railroad & Terminal Company (BCR&T) was formed on March 20, 1893 under the Oregon short Line & Utah Northern Railway Company.17 The new stone building initially stored freight and featured a small office for keeping up with company paperwork.18 Due to time constraints, the line used the freight depot for passenger service until the entire building reached completion in 1895. When the new depot opened on August 17, 1893, Mayor Peter Sonna hosted a large celebration. That day, the very first train pulled in with the Union Pacific’s Idaho Division superintendent E.E. Calvin and other important figures on board.19

Shortly after the completion of the rail depot and Tenth and Front Streets, the Idanha Hotel and the other businesses along the 1000 block of Main Street opened.

By 1895, the BCR&T installed parks with gardens and trees on both sides of the depot. The trees welcomed visitors to the city, and the depot quickly became a center for special events bringing large crowds to the area. Idaho volunteer soldiers marched to the depot as they prepared to join the Spanish Civil War efforts in 1898. In addition to the large crowds and a band, Mayor Moses Alexander, the Boise City Council, and the city’s volunteer firefighters attended the rally to support the troops. A few years later, in 1903, throngs of Boiseans and Mayor Alexander welcomed President Theodore Roosevelt to the city when he arrived at the depot for a visit to Boise. Later, in 1915, the Liberty Bell traveled through the depot on a tour across the country from Philadelphia. During the stop, fifteen thousand people visited the depot to view the bell. The Tenth and Front depot welcomed perhaps its largest crowd of people in 1917 as Idaho soldiers left Boise for their service in World War I.20

On August 14, 1922, the Boise Chamber of Commerce and the Oregon Short Line drew
up the contract for construction of a line providing through service in the city. By 1924, plans were underway for construction of the new Spanish-style Main Line depot on Capitol Boulevard. After the new Boise Depot opened in 1925, the Front Street station became an office building, and was later demolished after World War II ended. During its relatively short lifespan, the old depot greatly contributed to the growth of Downtown Boise and the Mercantile District.

Recently, local developers and politicians have tried to overhaul public transportation to revitalize the Downtown area. In 2010, Boise Mayor Dave Bieter’s team applied for a $40 million federal TIGER (Transportation Investment Generating Economic Recovery) grant to bring a streetcar system back to the streets of Boise. The initial project would serve the lengths of Idaho and Main between First and Fifteenth Streets. The grant would have allowed for the formation of a streetcar task force which would look at options for engineering and financing the project. The City Council would then choose how to implement those services and seek bidders for the project. In addition, they would have looked at the possibility of a local improvement district in the area. The plan called for completely free service for riders, and an eventual expansion to other areas of the city. If grant money had been received, additional funding would have come from the City of Boise, its urban renewal district, and property owners if a local improvement district formed.

The mayor’s team cited a decade’s worth of previous studies noting the potential economic benefits of a better transportation system within the downtown area. The system would then attach to a wider system reaching other parts of the city. The system would serve area employees during errands and lunch hours, tourists and city visitors, and those attending special events held downtown. A study completed by E.D. Hovee & Company estimated that the
streetcar system would bring $207 million in development around the loop and more than $8 million in tax revenue by 2030.\textsuperscript{24}

The TIGER program held $1.5 billion in funds, and received applications for $57.5 billion in projects, 1,338 grant applications in all.\textsuperscript{25} Although Dallas, New Orleans, Portland and Tucson’s streetcar projects received funding, Boise’s did not make the cut. In response, Mayor Bieter expressed his desire to keep the project alive. His team announced the project would be delayed for up to two years as they explored other options.\textsuperscript{26} In a March 2010 op-ed piece by Julie Fanselow published in the Statesman, she called for a better bus system rather than a return of the streetcar. She noted Valley Ride’s funding handicaps, but argued that buses running during weekday evenings and Sundays, making more frequent trips and stops during all hours of operation, and serving neighboring cities like Eagle, Kuna and Meridian, would bring more people to the downtown core than a looping streetcar system would.\textsuperscript{27}

While the streetcar proposal never materialized, the city and local developers continue to look into options for building a transit center downtown. A transit center would coordinate buses and shuttles, as well as taxi, van pools, and car and bike sharing programs. Like the original streetcar system and the Oregon Short Line, it seems the potential center could be built near the 1000 block. The Valley Regional Transit has been stalled at the starting point in looking for a potential developer for the plan for years. For over six years, the transit center has failed to leave the drawing board as six different proposals were shot down by neighbors disagreeing with the project. Tom Schultz, Idaho Department of Lands director, rejected a proposal to build the center on a piece of land at Eighth and Jefferson Streets owned by his department.\textsuperscript{28} Two proposals put forth in 2009, suggested locations near the Mercantile District; one at Eleventh and Idaho, the other between Tenth and Bannock on Main.\textsuperscript{29} In March 2009, over 300 people attended an open
house held at the Owyhee Plaza Hotel. Rene Iwamasa, co-owner of the Gem Noble Building’s Zen Bento restaurant, remarked that the project has turned into a “glorified bus stop.” Another citizen concluded that the project would simply relocate downtown bus shelters. Four people polled said they’d be happy with any new transit center, though. Neither plan received universal support, and the Tenth Street proposal was denied entirely. City officials put the Eleventh Street plan through to keep federal funding for the project secure, yet still hoped for a better proposal to come forward. The site’s property owner never voiced support for the project, and it never gained traction. In August 2013, Tommy Ahlquist of the Gardner Company (developers of the new Eighth and Main building) announced that they were looking into building the transit center in the U.S. Bank tower’s basement.
STANDING STRUCTURES WITHIN THE MERCANTILE DISTRICT

MERCANTILE DISTRICT MAP
THE 1000 BLOCK OF BOISE’S WEST MAIN STREET

1. IDANHA HOTEL
The Idanha Hotel building stands at the northeast corner of Tenth and Main Streets. Previously, the First Presbyterian Church occupied the corner. The church was constructed in 1878, and cost about $4,000 to build. The white brick building which housed the First Presbyterian Church featured only one room with doors at the rear and the front. The choir loft and pulpit were only two steps higher than the rest of the congregation. The steeple of the church never received a bell. The small church could only seat one hundred people. In 1893, at the end of the pastorate of the church’s pastor, Dr. Barton, the First Presbyterian Church closed. It moved to the corner of Ninth and State Streets, in a new church building designed by architects J.E. Tourtellote and C.B. Little.\(^{36}\)

Architect W.S. Campbell designed the Idanha Hotel after traveling across the country between New York City and Boise to look at the nation’s modern hotels. He included the best features of the hotels he visited in his plans for the Idanha.\(^{37}\) The meaning of the hotel’s name has been debated. Some say it comes from a Native American word that means “healing waters,” while others insist that “Idanha” is derived from an English word meaning “bubbling waters.” While performing at the nearby Pinney Theater in 1927, satirist and entertainer Will Rogers commented on the hotel’s name. He dubbed the Idanha and the Owyhee the two laughing hotels of Boise, the “Idanha-ha-ha and the Owyhee-hee.”\(^{38}\)

Main Street’s Idanha became Idaho’s second Idanha Hotel. In 1887, Ogden, Utah’s Natural Mineral Water Company constructed a hotel of the same name in Soda Springs for Union Pacific Railroad travelers to dine at. The Soda Springs hotel also featured European-influenced interiors and turrets adorning its exterior. The Idanha in Soda Springs later became an apartment building and was razed after a devastating 1921 fire.\(^{39}\) The hotel had been known for its mineral water, served to guests plentifully and known for its healing qualities whether cooked
with, bathed in, or used to treat alcoholism.\textsuperscript{40}

When plans for the Main Street Idanha Hotel were unveiled in 1899, an \textit{Idaho Statesman} reporter remarked that, “the plans disclose more of sturdiness than beauty of design.”\textsuperscript{41} The architectural style of the Idanha is French Renaissance Revival, or “Cheateau style.” Many American and Canadian hotels of the time boasted a similar style.\textsuperscript{42} The Idanha was designed primarily for two types of visitors: tourists and commercial travelers. Commercial travelers became more common in the area as Boise blossomed into a larger city. Developers hoped to attract more tourists to the city by keeping their needs in mind.\textsuperscript{43}

Construction began in February 1900, and the hotel opened its bar on January 1st, 1901. The hotel itself opened to the public on the following Thursday, January 3rd. Its construction cost $125,000, making it the most expensive structure ever built at the time.\textsuperscript{44} The six-story building features a raised basement. Originally, the basement housed a liquor store, billiards tables and a barber shop. The public and press admired the Idanha’s electric elevator, built by the Otis Elevator Company and powered by a 15-horse motor. The machinery operating the elevator was located in the basement and surrounded by glass so that visitors could see how the elevator worked.\textsuperscript{45} The basement also housed a pharmacy, which many called the “finest anywhere.”\textsuperscript{46} The pharmacy served drinks and snacks, with names like the “Idan-ha Cooler” and the “We We Sundae.”\textsuperscript{47}

