Historic Boise Trolley Tour
Adapted from a script written for the Boise Tour Train

Julia Davis Park loop to Myrtle.

**Introduction.** Founded in 1863 at the peak of the Idaho gold rush, Boise was an instant city. More than 1,000 pioneers settled in the first six months. From ship and steamboat via Portland and San Francisco, form Denver and Carson City by pack train and foot, they crowded into 400 ramshackle buildings on 40 occupied blocks. Today their story is told with gold pans and pick axes in the Idaho State Historical Museum (on your right). Its neighbor with the neon lights is the Boise Art Museum (left). BAM, as Boiseans call it, features the masterworks of frontier artists who chronicled the exploration of the American West.

The Oregon Trail Memorial Bridge (right) marks the approximate spot where prospectors from four continents veered north toward the Idaho gold rush. The bridge spans a ferry crossing. In 1930, when it opened to auto traffic, the cast concrete arches were engineering sensations. The bridge engineers were the same Boise builders who pioneered concrete gravity arch construction at the great Hoover Dam.

Boiseans believe that the bridge was close to spot where fur trapper John Reed died in an Indian ambush. We don’t really know what happened to Reed. His story first appeared in a book by a writer who had never been west of New York. We do know that the stories of Indian atrocities have been great exaggerated. And we know from British reports that bloodshed in the valley was rare before the United States planted the flag.

The army scout Kit Carson led Captain John C. Fremont along this river in 1843. Fremont reported a thriving camp of welcoming natives. Fat when the salmon were running, they supplied fish and water fowl to the Oregon-bound pioneers. Fremont called them Snake Indians. The first dam builders in Idaho, they modified the river with boulders so that fish were trapped in the shallows. Women made fishing nets. Men jabbed at the salmon with spears.

That river jumping with salmon was braided in pioneer times. It twisted through cottonwood wetlands and periodically flooded from here to Front
Street downtown. Today the Boise has been reengineered to look like a natural river. Not natural like an Idaho river. Natural like the meandering streams that Rembrandt wove through his landscape paintings. Natural like the Shakespearean gardens of London or Central Park in New York.

Likewise our evergreen park looks nothing like the Idaho nature that predated dams and canals. The park was named for pioneer Julia Davis. Julia and her husband Tom Davis were among the first to reclaim the Boise floodplain, planting apples. After 1907, when the orchard was bequeathed for a park, Boiseans filled in the soggy places with debris and recycled trash. More than fifty species of trees now shade the municipal playground. A rose garden and a boating lagoon strive for the Victorian splendor of Hyde Park in London. Cyclists can ride 20 miles along the river’s pastoral greenbelt.

Friendship Bridge (right) leads to the largest school in the state. Boise State University with its eight colleges serves 19,000 students with more than 200 kinds of degrees. The school prides itself as a metropolitan research center. These days it is better known for a remarkable football team. In 2007 the undefeated Broncos ranked second in the national polls. Blue Astroturf is our secret weapon—a turf so royally blue that migrating geese have mistaken the field for a lake. Boiseans call it Smurf Turf. “Don't adjust your television,” say the CNN sportscasters. “Boise’s field is actually blue.”

Bronco Stadium sits on the birthplace of commercial airmail service. The great aviator Charles Lindbergh landed here in 1927. Forty-thousand turned out to cheer.

But even as Boiseans cheered progress through aviation, they pined for the wild places lost to the modern age. In 1916 that reaction to modernization fed the campaign for a municipal zoo. Some say the zoo began with cages for exotic birds captured by sportsmen. Others say the cages were for a chimpanzee. The chimp, according to legend, had escaped from a traveling circus. Animal lovers wanted the city to keep it. As Boiseans loudly debated, a man jumped up and yelled: “Quite! This place is a zoo!”