The Idanha’s construction spelled doom for the nearby 1864 Overland Hotel at Eighth and Main. That corner had served as the location of Overland Station and the B.B. Rudell and Company, a station for the prominent Overland Mail stage line, which connected California, Utah and Oregon with the Idaho Territory. The Overland Hotel hosted impressive parties, banquets and live entertainment.\textsuperscript{48} Due to its renowned reputation and its stage-side location,
territorial governors often stayed at the Overland, among many other prominent guests. Idaho lore states that most everyone who traveled through or resided in the territory during the Overland’s lifespan checked in for at least a night. Competition from the nearby Central Hotel brought renovations to the Overland in the 1870s, and while future owners would continue upkeep, wear and tear along with damage caused by horses and buggies caused the hotel to age greatly by the 1890s. By the turn of the century, new technology and hotel features made the Overland seem outdated and it closed in 1904, just a few years after the Idanha opened. After a June 29, 1904 celebration for the Overland, the Eastman Brothers (then owners of the building) razed it and built the Eastman Building on that block.

Before the Overland closed its doors, its staff engaged in at least one form of competition with the Idanha Hotel. Idanha bellhop Ira King declared his intentions to travel to Buffalo on a tandem bicycle with his friend Ray Pendleton on twenty-five day trip. Overland employee Len Anthony announced he would race King and Pendleton to Buffalo on another tandem bicycle. Originally without a partner, Anthony finally recruited Idanha employee John Dial. Both parties attempted the trek and then quit the contest in Wyoming.

Guests entered the first floor of the Idanha by walking up a marble staircase and through a doorway with a stone arch above it. The first floor featured terrazzo floor and walls finished with oak and marble. The first floor housed the bar along with the Golden Rule Store, office and dining room with a brick fireplace and plate glass windows, while the second floor featured a parlor and banquet room. Men drank in the bar room while women used the parlor, which they accessed via an alternate stairway. The hotel staff occupied the sixth floor of the hotel. The second floor also featured a “senatorial suite,” which included four rooms and a balcony. According to Boise historian Arthur Hart, “the shaft from the bar passes through this room, so
there will be no danger of drought in case the political subject is a dry one.”

Some of the hotel’s furnishings had belonged to American businessman John Jacob Astor.

When it opened, the Idanha featured 140 rooms. All but three rooms in the entire hotel included windows to the outside. Each of the rooms in the hotel were connected to a bell system known as “the enunciator.” The bells in all 140 rooms reached the enunciator and allowed guests to ask for room service or times for train arrivals.

From 1908 to 1913, Charles H. Grout managed the Idanha and became well-known by travelers for his skills as a manager. Through his work he earned the nickname, “the man who has the hotel history of Idaho in his hand.” In 1910, Grout hosted a dinner party the day after Christmas featuring oyster cocktail, duck suckling pig and crab salad, along with appetizers and fresh tomatoes. Grout’s popularity made the Idanha’s grill room one of the top restaurants and meeting places in the West. It had been said of Grout’s Idanha dinner parties that, “an invitation to a private dinner there is almost equivalent to an acceptance.” Before his stint as manager of the Idanha, Grout managed the Oregon Short Line dining cars, and worked in Denver as a restaurateur.

The hotel was known for the crowds that often gathered nearby and the political events that took place within the hotel walls. The Idanha hosted the conferences where legislatures decided the Idaho Territory would become a state. In 1907, Senator William Borah was acquitted of timber fraud charges. Afterward, he spoke to a street audience from an Idanha balcony on Main Street. In 1918, Armistice Day crowds burned the German kaiser in effigy while wearing protective masks to guard them from Spanish Flu. In 1919 during the Prohibition era, authorities arrested Boise’s public building committee chairman for serving moonshine in his suite. After threatening to stall a bill to add a new wing to the Statehouse, the
One event in particular cemented the Idanha Hotel and Mercantile District’s place in Idaho history. The hotel became the center of the activity surrounding a trial that received nationwide attention - the trial of “Big Bill” Haywood after the assassination of former Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg. Paid killer Harry Orchard rented a room at the Idanha Hotel in 1905 after learning that Steunenberg had checked in there. Orchard had gone by several names, including Tom S. Hogan, Albert Horsley and John Dempsey. He sold insurance and bought livestock under his aliases. He attempted to use his livestock career to sell meat and gain access to Governor Steunenberg, although his plan was not successful. During his stay at the Idanha, Orchard befriended a chambermaid and memorized the Governor’s schedule. He carried out a plan to kill Steunenberg using a bomb he crafted and placed under his bed. He disconnected the bomb before it exploded out of fear it might kill the chambermaid.

In December 1905, Orchard continued stalking Steunenberg around his Caldwell home. He attached a bomb to his gate and rigged so that opening the gate would trigger it. The bomb killed the former Governor and police arrested Orchard in early January 1906. Orchard confessed his guilt to lawyer James McParland. Then Governor Frank R. Gooding, who had been staying at the Idanha at the time, promptly sent officers to the scene. He offered a sizeable reward for the apprehension of those responsible for the murder. Authorities brought William “Big Bill” Haywood, Charles Moyer and George Pettibone, leaders of the Western Federation of Miners, to Idaho from Colorado under murder charges. The Idanha became the center of the media frenzy as journalists, detectives, lawyers and curious onlookers crowded the hotel. Judge Fremont Wood presided over the trial. The trial’s jurors stayed at the Konrad House at Sixth and State so as not to be exposed to the commotion around the Idanha.
The trial brought ample amounts of press and attention to Boise - a new experience defined by conflicting feelings of the glamour of the spotlight and worry that other leaders might be targeted by the Western Federation of Miners. The trial also shed a spotlight on the city’s economic prosperity and regional growth. Portland and Salt Lake City business executives toured Boise’s local attractions as the Commercial Club attempted to lure their additional interest to the area. While the businessmen from Portland and Salt Lake City attempted to outshine one another, Boise kept favorable relationships with both factions while enjoying the attention. During the trial, Nebraska Governor George Sheldon and a large group of Omaha businessmen traveled to Boise to express goodwill and spend time at the courthouse viewing the trial proceedings. Brooklyn pastor Hewell Dwight Hills also made his way to the city at the time to witness the action and preach about crime to Boise citizens.

Perhaps the most influential player in the trial was Clarence Darrow, famed Chicago defense lawyer, known for his steadfast support of laborers. The exact amount of time he spent at the Idanha is unknown as he spent time at a different boardinghouse to be away from the uproar surrounding the events of the trial. He received medical attention for an ear abscess that almost forced him to withdraw from the case.

Harry Orchard’s confessions became a main focus of attention during the proceedings. In addition to Steunenberg’s assassination, he confessed to several other killings connected to the mining federation. The press ran with Orchard’s guilt, publishing wild stories of Orchard escaping custody during the trial and planting explosives around the Capitol. In addition, tales spread about miners teaming up with Boise Chinese to lay dynamite in secret, non-existent tunnels under Downtown Boise. During his subsequent prison term, Orchard raised chickens and grew strawberries, which were used in the kitchen of the Idanha until Orchard’s 1954
Many residents and guests claim the Idanha is haunted. In 1999, Idanha resident Perry Allen was quoted saying he believed the hotel was haunted by a woman’s ghost. At least one murder has been committed in the Idanha. During the mid-1970s, a drifter who had been staying in room 410 of the hotel shot and killed an 85 year-old former elevator operator and hotel resident after hearing noises coming from outside his room. After leaving the scene, the drifter killed himself. In June 1907, as the Haywood trial roared on, a man shot another man in the Idanha whom he accused of flirting with his wife. Caldwell civil engineer Henry Hedges shot contractor A.S. Whiteway in the presence of Hedges’ wife in room five of the hotel. The case stole brief attention away from the Haywood trial.

While other hotels operated within walking distance of the Idanha when it opened its doors, including the Overland, the Capitol on Main Street and the International on Grove, as well as other boardinghouses and flophouses, the Idanha quickly earned a reputation as the preferred hotel destination for Boise’s powerful and wealthy. In a 1980 Idanha publication titled *Meet Me at the Idanha*, the hotel management stated that they did not hold any political preferences. Republican and Democratic politicians were more than welcome to stay at the Idanha. Famous Idanha guests included Presidents William Howard Taft and Theodore Roosevelt, politician William Jennings Bryan, veteran and showman “Buffalo Bill” Cody, and entertainers such as Diahann Carroll, Jimmy Stewart, Martin Landau, Ruth Buzzi, Clint Eastwood and Scatman Crothers. Other notable visitors included Sally Rand, an exotic dancer, or “fan-dancer” who stayed at the hotel in the 1970s well after her time as a dancer, as she toured the club circuit entertaining listeners with stories of her former career. Actress Ethel Barrymore also stayed at the Idanha during the trial of “Big Bill” Haywood to view the proceedings. She
accompanied prosecuting attorney William Borah to Boise, and she told the press that Harry stated that Orchard reminded her of a “respectable grocer.” She complimented his appearance and demeanor, and spoke highly of his honesty in answering questions.

In May 1907, a well-known local character nicknamed “Hogan the Stiff” who drifted in and out of local bars and the county jail stopped in front of a store next to the Idanha. He yelled at a phonograph playing music inside. He disagreed with the “noises” coming from the machine, When the music would not stop, he threw a brick from the alley behind the Idanha through the window, breaking the phonograph and stopping its sounds. After spending a few days in jail and paying a small fine (donated by unnamed locals who echoed his sentiments toward the era’s popular music), he returned to the streets.

On September 9, 1951, a major fire nearly destroyed the Sonna Building next to the Idanha. The hotel escaped major damage from the fire, although smoke and fumes did penetrate the building’s walls and the second-floor annex rafters caught fire. Because the Idanha was the first Idaho hotel to have a sprinkler system, the fire did not spread any further. Then owner Thomas McMilan used the hotel’s insurance to have the annex ceilings lowered and air-conditioning put in. Previously, in 1905, the Aetna Fire Appliance company held a demonstration in front of the Idanha Hotel, lighting a fire on the street and quickly putting it out using one of their new Aetna Dry Chemical Machines. The company built a wall on the corner of Main in front of the hotel using dry pine boards, turpentine, tar and coal oil. Upon being lit, flames burst twenty feet high, and the fire was quickly extinguished using the new product. Next, the demonstrators used a match to engulf a man wearing a coat doused in gasoline in flames, and put the fire out immediately afterward. The consistently busy atmosphere of the 1000 block of attracted visitors, travelers and residents alike to the area.
In 1974, the Idanha Hotel was named to the National Register of Historic Places. This action mandated that public hearings be held if the building became threatened by federally funded development. Boise Redevelopment Agency assistant director Jim Koelsch discussed the possibility of turning the hotel into a retirement home. In October 1974, the Boise Redevelopment Agency instead voted to begin negotiations needed to purchase the Idanha and demolish it. In 1975, Idanha owners Broadbent Development Co. saved the Idanha and other nearby buildings from being purchased and torn down by the Boise Redevelopment Agency. The Broadbent Company succeeded in making the area ineligible for federal funding purchases so the Boise Redevelopment Agency could no longer buy the structures. In order to make the area ineligible, the company agreed to refurbish the buildings. Because renovation of the Idanha was deemed “economically unfeasible” according to a study of the building’s structure, the company would carry on its then current maintenance plan.

In 1977, the Broadbent Development Company announced that it had sold the Idanha Hotel to Boise firm White-Savage Associates. Their agreement stipulated that the hotel be restored “as nearly as possible to the hotel’s original appearance, since it is included on the National Historical Registry.” Their agreement also included requirements for the refurbishments to meet Boise Redevelopment Agency standards, as well as the wishes of the Broadbent Company for the building’s future. The Broadbent Company sold the Idanha as part of a strategic move to decrease their lodging properties and focus more on office spaces. White-Savage specialized in restoration and had previously worked on the Belgravia Building in Boise. They planned to keep the hotel in business while renovating it. The firm hired the local Wright-Leasure Company to manage the property and lease out the hotel’s retail space.

White-Savage associate and Idanha Properties manager Calvin Jensen committed to
restoring the hotel to the former of its early 1900s heyday. In a 1977 interview with The Idaho Statesman during its renovation, he stated that, “We are turning this into a terribly elegant hotel that we think is going to be the nicest little hotel in the Northwest.” Jensen’s vision for the renewed Idanha included limousine service between the hotel and the Boise Airport, valet services for automobile travelers, dry cleaning, and room service from the renovated hotel restaurant, then called Peter Schott’s Continental Restaurant. Jensen insisted that less expensive hotels such as Motel 6 were popular during the Vietnam War era due to their affordability. He argued that the modern public now demanded more space for their families and more comfortable accommodations. Jensen enlisted Samuel Lopata, a French designer known for his work on the New York City Premiere restaurant, as well as the home of entertainer Barbra Streisand, to recreate the turn-of-the-century atmosphere of the building. Jensen believed the renovations resembled what the hotel would have looked like when it first opened in 1901 if they had a larger budget at its inception. The additions to the Idanha included exterior window awnings like the ones the hotel featured in its original design, and a chandelier imported from New York’s Astor Hotel. By 1978 the hotel had 104 rooms. The restoration plans called for all rooms to close by early 1979 and revert to a floor plan featuring 72 larger rooms along with twelve suites. By 1979, the hotel would feature thirteen rooms for hotel guests, and ninety rooms repurposed as apartments.

Peter Schott, a chef born in Austria who had served as executive chef for Sun Valley’s Duchin room restaurant, opened the Continental Restaurant in 1978 after completion of the hotel’s first floor renovation. It soon became a hotspot for Boise dining and music lovers, as jazz pianist Gene Harris frequently played in the restaurant and lounge. Schott shared Calvin Jensen’s ideals to recapture the spirit and atmosphere of the Grout-era Idanha Restaurant. The new
restaurant menu featured Austrian dishes including Wiener Schnitzel and the veal dish Pfifferling Rahmschnitzel, as well as breakfast and dessert specialties. In addition, Schott served more mainstream dishes including crab legs, chicken with mustard sauce, spinach salad, and apricot crepes.

A newly remodeled showroom reopened in late 1979, and the owners held a public open house event on December 2nd. Many guests frequented Peter Schott’s restaurant to eat and listen to the live music, but room reservations had dwindled. The open house served to remind visitors that people could stay the night at the hotel, too. Many former area hotel employees gathered at the open house to reminisce about Boise’s past as a frequent stopping point for travelers. The owners believed the 1970s renovation work caused many to forget about the Idanha’s rich history, or that it even existed. At the open house event, Julie Stromberg, the public relations director for the Idanha at the time, stated that, “A man walked up to me today and asked me, ‘What is this place?’ People don’t understand this is a hotel.”

By 1980, the Airport limousine service opened, and guests could be transported in a 1948 Packard Limo or a 1935 Rolls Royce automobile, estimated to be worth about $35,000. However, the 1979 overhaul had never been completed. For a few years the hotel lingered in a transitional state with only half of the room renovations finished.

In 1983, Idanha Properties began working with Fernando Bensuaki, a financial consultant, and Jerry D. Smith, an investor from California, to remodel the Idanha once again. They planned to close the hotel, which had not been fully closed since its 1901 opening, in April 1983. It would reopen in November of that year as a lavish hotel, catering to executives and visitors seeking a romantic, luxurious weekend away. Bensuaki planned to “have the highest-priced rooms in Boise and offer the service to justify the price.” He added, “We believe we can
make a lot of money in this deal. I’m not here to save Boise’s architecture.” The new partnership hoped to raise $2.3 million for the project by selling $5,000 shares in the Idanha Partners II, Ltd. group. These partnerships would account for $1.1 million of the money needed, while the other $1.25 would be borrowed from local banks. In September 1983, Wright-Leasure spokesman Jim White announced that the deal with Benusaki had fallen through as the partnership could not raise the needed money.

During the late 1990s, the Heaven On Earth Instructional Corp., part of the Transcendental Meditation Group owned by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, purchased the building to operate a learning institute. Due to the Idanha’s status as a historic landmark, the Yogi’s plans to construct an eastern entrance to the building in accordance to his beliefs could not be enacted, and the building was put back up for sale in 1998. In the meantime, the hotel became a haven for local artists, many of whom rented out rooms in the building for studio space. Perry Allen operated the Basement Gallery in the hotel basement from 1998 to 2009.

In 2000, developer Ken Howell purchased the Idanha and planned to turn the building into an apartment complex. The hotel rooms would be transformed into apartments of differing sizes. His investments included major repairs to the leaking, drooping roof. In January 2001, the new owners began showcasing the apartments to potential lessees. The newly remodeled building now featured 53 apartments, and the waiting list totaled forty people by the beginning of 2001. Ken Howell gave the city of Boise ownership of the Idanha Building’s exterior, and he received a tax break in return. This trade allowed for secured preservation of the façade. By February, tenants started moving into the new Idanha Apartments.