Today the zoo houses over 100 species. If you’re planning a zoo visit, it helps to bone up on some facts:

- What do you call a deer with no eyes? No eye de-er.
- Where do otters come from? Otter space.
- Can a squirrel jump higher than a lamp post? Yes, lamp posts can’t jump.
• How do you get down from a giraffe? You don’t, you get down from a goose.
• What should you do if you get eaten by a bear? Run round until you’re all pooped out.
• What do you call a tuft of hair underneath the chin of a moose? A moose-stache.
• If a baboon is having trouble with the plumbing in its cage, how would you use to fix it? With a monkey wrench.

Leaving the park and zoo we pass a 1920s steam locomotive that Boiseans call **Big Mike.** The Union Pacific served Boise for ninety years before the trains were purchased by Amtrak. Today our replica steam locomotive provides a slower but smoother ride. Our train has **articulating wheels** that follow the exact path of the locomotive. Technology keeps us from playing crack the whip with the people in the back car!

North on Third Street from Myrtle to Main.

Crossing Myrtle we are heading north toward the Boise Mountains where the miners once scrambled for gold. Granite ridges rise 7,500 above sea level. **Bogus Basin,** our ski resort, rises a vertical mile.

**Bogus Basin** takes its name from a famous swindle. Miners allegedly seeded a cave with gold dust to jack up the sale of their claim. Others say the bogus treasure was fools-gold iron pyrite. Foolish miners mistook its glitter for gold.

Coming up on your right is the **Ada County Courthouse.** Ada was named for the daughter of the county’s founder, the gold-miner Henry Riggs. In 1864, while the territorial legislature sat up north in Lewiston, Riggs engineered the theft of the Idaho seal. Boise emerged as the territory’s capital city. Northerners were compensated with the University of Idaho in Moscow. Boise got the prison. Idahoans still debate who got the better deal.

East on Main to Broadway/Warm Springs

The gold that brought Henry Riggs to Ada County was one of the richest strikes in the history of the American West. To your left, we can see the **U.S. Assay Office** where the treasure was converted to cash. Over $1 billion worth of gold and silver passed through the assayer’s doors between 1872-1933. The chimney vented a basement furnace where gold and silver were melted and poured into bars.
The **100 Block of Main Street** was the social center of early Boise, with Gothic and Classical mansions built by the mining tycoons. In 1906 the road became the highway to the gold mines in Idaho City. Waterwheels irrigated a tree nursery. Rail cars hauled lumber from saw mills. A trolley connected downtown to a Moorish style spa and dancehall. Chestnuts shaded a cabin village of Spanish-speaking mule packers who ran guns to the U.S. Army and hardware to the Idaho mines.

East on Warm Springs to Old Pen Rd.

We are traveling east toward the Boise foothills on **Warm Springs Avenue**. Warm Springs takes its name from the natural spas and hot water pools that were Boise’s first tourist attraction. The water begins as snowmelt or rain that seeps through porous lava. Superheated by the core of the Earth at depths of 4,000 feet, it steams back to the surface in pools near **Table Rock Mesa** (on the horizon ahead). Boise entrepreneurs have been selling hot water for domestic heating since 1891. Today the geothermal system heats 200 buildings and homes.

The heat that boils the water also fuses the sandy rock into a highly prized building stone. The avenue’s most magnificent homes all rise from **Table Rock sandstone**. Yale University Law School and the Idaho Capitol Building also feature this excellent stone.

**Idaho Children’s Home, 740 Warm Springs Ave.** (left). In 1907, the schoolteacher Cynthia Mann donated a block of land for the **Idaho Children’s Home**. Like most of the great buildings in Boise, it features Table Rock Sandstone. Today the home for urchins and orphans continues its social mission as a family counseling center.

**C.C. Anderson House, 929 Warm Springs** (right): Merchant C.C. Anderson built Golden Rule of Boise into a chain of 35 stores. Anderson hired an architect from Spokane to design this Tudor manor. The 1925 house briefly served as Boise State’s president’s mansion. Its formal backyard gardens were designed by the famous Olmstead firm that built Central Park in New York.