Through the frequent changes in building ownership, Peter Schott’s restaurant remained open. The lounge eventually became Schott’s BarTime. In 2004, BarTime began hosting
nighttime events called Lips at BarTime featuring lively music and bikini contests. Many objected to the Lips festivities, claiming the bar did not positively represent the historic hotel. That year Peter Schott retired after 26 years in the Idanha, and his restaurant became Borton’s Steak, Seafood and Spirits under new ownership. Borton’s and Lips remained open until 2006 when La Vie en Rose a new restaurant, replaced both. The French-influenced café specialized in European dishes and baked goods. La Vie en Rose closed in January 2011, and was replaced in September 2013 by Ketchum-based bakery Rolling in Dough’s new Boise location. Today, the Idanha Hotel stands as a reminder to residents and visitors of the city’s rich history of hosting travelers during their stops and welcoming people to Downtown Boise.

2. GEM NOBLE BUILDING

J.E. Tourtellotte and Company designed and constructed the 1902 Gem Block, which
occupies the northwest corner of Tenth and Main across from the Idanha. The Gem Building encompasses the original corner Gem Block and the next-door Gibbons and Knights Block on Tenth Street. The building features storefront space on the first floor, with a second floor originally designed for offices and a basement for storage. After purchasing the Gibbons and Knights building in 1910, Sigmund Falk developed plans with J.E. Tourtellotte to build additional floors on the block, but the plans never materialized.116 Some believe the Gem housed first pharmacy in Idaho.117 The Joy Drug Company opened one of five Boise stores at the location in 1906. Through different incarnations, the store became the McMahon Drug Store and later the Ford Drug Store. In 1925, the store hired pharmacist Lois Brook, becoming Boise’s only woman druggist at the time. McMahon’s became a popular lunch spot and meeting place, serving hot food in addition to ice cream at the fountain.118 The drug store occupied the corner storefront until the 1990s when their pharmacy rights were purchased by Albertsons and the store became Ford’s Market.119

Next to the Gem Building on Main, J.E. Tourtellotte designed the 1902 Noble Building for John Noble with the aesthetics of the Gem and Gibbons and Knights Blocks in mind to make the three buildings visually compatible.120 Costing over $18,000 to build, Tourtellotte and Company hired Walker & Jensen to build the superstructure, Sullivan & Kavanagh for the masonry, Louis Kieldsen to lay the brick, Finnegan & McDonald to complete the required cement work.121 Because the Gem Block and the Noble Building were designed to match, they were often referred to together as the Gem Noble Building. Around 1914, civil engineers Harry Morrison and Morris Knudsen rented office space in the Noble Building at 1006½ Main Street. Then contractors, their services offered at the time included pipe lines, reinforced concrete, timber and steel fluming and pumping stations.122
In 2005, developer Gary Christensen announced a $2.5 million renovation for the Gem Building. His plan included construction of condominiums on the building’s second floor, and revamped retail space on the first floor. During the remodel, Christensen Ford’s Market moved to a new location a couple storefronts down, and Jay Hicks’ Zen Bento restaurant owned opened at the corner of Tenth and Main in the Gem Block. Christensen chose not to rely on pre-sales of condos to finance the project. He opted to fund the early stage of the project on his own and use the completed condominiums to show potential buyers and gather feedback. Christensen estimated that the project would be completed in early 2006.123

In February 2008, Gary Christensen filed for Chapter 11 Bankruptcy on the Gem Noble renovation project. The filing occurred one day before foreclosure and auction of the property to pay creditors including TorryMcAlvain’s McAlvain Construction Company. McAlvain had completed $1.4 million in work on the Gem Noble Building and then sued Christensen for the money owed to them.124 By March 2008, construction on the building had been completely halted.125 In December 2008, construction resumed as Homeland Realty’s Urban Concepts Group took over marketing of the condominiums. First-floor retailers prepared to start moving in.126 Crews completed the Gem Noble remodel by Summer 2009, and in early 2010, sales for the $200,000 to $350,000 condo units had begun.127 In addition to Zen Bento, other retailers have moved into the newly remodeled building, including ice cream parlor Ben & Jerry’s, which began serving Gem Noble Block customers in April 2009.128 Today, the mixed-use Gem Noble Block, consisting of three historic structures (the Gem, Gibbons and Knights, and Noble Buildings) stands as a reminder of the bustling business atmosphere that characterized Main’s 1000 block.
3. TINER BUILDING

Wayland and Fennell constructed the Tiner Building at 101 Main Street in 1910 after a
fire destroyed the original two-story 1902 Tiner Building. Construction crews dug beneath the basement to insert stronger support systems for the new four-story structure. It is sometimes referred to as the “Averyl” Building, because the word “AVERYL” was carved into the building’s façade during its reconstruction. After completion of the new Tiner Building, new tenants included the Manitou Hotel on the second, third and fourth floors, and the New Boz Theater, which many heralded as the “largest and best moving picture theater in the world.” A 1910 postcard featuring an image of the theater called it “Boise’s Most Popular Place of Amusement.” The New Boz Theater lived on through different incarnations. It was later renamed the Strand Theater, and then the Granada in 1930. The theater remained open until the 1950s when the Bazaar expanded into the space. Later, the Blues Bouquet, a classic Boise blues bar, relocated to the theater space. Blues Bouquet owner Al Berro moved his bar to its new 1000 block location and welcomed popular music acts including the Robert Cray Band and Bonnie Raitt.

The Bouquet moved down Main Street in 1975 from its original location before its former building succumbed to the urban renewal process. The turn of the century Brunswick Bar inside the Bouquet moved along with the business, and it received a refurbishment at the time. The bar had been built across the country on the East Coast, and then resided in the old Overland Hotel. After the Overland closed in 1904, the bar moved into the original Bouquet location. Berro planned for the new Blues Bouquet’s exterior to resemble an “old storefront,” with its redwood paneling, canopies and stained glass windows.

After a 2008 purchase by Tyson Twilegar, the Bouquet faded from the Boise consciousness. In 2011, lenders posted a “Notice of Trustee’s Sale” sign had been on the closed club’s door, and Twilegar insisted that he would pay his financiers before the property went to
public auction. The bar did not reopen and it became available for purchase. A 2012 deal involving new ownership under a local entertainment group did not materialize. Events were planned for Halloween 2012 and Valentine’s Day 2013, neither of which occurred. New manager Nathan Gorringe planned to attract differing audiences to the newly renamed Ice Bouquet with a sports bar atmosphere featuring television screens and cheap beer near the entrance and a dance floor and DJ booth toward the back. The club reopened in May 2013 as the Ice Bouquet after several false promises of doing so. Advertising for the reopening party promised live entertainment including “the beautiful art of pole dancing.” After it finally reopened, Gorringe (also manager of local Rockies Diner for many years) said, “This is something I’ve wanted to do my whole life.” He added, “We haven’t forgotten our past. We even kept it in the name- it’s really important that the Bouquet has stayed a part of what we’re doing.”

4. ALASKA BUILDING

J.E. Tourtellotte and Company designed the 1906 Alaska Building for John P. Tate. The
building originally contained two floors, and two additional floors were added in 1911. When it opened, the Renaissance style building housed Link’s Business College as well as merchants Blake and Reilly, who later changed their store’s name to the Cash Bazaar which occupied the rest of the Alaska Building by 1922.\textsuperscript{140}

Bazaar owners Eugene Reilly, John Blake and Tom Blake initially rented out a 20-foot wide space in the Alaska Building for the Blake and Reilly store. John and Tom Blake dropped their ownership in 1913, and Thomas N. Nelson became Eugene Reilly’s new business partner. Mrs. Mabel Nelson gained partial ownership in 1925 in Reilly’s place. The Nelsons operated the store until 1929 when they sold it to H.T. Bigham and W.E. Graham. Graham and Bigham founded a second branch of the store in Meridian. Known as “Boise’s Friendly Store,” the Cash Bazaar expanded throughout the rest of the Alaska Building between 1915 and 1948. In 1945, Bigham and Graham sold the store to C.M. Newhouse and Ralph Raber.\textsuperscript{141} The new store owners completed a major renovation of the building’s interior and first-floor exterior in 1953.\textsuperscript{142} They shortened the store’s name to The Bazaar in 1963. In a December 30, 1981 interview with \textit{The Idaho Statesman}, Christine Tatro, whose family worked at the Cash Bazaar, recalled that the store appealed to “middle and lower-income shoppers,” while “The Mode and Falks were always the more elite stores, I think that (The Bazaar) catered to the farm trade.”\textsuperscript{143}

After business dwindled, the Cash Bazaar closed in December 1981. Although many had heard the store would be closing, C.M. Newhouse confirmed that the Bazaar’s board of directors did not reach their decision until a few days before the formal closing on Christmas Eve. The company had considered moving to a new location or staying open until June 30th when their lease expired. In the two years before the store closed, the downtown location lost money. In their last year of business, the downtown Bazaar downsized its staff from twenty-five
people to only eight. After closing, the owners briefly used the space as a warehouse. In 1983, Ken Howell’s Parklane Development Co. purchased the Alaska Building to convert it from a department store to an office complex. Howell’s $3 million plan called for a “skywell” in the center of the building, featuring an atrium, a skylight using stained glass, and a new glass elevator. The upper floors would be devoted to office use, while the ground floor, basement and mezzanine would feature space for retailers. The project moved ahead after passage of the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981, which gave investors in historical preservation projects tax incentives. While the remodel completely altered the Alaska Building’s interior, the exterior features were restored to their original 1906 state. The newly remodeled Alaska Center opened to the public on April 27, 1984. New occupants of the Alaska Center soon included Global Travel and Swanson Investments, lead by Steve Swanson who co-developed the building with Howell. In Fall 2010, Boise State University joined current tenant Boise Community Radio, as it opened the Center on Main in the Alaska Building’s storefront space. Melissa Lavitt, Dean of the College of Social Sciences and Public Affairs, envisioned the space as a “front door” to the university, and Karen Sander, Downtown Boise Association executive director, stated that it “furthers the connection between Downtown and Boise State. It’s great, and we want that.” Ken Howell’s Parklane Management even offered the university a $25,000 rent discount per year. The space had been vacant for two years, and Howell hoped Boise State would use the space forever. The university brought major tenant improvements to the classrooms, and the SSPA college held classes and hosted special events and art and photography exhibitions there. Boise State Center for Idaho History and Politics director Todd Shallat planned the space for “place-based education,” using the 1000 Block’s streetscape as a lab for putting ideas into
After nearly two years, the Center on Main closed in 2013, as Boise State prepared to move into a larger facility on Capitol Boulevard. Boise Community Radio still broadcasts from the Alaska Building’s second floor, above the now empty storefront.

5. BECKWITH BUILDING

The Beckwith Building, which houses Hannifins Cigar, stands down the street from the
Idanha Hotel at the northeast corner of Main and Eleventh Streets. Architect J.E. Tourtelotte designed the building for St. Louis businessman H.H. Beckwith in 1897. The small brick building is comprised of three different storefronts, one of which (the Eleventh Street entrance) later became part of the Bazaar department store. Originally the Silver City Stage line used the building as a station for the Silver City Stage line.¹⁵⁰

Edmund Salmon owned Hannifins Cigar (first known as Edmund Salmon’s) when the store operated at its 1904 Eight Street location near the Hotel Boise. Salmon’s moved to its new Main Street location in 1909. At the time, barns and blacksmith shops still occupied the 1000 block. Boise residents, travelers and the stage lines comprised much of the store’s early business. From 1912 to 1914, the store served as a station for the stage to the Arrowrock Dam. Many workers on the project stayed overnight and stored building materials in the old Beckwith building during dam construction. John Hannifin said of that time period, “The back room was full of bedrolls belonging to men working on the dam.”¹⁵¹

In February 1921, John Hannifin, an employee of Edmund Salmon’s, purchased the store from him as Salmon’s health started to deteriorate.¹⁵² A wood burning stove which John Hannifin acquired from a former Ada County sheriff in 1909 served as a heat source for the building until the 1960s when Hannfins donated it to the Idaho Historical Society.¹⁵³ The stove also functioned as a humidifier.¹⁵⁴ Another stove replaced the original, and wood burning remains the main heat source for the building today.¹⁵⁵ Many famous people frequented Hannifin’s Cigar over the years, including Governors Chase Clark, C. Ben Ross and Charles Moore, Senator William Borah and attorney Clarence Darrow. Early Idaho Statesman publisher Calvin Cobb also visited the store frequently. Loyal customers called the store “Little Tammany,” a nickname derived from New York City’s Tammany Hall.¹⁵⁶ Local politicians often congregated in the store’s back
room to discuss campaign strategies. At one point the store sold around 125 different cigar brands, which they displayed in cases that surrounded the entire showroom. In the decades before his death in 1980, John Hannifin received help running the store from his brother Lawrence Hannifin. Lawrence worked at the store since 1919. Lawrence told John that it was the right time to enter the tobacco business when he purchased the store, as smoking had become increasingly popular, and many men in World War II had developed smoking habits. By the 1940s, Hannifins began stocking periodicals such as The Denver Post at the request of sheepherders and miners who wanted to complete more of their shopping in one place. In 1974, the walls of the shop still featured the original decorative cigarette ads. At one point, the store received a $500 offer for one of these pieces.

John Hannifin sold the store to his brother Lawrence in 1963. In 1968, Lawrence sold the store to Boise man Henry Renk, though he kept working there after the sale. In 1978, Vern Richards purchased the store from Renk. John Hannifin died in 1980 at the age of 86. The brick Beckwith Building still occupies the corner of Eleventh and Main Streets today, recalling the politicians and powerful businessmen who once frequented the 1000 block of Main Street.

6. LARSON BUILDING and SMITH BLOCK

Construction firm Avey and Avey built the Smith Block in 1905 for Roscoe W. Smith.
The two-story stone and brick building features a carving of the phrase, “SMITH BLOCK” in the center of the upper façade. Wayland and Fennell constructed the Larson Building next to the Smith Block. Landowner Robert Noble commissioned the building’s construction as a replacement for the wooden building that houses George W. Prout and Eli L. Larson’s Prout and Larson Grocery.163

7. OWYHEE HOTEL

The 1000 block of Main Street features two hotel buildings other than the Idanha: the
1910 Owyhee Hotel located at 1117 Main Street and the 1914 Grand Hotel, now the Safari Motor Inn. J.E. Tourtellotte and Company built the 1910 Owyhee Hotel with Chicago hotel expert R.T. Newberry. The six-story building represented a transition from Victorian architecture to a more modern, utilitarian Chicago style. When it opened, the Statesman called the Owyhee, “probably the finest hotel of its size in the country.”\(^{164}\) The publication also compared the buildings interiors to classic European cathedrals. Tourtellotte and Hummel’s plans called for 150 of the hotel’s 250 rooms to contain baths, which many considered luxurious at the time. The building’s exterior remained largely unchanged for many years other than new paint, while the lobby interior was completely overhauled in 1977.\(^{165}\) The Idaho State Historical Society inherited many of the original building fixtures during the remodel, including the lobby ceiling’s stained-glass dome.\(^{166}\)

The Owyhee Hotel opened with the Candlelite Room restaurant and lounge, where the Boise Rotary, Kiwanis and Lions Clubs held regular meetings for decades. Additionally, the restaurant hosted countless banquets and parties. The Candlelite Room closed in 1968 after Ore-Ida Foods purchased the space (along with two additional floors) for data processing. Former diners, employees and the press lamented the Room’s closing.\(^{167}\) Additionally, the hotel featured the Orange Room, known for its lush, orange interiors and fine china, and the Rose Grill, a women’s tea room. The rooftop garden featured cold (non-alcoholic) drinks, music and dancing under hanging lanterns. It became a popular destination for Boiseans during the prohibition era, offering an expansive view of the city.\(^{168}\)

Over the years, the Owyhee attracted local businessmen and politicians choosing to hold their meetings in the hotel. Senator Borah used the location as his headquarters in Boise.\(^{169}\) The Owyhee changed over time. By 1952 the Owyhee Drug Store had closed and a new, modern
marquee was placed on the side of the building that year. Around that time the hotel opened its Circus Room lounge, featuring live animals kept in air-conditioned cages and circus-themed décor.¹⁷⁰

In April 2013, Owyhee and Old Boise District owner Clay Carley (who purchased the hotel in 2012) ended the Owyhee’s hotel operations. A new development called for the conversion of the old hotel into an apartment and office complex called Owyhee Place. By 2012, the Owyhee Hotel’s occupancy rate had been around fifty percent, and Carley stated that anything less than a sixty-five percent occupancy usually leads to a financial loss. According to Carley, the aging, independent hotel could not compete against modern and chain hotels. Hotel jobs were eliminated and the project began in May 2013. The project will combine hotel rooms into apartments. Carley hopes to reopen the Owyhee’s historic rooftop garden as a new lounge.¹⁷¹