**Will Regan House, 1009 Warm Springs** (right): When the debonair architecture John Tourtellotte hired the architect Charles Hummel, Boise was forever remade. Tourtellotte & Hummel built this California Mission for banker Will Regan. Completed in 1911, it anticipated the red-tile-and-stucco of the Union Pacific Depot.
Moore-Cunningham House, 1109 Warm Springs (right): Built in 1891, the Moore-Cunningham House was a technological marvel, perhaps the first house in the nation to be geothermally heated by wooden pipes to a hot-water well. Banker C.W. Moore invested in the water system. His French Chateau on Warm Springs still houses the banker's descendents. Natural hot water still heats the house and its swimming pool.

Granite Hall, 1205 Warm Springs (right). A Scottish architect built this 15-room showplace for $15,000 in 1902.

Cox House, 1308 Warm Springs (left). Realtor L.H. Cox owned the entire block when he commissioned Tourtelotte & Hummel for this Georgian Revival in 1906. He named the side streets for business partners Walter E. Pierce, a Boise mayor, and future governor John M. Haines.

Leo Falk’s Mission Revival, 1320 Warm Springs (left). Entrepreneur Leo Falk built this Mission Revival in 1923. The Falks had been peddlers in the Idaho gold camps. Jews from Bavaria, they founded Falks ID department stores. Leo Falk also built the Owyhee Hotel and the Egyptian Theatre.

1420 Warm Springs (left). When St. Lukes hospital expanded, this 1896 house moved from Jefferson St. to Warm Springs. The avenue has since become Boise’s preferred addressed for replica and relocated landmark homes.

Mediterranean Villa, 1522 Warm Springs: Nineteen twenty-five was the high-tide of the Mission Revival in Boise. This palatial showplace was the first house in Boise with an electric dishwasher and a hydraulic sprinkler system. A seven-foot mirror above the fireplace is a survivor of the great San Francisco earthquake.

The Natatorium pool on your right sits on the spot that made Boise a tourist attraction. Built in 1892, the Nat was a Moorish castle with baths, card rooms, a German tavern, an electric roller coaster, and an Arabesque boardwalk arcade. Boiseans could ride to the Nat for a nickel on the city’s electric streetcar. The trolley mural (right) captures the romance of that neighborly era in Boise before the city was flooded with cars.

The Old Pen loop.

Turning north, we climb toward the Old Idaho Penitentiary at the base of Table Rock Mesa. Once the sandstone mesa was an Indian smoke signal
site. During the era of the Idaho fur trade, when the British Hudson Bay Company built a fort at the mouth of the river, the mesa commanded a free-trade rendezvous point. Trappers called it Peace Valley. In 1819 a gigantic Canadian trapper named Donald McKenzie came to negotiate a commercial treaty. Counting campfires, he estimated 10,000 Indians.

In 1832 a West Pointer named Benjamin Bonneville called these cliffs of the Boise River the most sublime sight in the West. Bonneville crested a ridge east of the city with a brigade of French Canadians. Boiseans credit the French Canadians with naming the future townsite. “Les bois! Les bois! Voyez les bois!” they allegedly cried when they discovered the forested river. “The woods! The woods! Look at the woods!”

In Bonneville’s time the people of the Boise Valley were mostly spearfishing nomads with very few horses or guns. A Shoshone woman named Four Dollar Winnemucca may have cared for the sick and wounded at the hot springs under these rocks. The Shoshones thought the stacked volcanic formation looked like a nesting eagle. Eagle Rock, it was called. Settlers thought the boulders looked medieval and called them Castle Rocks.

Notice the slant-roof shed (left). Here on Christmas Day, 1890, a 400-foot well gushed 555 gallons per minute at 170 degrees. United Water Company now pipes the water to the Idaho Statehouse.

Idaho Territory was only seven years old when inmates cut the first sandstone blocks for the Old Penitentiary. Thirteen thousand had been incarcerated by the time the state prison close in 1973. There have been ten executions at the Pen, all by hangings.

Perhaps the prison’s most famous inmate was the assassin Harry Orchard. In 1905 he had murdered Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg, killing the politician with a dynamite bomb.