8. ROYAL PLAZA

Longtime Boise citizen Kay Hardy recalled that the Royal Restaurant was a “great place
to eat” when her family friend Vince Aguirre owned and ran it with his partner Ed Graves.\textsuperscript{172} Located across Main Street from the Owyhee, the restaurant closed in 1982. As late as March 2000, former Royal staff met monthly to reminisce about their time spent there. In a lunch interview with the \textit{Idaho Statesman}, the staff raved about the quality meats used, the grasshopper pie, spumoni and cheesecake that the restaurant served, and the $5.95 Fish-o-Rama seafood buffet featuring shrimp, salmon, crab and clams. Former Royal waitress Betty Archer declared, “You wouldn’t think so after all this time, but we still run into customers who say there’ll never be another Royal. How many restaurants have that kind of effect on people?”\textsuperscript{173} The Royal’s former employees also included Won Chang, who later owned Boise’s Korea House Restaurant. Chang came to Boise from Korea and became enamored with being a chef after working at the Royal.\textsuperscript{174}

The Royal Restaurant opened in 1941 in the 1904 Larsen Building. J.E. Tourtelotte designed the building as a two-story structure with a storefront on the ground floor and boarding rooms above. A third story was added in 1910. Originally a small, single room of dining booths, the Royal grew through several expansions in the 50s and 60s. By 1978, the restaurant could seat 250 people. The Larsen Building underwent a renovation in 1955 when developers converted the third level into apartment space. After former co-owner Aguirre died in a Boise plane crash, Graves sold the Royal Restaurant to an investment group which included Gamekeeper manager Vic Hauss. The group kept the name of the restaurant intact.\textsuperscript{175}

After the demolition of the neighboring Whipple, Larsen and Tate Buildings, the 1100 block was razed for parking. In 2001, developers R.S. Hosac, Inc. purchased the lot and planned construction of the Royal Plaza, named after the well-known former restaurant. Insistent that the removal of the parking spaces must be remedied, Larry May (then owner of the Owyhee Plaza
Hotel) and Bob Hosac of R.S. Hosac planned for the construction of a nearby parking garage on Grove Street. Building began in March 2005 on the six-story, $11 million Royal Plaza which targeted high-end buyers “willing to pay $300 per square foot.” It featured planned retail space on the ground floor and condominiums throughout the upper levels. By December 2005, Hosac told the *Idaho Statesman* that eleven of the upscale units had been reserved. According to Hosac, the changing atmosphere of Downtown Boise called for expanded opportunities for high-end living to complement high-end restaurants and stores. In March 2007, a small fire occurred during Royal Plaza construction, following a propane fire earlier that same year. Neither fire delayed construction.

Very few additional condominiums sold at the Royal Plaza by the time it opened in Summer 2007. By December 2009, over half of the twenty-six units remained unoccupied and Hosac did not sell a single unit in 2009. That month, Hosac’s Royal Plaza filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy. In April 2011, he prepared to auction the Royal condos off before his lender could hold a foreclosure sale. At the time Hosac stated, “We’re trying to move forward. It’s important to bring some kind of closure to the Royal Plaza.” Current Royal Plaza first-floor tenants include the ISR Capital investment group and Concierge Legacy Advisors.

9. **SAFARI MOTOR INN**

Architects Nisbet and Paradice constructed the Renaissance style Grand Hotel for Roscoe
W. Smith for $40,000 using molded concrete. In the 1960s, the Grand Hotel became the Safari Motor Inn. In the process, developers altered the exterior, installing a then modern brick façade, which the building still sports. In his description of the Safari in the National Register of Historic Places nomination form for the block, Richard Briggs stated that, “The historic fabric of the building survives beneath this new exterior.” In the form, he classifies the building as an intrusion. Current tenants of the Safari Motor Inn storefronts include the dv8 Salon, Radiate MediSpa and Nobody’s Hero Tattoo, along with a single, protective caged metal garage door over 1017 Main Street storefront, installed before 1980 when the location housed Jay’s Pawn Shop.

10. WILLIAM H. LANGROISE BUILDING

The Continental Life Building at Tenth and Main next to the Larson Building received its
current brick façade during a 1974 renovation project. It may have been the first structure made using reinforced concrete in Boise. It originally featured a courtyard surrounded by a U-shaped structure that resembled two towers from certain angles. By 1974, during the climax of Boise’s urban renewal projects, an *Idaho Statesman* article by Julie Monroe called it “an outdated, unaesthetic building.” Architect Jedd Jones of the firm Hummel, Hummel, Jones and Shawver, who completed the renovation project, stated that he did not intend for the remodeled building to look old or to mimic the modern look of the new One Capital Center Building across the street. Plans considered and rejected included a concrete façade, and a look Jones referred to as “Las Vegas Strip,” “all done in great white arches, with gold-colored screens over the windows.” They chose the red brick style as it was considered an “in” thing at the time, according to Jones, and the arches over the first-story windows and doors resemble San Francisco’s Ghirardelli Square.

The non-local influence called for red brick around all four of the building’s walls, and a metal roof and trim. Jones added that, “We put on the high metal roof to give the building a little more height and to hide all that ‘roof garbage’ that buildings have on top.” Continental Life Insurance, which had previously occupied the Yates Building and Ninth and Main, took over ownership of the building from Boise Cascade and then commissioned the project, which included extensive interior alterations as well. They never considered destroying the building entirely. Jones stated that, “I think it was the first reinforced concrete building in Boise… It is structurally good.” Considered an intrusion, Richard Briggs left the block completely out of the 1980 nomination for the National Register of Historic Places. It has not undergone any significant changes since it received its brick façade in 1974. In *Home from Nowhere*, James Howard Kunstler lamented the disappearance of unique building features in favor of modern, in
favor of modern, plan exteriors. He wrote, “The blank brick wall – a very common feature in American towns – conveys many messages. It says, *The street has no meaning, and you, Mr. Pedestrian, are a meaningless cipher.*” He added that a plain, uninteresting building design does not allow people to become interested in what goes on inside or outside it. Coincidentally, the building’s brick storefront currently sits unoccupied, adorned with the leasing agent’s contact information. It now features a plaque re-naming the building the William H. Langroise Building. Langroise had been chief executive officer of Boise-based Continental Life and Accident Co., in addition to advising entrepreneurs Joe Albertson and J.R. Simplot, and becoming involved in the growth of Boise State University.

11. ONE CAPITAL CENTER

One Capital Center occupies another corner of Tenth and Main, directly across Main
Street from the Idanha Hotel. Its large outdoor plaza became the original home of the Idaho Shakespeare Festival in 1977, when the company performed eight showings of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” Doug and Skip Oppenheimer started the Festival that year and contributed its first-year budget of $3,500. Completed in 1975, One Capital Center became one of the first outcomes of the city’s urban renewal process, after the barbershops, empty storefronts and bars occupying the block along Main Street between Ninth and Tenth were leveled. Developers of the tower, called One Capital Center, sought to usher in a new age and style to a downtown that many believed needed a major redesign. Doug and Skip’s company, the Oppenheimer Corp., commissioned the architects of the Space Needle, Seattle’s John Graham and Co., to build it. In a 2006 interview with Charles Hummel, he named it among his top five Boise buildings. He called it “an honest design expression with its beautiful east end that’s like a park,” and he added, “It’s just a real gift to the city.” Since its opening in 1975, the Simplot Company has operated in a large portion of One Capital Center, which currently houses its main headquarters.

Angell’s Bar and Grill has occupied the ground floor of One Capital Center since 1981, offering a menu of items called “New American” upon the restaurant’s opening, and “retro” in 1999. Curt Knipe, who owned Angell’s in 1999, planned to update the institution’s menu at the time. He stated, “We’ve been here 27 years, and we’re ready for a change.” In January 2013, Bob and Mickey Angell decided to close the restaurant after thirty-two years, citing their inability to locate a buyer. Finally, Russell Dawe purchased it and reopened in July 2013 under the new name Angell’s Renato (“Renato” being Italian for “reborn”). With a new menu and a new name, Angell’s lends a needed component of consistency to the Mercantile District.

While the 1000 block of Main Street presents a singular snapshot of Boise’s past, the area expands to form a larger area dubbed the “Mercantile District,” a take on the earlier...
nickname, the Lower Main Street Commercial Historic District. Current structures of note and away from the 1000 block include the 1908 El Korah Temple at Twelfth and Idaho Streets, the Hitchcock Building at Idaho and Eleventh, the Empire and U.S. Bank Buildings on Idaho between Tenth and Eleventh, and the giant 1971 Boise Plaza two blocks away on Bannock and Eleventh Street. Because these structures do not currently reside in any other named Boise district, they have been incorporated into the Mercantile, and adding to the rich history of the 1000 block area.