Perhaps the most famous female inmate was Idaho’s “Lady Bluebeard.” Four of her husbands had died from eating cookies laced with arsenic. After a 20 year sentence, she returned to the woman’s ward with a batch of her special cookies. The guard politely refused.

Today the Old Pen is a cultural complex with ten different museum. The J. Curtis Earl Collection is has world-class weapons exhibit. The Idaho Botanical Garden with its fourteen gardens is aglow in the winter with holiday lights.
To our left we see the **Idaho State Historical Library and Archive**, the headquarters of the state historical society and the source of our tour research. The library is free to the public and open four days a week.

Warm Spring west to Haines Street.

Returning to Warm Springs Avenue, we travel a road through a valley of considerable violence during the Snake River Indian Wars. In 1863 the war began at Shoshone encampment on Bear River in Eastern Idaho. Troops opened fire with howitzers. Nearly 400 Indians died. The dead included 90 women and children shot down in the snow as they fled. Indian warriors responded by attacking the mines at Idaho City. Indians raids that summer shut down the gold road to California and imperiled the Oregon Trail.

In 1863, as miners flooded through Boise, Abraham Lincoln’s army established a fort. Troops corralled Boise Shoshone in a canvas refugee camp. About 300 hundred shivered through bitter winters without adequate food or blankets. Many died of tuberculosis. In 1867 the survivors were dispatched in wagons and shipped to the Eastern Idaho desert surrounding Fort Hall.

Riding through this splendor of architectural landmarks it is tempting to dismiss those hapless captives as relics of a bygone era. But the story is more complicated. Horseless nomads offered little resistance, but the army was seldom a match for mounted Bannocks who exacted a toll in sheep and cattle for use of the Oregon Trail. Preoccupied with Robert E. Lee at Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, the Union agreed to a generous treaty that guaranteed Indian hunting and safe passage through ancestral lands.

Warm Springs borders the Fort Boise Militia Reserve where President Lincoln’s army defended the Oregon Trail. The East End, as Boiseans call it, dates back to the time of buggy and streetcar. A great wooden flume once dominated the district, protecting these houses from floods.

In the 1990s, as the McMansions rose in the foothills, East Enders sued to protect their views. Sho-Bans joined the suit in an attempt to preserve their burial ground. Eventually the City of Boise was forced to concede that the Shoshone-Bannocks had never been compensated. City Council raised $500,000 to protect the hillside with a nature preserve.

East End Loop--Haines to Bannock to Bruce
**Bannock Street** takes its name from the fiercest of the Idaho warriors during the era of the overland trails. Once the **Bannocks** had been buffalo hunters from the Malheur Valley of Eastern Oregon. Crossing through the Boise Valley en route to the Yellowstone country, the Bannocks sometimes allied with the Boise Shoshone and intermarried. Chief Pocatello, a famous Bannock, set fire to emigrant wagons and eluded the U.S. Army during the Snake River Indian Wars.

Pocatello was long retired at the Fort Hall Reservation when a young chief named Buffalo Horn led a fiery revolt. Buffalo Horn’s war party attacked homesteads and ferry landings, In 1878, at South Mountain in Owyhee County, a militia routed the Bannocks, killing Buffalo Horn. The battle at South Mountain was one of the last of the Indian Wars.

Today the street named for the Bannocks is a tranquil mix of architectural gems. About 30 percent of the homes are early 20th century Craftsman Bungalows. These small working-class homes were like city cabins with small porches and decorative elbow brackets that pretend to hold up the roof. Low roofs cover family rooms with wood boxes and fireplaces.

**Bungalows on 900 Block, Bannock.** On your left at 921 Bannock the builder used river rock. Across the street at 912 Bannock (right) the exposed eves under the roof and the wooden elbow brackets are keys to the Bungalow style.

Approaching on your left is the post-WWII, post-modern rectangular no-frills architecture that Boiseans sometimes defend and elsewhere abhor. The debate revolves around what Boiseans consider historic. In the East End, one of youngest of eight historic districts, a citizen preservation commission decides.

Ahead is Flume Street with a remnant of the wooden structure that diverted the foothills floods. Once the seasonal flooding tore out the graves of the pioneer cemeteries. A high-ground cemetery at Morris Hill Cemetery solved the problem of floating corpses. Today the only “floaters” are river tubers happily splashing from Barber to Ann Morrison parks.

South on Bruce to Warm Springs and Broadway.

Returning to Warm Spring, immediately ahead, we see two perfectly ornate Queen Annes that predated the Bungalow style.
**Fraser House, 635 Warm Springs.** A sheep-rancher hired Tourtellotte & Hummel for the Queen Anne ahead on the left. Gaudy ornamentation and a mix of stone and shingles typified the style.

**Morrison House, 615 Warm Springs.** Likewise the Queen Anne on right is a layered like a Victorian cake with shingles and patterned siding. Presbyterian John Morrison, the founder of the College of Idaho, now Albertson’s College, converted the house to the governor’s mansion when he won the Republican bid for the statehouse in 1902. His successor Frank Gooding took over in 1905. Pinkerton detectives guarded the home after the shock of the Steunenberg assassination.

On the right, we are passing the **Pioneer Cemetery.** Here Boiseans have planted the dead since the era of the Idaho gold rush. In 1872 the Boise Masonic Lodge purchased and fenced off the site. Headstones mark the graves of the city founders—of the Falks and Logans and Lems who pioneered Main Street retail, of George Shoup, the Indian fighter, whose statue now represents Idaho in the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol, of mule packers John Hailey and Jesus Urquides who ran freight to the Idaho mines.

Crossing Broadway on Idaho Street into downtown.

**St. Luke’s Hospital** (right). As Warm Springs becomes Idaho Street we pass the St. Luke Medical Center. Founded in 1900 by Boise Episcopalians, the hospital led the fight against cholera and tuberculosis. Its nursing academy graduate its first class in 1906. Today the 400-bed hospital with 800 staff physicians employs more than 6,000. One specialty is cancer treatment. Last year the hospital also delivered nearly 8,000 babies.

**Heritage Inn, 109 W. Idaho** (left). Ahead on your left we’re approaching the boyhood home of **Senator Frank Church.** An early opponent of the Vietnam War, Church ran unsuccessfully against Governor Jimmy Carter for the Democratic Presidential nomination of 1976.

Frank Church also won national fame for calling foul on the CIA. In 1975 the senator led a Senate committee that denounced domestic spying and CIA assassination attempts. One target of the investigation was **James Jesus Angleton,** a Boise-born poet-turn-spy. Angleton was obsessed with Cuba’s Fidel Castro. There were exploding cigars, exploding seafood, poisonous coffee, and a bizarre attempt to infect Castro’s scuba suit with a fungus that would cause a skin disease. Frank Church pursued Angleton until he resigned. Today the senator and the spy share Morri
Hill Cemetery. Closer in death than in life, they lay under Boise headstones about 100 paces apart.

Downtown along Idaho from 5th to 10th.

Crossing through downtown we tour an immigrant city that has always been a cultural crossroad and surprisingly diverse. On your right the Star Hotel at 527 Idaho Street is a remnant of the boarding house districts once crowded with immigrant Basques. Most had been villagers from the province of Bizkaia in Northern Spain. Finding work in the Idaho sheep camps, they wintered boarding houses.

Boise City Hall (left) sits on the notorious site of a red-light district called Levi’s Alley. In 1910 murder and prostitution stirred the hymn-singing, ax-wielding social reformers of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union.

City Hall drinking fountain (left). The anti-saloon crusaders built water fountains to discourage saloons. On your right, on the corner of Idaho Street, the cast-iron WTCU drinking fountain dates from those bawdy times.

Union Block, 718 Idaho (right) is a fine example of the German Romanesque architecture that dominated turn of the century Boise. Built by Germans in 1901, it rough-cut Table Rock sandstone.

Another Romanesque landmark is the 1890 Boise City National Bank (left). The bank replicated the heavy semicircular arches of Chicago’s Marshal Fields Building.