GREATER MERCANTILE DISTRICT

12. EL KORAH TEMPLE
The El Korah Temple, originally occupied by Boise Hack & Transfer Co., was built in 1908 using local sandstone mined from Boise’s Table Rock Quarry. Before the building’s construction, a rundown livery stable occupied the corner. The El Korah Shriners took over the building in 1914 and added onto it in 1928. Since then, the group has given to the community and hosted community events in the temple including their annual Melodrama shows which help raise funds for Temple maintenance and upkeep. They hosted their fiftieth annual Melodrama in March 2013.

13. EMPIRE AND U.S. BANK BUILDINGS

Architects Nisbet and Paradice completed construction on the tall Empire Building at the
corner of Idaho and Eleventh Streets in 1910. In 1911, the Idaho Statesman reported that it “is reckoned by students of architecture as the handsomest building in the entire northwest.”

Nisbet and Paradice had previously built two buildings on the College of Idaho campus. Upon completion, the Empire Building featured an elevator serving its six levels. Benjamin Morgan Nisbet worked for Tourtellotte and Hummel’s company for five years before he started his own company. During his tenure with Tourtellotte and Hummel, he participated in construction of the State Capitol Building and St. John’s Cathedral on Eighth Street, among other projects. He spent many years building his practice in Twin Falls where he resided after 1914, becoming that city’s most prominent architect for a time. His partner, Canadian born Frank H. Paradice Jr., spent time working in Denver and Portland before he was hired by Tourtellotte and Hummel’s firm where he met Nesbit. The two built the Empire using Chicago-style features including classical columns and a Greek-inspired cornice. It was modeled after the iconic Wainwright Building in St. Louis, built by architects Dankmar Adler and Louis Sullivan. Sullivan once stated that tall buildings must be “every inch a proud and soaring thing.” The tall columns and pilasters of the Empire Building exaggerate its six-story height.

The Empire Building’s designers followed the traditional three-tiered structure of a column. The building’s first floor, representing the column’s base, featured a large entrance and space for retailers to occupy windowed storefronts. The middle portion, echoing the shaft of a column, included five levels of office space with uniform windows. The column’s capital can be seen in the building’s ornate cornice.

By 1919, the Empire’s owners had failed to attract enough tenants to keep the property afloat and they filed for bankruptcy. The First National Bank then purchased the building and contracted Tourtellotte and Hummel to build the neo-classical building next door, known today
as the U.S. Bank Building, in 1927.\textsuperscript{210}

In April 1999, the building received an extensive renovation under new owner and developer Jim Tomlinson’s Tomlinson & Associates to reinforce its structure and make it resistant to earthquakes and other natural forces. The firm outbid other potential owners in 1999 for ownership of both the Empire Building and the adjacent 1927 U.S. Bank Building. U.S. Bank sold both buildings to Tomlinson, who then leased the U.S. Bank Building back to the banking company, who still operates a branch there today. ZGA Architects and AHJ Engineers completed the Empire Building renovation project in February 2001. Tomlinson intended to lease the upper five floors as office space and the ground floor for retail purposes. The Empire had faced an uncertain future. WestOne Bank, a previous owner, had planned to tear it down in 1994, but their plan faced scrutiny from local historians and then Boise Mayor Brent Coles. U.S. Bank purchased the buildings from WestOne in 1995. When U.S. Bank merged with First Bank Systems a few years later, they decided to sell the property once again\textsuperscript{211}

Developer Ken Howell had been heavily involved in persuading WestOne to keep the property intact, and Jim Tomlinson credited both Howell and Mayor Coles with helping to keep it on the path toward restoration when he purchased it in 1999. Howell and his Parklane Company had intended to purchase the Empire Building, and he stated that he “wanted that building so badly.”\textsuperscript{212} The $2.4 million cost kept him from buying. “It was way disappointing to me, but I couldn’t justify the overall price,” Howell said.\textsuperscript{213} Tomlinson declared that, “we feel real fortunate we were able to tie it up.”\textsuperscript{30} Additionally, after completion of the project, Tomlinson sought to add the Empire Building to the National Register of Historic Places.\textsuperscript{214}

14. HITCHCOCK BUILDING

One of the district’s most prominent businesses, the Record Exchange, has operated
within the Hitchcock Building at Eleventh and Idaho since 1977. The store originally took up only a fraction of the building it currently uses. Since 1977, it has expanded nine times. The store contributes heavily to the activity around the 1000 Block of Main, hosting annual events in honor of National Record Store Day in April and concert performances by local and national touring musicians. In 2013, the Boise City Department of Arts & History named the Record Exchange one of Boise’s 150 icons during the city’s sesquicentennial celebration.215

Built in 1919, the Hitchcock Building became home to Oakley & Sons and Western Ignition and Battery Co. in 1921. The automotive and electric company used most of the building, while Starkey Electric Service occupied the addition where the Neurolux bar and concert venue now operates.216 Oakley & Sons became Oakley’s in 1947, and the corporation soon overlaid the building’s red brick exterior with white paint. Oakley Moody still keeps equipment from their 1921 location at their current Grove Street shop, a few blocks away from the 1000 Block of Main.217

The Record Exchange gave the Hitchcock Building, which also encompasses The Edge coffee shop and the Neurolux, an extensive and edgy makeover as several local artists collaborated with Fred Choate, the artist who had painted the building’s exterior since 1984. In honor of the then impending thirtieth anniversary of the Record Exchange in 2007, they gave the building the vibrant and “hip” makeover that it sports today.218

15. BOISE PLAZA

San Francisco architects Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, famed builders of the 1973 Sears
Tower (once the world’s tallest building) constructed the nearby Jefferson Street Boise Plaza in 1971. Boise Cascade has leased a majority of the Plaza’s space since its completion. The building was originally called the Boise Cascade Building; new owners, developers Rafanelli & Nahas, purchased the building in 2006 and renamed it. In 2010, they commissioned an art piece for the Plaza’s Bannock Street entrance titled “AquA” by Philadelphia artist Ray King. Featuring over 2,000 glass cubes that reflect light and change color, it became the biggest privately funded piece of public artwork in Boise. Rafanelli & Nahas also built a large parking garage across the street from the Plaza near the local Greyhound Bus Station.

MOVING FORWARD WITH THE MERCANTILE DISTRICT

There is interest in the 1000 block of Main Street and the Mercantile District, as the
CCDC has completed street improvements for the block and funded public artwork representing the area’s history. Local planner John Bertram declared his support for preserving the block. He stated that, “Boise’s 1000 block of Main Street remains a preservation frontier. With a variety of styles and rich visual appeal, the block can serve as a vibrant entry district into the downtown.”

Bertram’s suggestions for the block includes creating an overall plan, filling vacancies in upper floors, building a committee of property and business owners to come together and plan for the area, and an annual event honoring the block. Branding for the block has begun, and new and old businesses such as The Crux, Community Radio and the Record Exchange are bringing people to the area. Boise State University located classroom space there in an effort to bridge the campus with Downtown Boise. In effect, initial steps have already been taken to use this section of Main as the launching pad for a successful Main Street program under the National Trust’s parameters. Current construction work on the block, such as the Owyhee project, is being completed utilizing existing structures rather than new construction, following the turmoil of the Royal Plaza development.

Today, nightlife around the 1000 block of Main Street consists primarily of bars and music venues in the area, from the Hitchcock Building’s Neurolux, to 10th Street Station in the Idanha’s basement, to Mulligan’s in the Larson Building. In March 2012, Eric Gilbert, Boise Radio host and frontman of local band Finn Riggins, brought the Treefort Music Fest to Downtown Boise. The new music festival would include performances by local and national acts in venues throughout the downtown area, including the Neurolux, the El Korah Shrine and The Crux coffee shop next to Hannifin’s on Main, along with a main stage located close to the 1000 block in the Owyhee’s overflow parking lot at Twelfth and Grove Streets. During the second Treefort in 2013, the Shriners ran out of canned beer and called the event “a great
success” on their Twitter account. Event producers including Gilbert and locals hoped the
festival would lend credibility to the music scene in Boise and bring an increased awareness to
local musical acts and venues.  

According to the Downtown Business Association, fourteen businesses closed within
their district’s boundaries in 2012, the Idanha building’s La Vie en Rose among the
casualties. In their place, twenty-five new enterprises, including retail shops, restaurants and
bars, and a medical clinic opened to serve the area. Rolling in Dough replaced La Vie en Rose
in 2013, and The Crux coffee house opened in January 2012. The new café occupies the
Beckwith Building extension once taken over by the Cash Bazaar and previously housing
Brown’s Gallery until late 2011. In addition to serving regionally produced coffee and beer, The
Crux showcases live bands and artists in concert on weekends and often throughout the week.  

The Capital City Development Corporation completed street improvements on both sides
of the 1000 block in 2013, bringing low sandstone walls, chairs and outdoor chess tables to the
streetscapes in front of the Smith Block and its neighboring buildings. Improvements on the
opposite side of the street had been completed a couple years before. Simultaneously, the CCDC
commissioned Boise artist Ward Hooper to design and implement several matching public art
pieces on both sides of the block. The CCDC funded the public art project completely as a gift to
the City of Boise. The structures feature circular plates within totem towers, and the “Gem
Block” title atop each one, a name taken from the block’s historic Gem Building. The circular
plates feature artwork and interpretive information inspired by the history of the Mercantile
District, including icons such as the Idanha Hotel, Clarence Darrow, Harry Orchard, and the
Boise streetcar system and Hannfins. The “Gem Block” name grew out of discussions between
local historians, block residents and property owners, along with CCDC representatives. After
the group reached an agreement on a name, Hooper completed the pieces and installed them along the 1000 block’s sidewalks in 2013.229

In 2003, ten years before the installation of Ward Hooper’s public art on Main’s 1000 block, local artist Amy Westover designed the nearby sculpture near Ninth and Front Streets titled *Grove Street Illuminated and Boise Canal*, marking the location of the Boise Canal. The sculpture features three circles, rising out of the pavement, using light and historical images of the Grove Street area. The piece also includes illuminated circles with letters spelling “Boise Canal.”230 The CCDC and the City of Boise, along with the nearby Statehouse Inn (now Hotel 43) on Grove Street and other local donors funded the piece. Westover described the value of public artwork, stating that, “It creates a special place that can really make a city unique. It’s a very lasting legacy.”231

Local business and property owners and CCDC officials have shown investment in the 1000 Block or Gem Block, so the city would need to take advantage of this support by establishing an organization with a full-time program manager, with the goal of building on this relationship between the public and private sectors. This Main Street organization should follow in Boise State’s footsteps, planning events celebrating the area, involving local businesses and encouraging the general public to frequent the block. The organization would take part in establishing quality design regulations in an effort to avoid repeating missteps such as the now vacant Continental Life Building. Using the 1000 Block as a base, the Main Street program could then expand to encompass the greater Mercantile District or other parts of Boise’s Main Street.

Outside of a full-fledged Main Street program, simple steps could be taken to reinforce a cohesive identity throughout the Mercantile District. A public art kiosk corresponding with
Hooper’s sculptures should be installed on the 1000 block. The kiosk would feature a map and interpretive information along with copies of the walking tour brochure. Other interpretive markers should be installed around the block to designate specific landmarks. The lampposts on the block should mark the boundaries of the district and convey its identity to people traveling through the area. October 2010, I co-wrote and submitted a Boise City Neighborhood Reinvestment Grant application to fund those street improvements. Dr. Todd Shallat and I requested $18,400, and included a proposed kiosk design by local artist Noel Weber’s Classic Design Studios. After visiting and discussing the application with business owners including Lisa Bower of Art Source Gallery and Andy Smart of Foot Dynamics, we collected letters of support for the project from a range of people involved. Letters came from Karen Sander, Executive Director of the Downtown Business Association, Terry Little and Chanon Romo of the Ada County Highway District (ACHD), the CCDC’s Phil Kushlan, Gem Noble owner Gary Christensen, Zen Bento owners Rene Iwasama and Jack Hicks, Boise City Department of Arts & History Director Terri Schorzman, Nobody’s Hero Tattoo owner T.J. Mahoney, Craig Driver of Parklane Management, Nicole Keulman of the Alaska Building’s Platinum Beauty Lounge, architect David Rudeen, as well as Lisa Bower and Andy Smart.

After holding a public meeting on October 10th, allowing for discussion of the project, we submitted the application to the city. Despite the support of block residents and building owners, we received notice in April 2011 that the application had been denied. The Department of Planning & Development Services cited concerns about naming and branding areas of the city. The city asked if plans were in place to designate all neighborhoods within Downtown Boise.

In July 2011, I submitted a Boise City Department of Arts & History grant application for
funding of the walking tour brochure. While the brochure constituted only one component of the previous grant application, the brochure would start the process of branding the area. I received $1,200 from the Arts & History department and additional funding from Boise State University’s Department of History for design and printing of the brochure. Dr. Shallat and I co-wrote the walking tour, and design came from Adele Thomsen. On April 5, 2011, we celebrated the release of the brochure at a College of Social Sciences & Public Affairs book signing event at the Center on Main. At the event, I hosted guided trolley tours circling the district. With the “Mercantile District” and “Gem Block” names established, further steps should be taken to establish the area as a cohesive historical district.

Because the National Trust for Historic Preservation promotes re-use of established buildings, no other block on the street could represent those ideals better than the 1000 block the last “complete” block of Main. The historic buildings lining the streetscapes of the 1000 block represent a period in Boise history when travelers frequently stopped off in Boise while traveling on the Oregon Short Line, and local politicians gathered in neighborhood shops and bars to discuss their campaigns. The Idanha, Grand, Manitou and Owyhee Hotels welcomed Boise guests and notable residents. Presidents, Governors and entertainers stayed in the area hotels while visiting Boise, and politicians frequently purchased cigars and met in the back room at Hannifin’s. While the upscale dining at the Idanha attracted Boise’s elites, the Cash Bazaar department store served the retail needs of average citizens. The district quickly became a mercantile area, as blacksmiths and barns gave way to hotels, shops, restaurants and theaters, due to nearby rail travel. While the Owyhee Plaza Hotel and the Safari Inn still operate as hotels, the Idanha has since converted to an apartment building while still featuring retail and restaurant space at the ground level. The Gem Noble Block also transitioned into a condominium
development with business tenants occupying their storefronts. Some businesses including Hannifin’s remain open in the block, while other restaurants and shops have risen taken the place of institutions like the Cash Bazaar. The mercantile atmosphere still inhabits the block despite economic woes. Having survived Boise’s urban renewal process and plans for an indoor shopping center, the 1000 block of Main Street and its historic buildings represent the rich architectural, political and entrepreneurial history. As modes of transportation changed, the 1000 Block changed with them, but the buildings have remained largely untouched. By studying the cultural contributions of this Main Street district, the area is a valuable tool for heritage education.

GALLERY OF HISTORICAL IMAGES
Two railroad workers pose as an Oregon Short Line engine pulls into Boise, 1907. (Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
R.C. Cole stands before the Oregon Short Line Depot at 10th and Front Streets.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
The Salvation Army Band plays on the doorstep of the First Presbyterian Church at the corner of 10th and Main, the future site of the Idanha Hotel, about 1893. (Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
The 1000 Block of Main Street in Boise, from 11th Street, about 1905.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
William E. Borah, Harry Orchard and Clarence Darrow.
Idanha bar staff with David Neuman, about 1910.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
All four corners of 10th and Main once featured French-style turrets, about 1910. (Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
Streetcars loop past the Alaska Building and the Idanha, about 1915. (Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
Payless Drugs and the Rialto Theater (one of many several Boise theaters located within the Mercantile District) once stood at the corner of 10th and Idaho around 1940. A bank and drive-through window now occupies this space.

(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
A view of Main Street from the Owyhee Hotel rooftop, about 1930.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
A bicyclist rides past the New Boz Theater in the Tiner Building, about 1910.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
The Bazaar department store in the Alaska Building, July 1980.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
E.E. Plowhead’s Grocery store at 11th and Main, later home to Hannifin’s Cigar, about 1895. (Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
A crowd gathers for a show at The Boztheater, August 1910.  
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
The Smith Block, next to the Grand Hotel, circa 1930.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
The Sherwood family in their horse-drawn carriage on Main Street, in front of the Owyhee Hotel, 1910.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
The lobby of the Owyhee Hotel, about 1910.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
A nighttime view of 11th and Main, with the Owyhee Hotel in the foreground, about 1910.

(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
Bustling streets surround the Owyhee Hotel, about 1935.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
A parade entertains Main Street visitors in front of the Royal Restaurant, about 1950. (Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
Chorus girls during a 1923 El Korah Temple Follies show.  
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
The Empire Building at 10th and Idaho Streets, about 1915.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
A 1930 illustration of Idaho Street featuring the Empire Building and the newly built 1927 bank annex next door.  
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
The Hitchcock Building, about 1947, then home of Oakley’s Electric. The brickwork would soon receive a white painted overlay.

(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
A view of Main Street, looking east from 11th, about 1915.
(Photograph from Idaho State Historical Society)
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