The alley behind the bank was once the third largest Chinese district in the Pacific Northwest. Boiseans even today will swear that coolie-hatted Chinese once tunneled under the sidewalks. But there never were Chinese tunnels. The origin of the legend may be curbside delivery chutes that connected some buildings downtown.

South on 10th, east on Main to Capital Boulevard.

Idanha Hotel (left). The Idanha opened the first day of last century on January 1, 1901. With private telephones, electric intercom, pharmacy, soda fountain, and Otis elevator, the 1901 hotel was, said the Statesman, "the acme of perfection."

It was at the Idanha in 1905 where the serial killer Harry Orchard first attempted to assassinate Governor Frank Steunenberg, rigging a bed with
a dynamite bomb. Steunenberg’s assassination brought attorney Clarence Darrow to the Idanha for the famous murder conspiracy trail in 1907.

Another hero of Boise’s Main Street was a threadbare immigrant from Bavaria who became the nation’s first elected Jewish governor. In 1925, Governor Moses Alexander retired to his men’s store in the white terracotta Alexander Building (left).

**Wells Fargo, U.S. Bank, and the Capital Terrace Garage** now define the Main Street skyline. Children splash through a public fountain in middle of a brick courtyard that Boiseans call *The Grove*.

North on Capital to Jefferson and 8th Street.

Where Main crosses Capitol, on your left, the *Egyptian Theater* with its gilded pharaohs and topless nymphs is a national historic landmark. Its pipe organ dates back to the silent era of the silver screen.

Ahead is the *Idaho State Capitol Building*. Built between 1906 and 1920, the Statehouse is now under restoration and due to reopen to the legislature in 2010. Architects Tourtellotte & Hummel paid homage to the log-cabin roots of Idaho territory with a basement tier of rounded sandstone sculpted to resemble pioneer logs. The foundation is Vermont granite. The interior rotunda has four kinds of marble and sixty-foot Corinthian pillars. Forty-three stars for forty-three states gild the rotunda ceiling. A copper eagle dipped in bronze perches atop a lantern on the neoclassical dome.

Stop at Steunenberg statue.

Historic monuments on the capitol grounds range from the patriotic to the sacred and kitschy bizarre. The statue (left) honors assassinated Governor Frank Steunenberg, a martyr of the mining wars. The liberty bell on the Capitol steps (right) was a gift from the U.S. Treasury during a campaign for liberty bonds. Memorial trees include a sapling that went to the Moon, a sugar maple planted by Teddy Roosevelt, and the aging trunk of an oak that President Benjamin Harrison planted on a visit to Boise to celebrate Idaho statehood. Harrison’s Republican Party was well represented by a west lawn tribute to Union Soldiers. Senator William Borah donated a Civil War cannon used in the siege of Vicksburg. Pranksters proudly recall when the cannon blew out the windows of the *Borah Post Office* (left). The following day the cannon was plugged with cement.
North on 8th Street to Hays.

Behind the capitol building is St. Michael's Episcopal Church (ahead to the left). Built in 1902, the Cathedral is English Gothic. Tiffany's of New York stained some of its magnificent glass.

**Eighth Street.** Heading north on 8th Street we follow that road to the Idaho gold camps. The Union garrison on Fort Street, ahead, was later called the Boise Barracks. Its original Quartermasters Building still stands. At its foot was the one-room O'Farrell Cabin where a wandering French cleric performed the city’s first Catholic mass.

**St. John the Evangelist Cathedral, 8th and Hayes.** Catholicism grew from the seed planted by the pioneer cleric in a city of Irish miners and Catholic sheepherding Basques. In 1907, the Boise Diocese hired architects Tourtellotte & Hummel for a grand cathedral in the Romanesque style. German-born Charles Hummel, schooled in Stuttgart, patterned St. John’s after German cathedrals. Opulent stained glass depicts the life of Christ.

Hayes to Harrison

**St. John’s Rectory, 804 N 9th Street** (right) In 1904 this half-timbered Western Colonial was a the parish office and home to the bishop and priests serving St. John’s. Named for Sylvester Treinen, Boise’s fifth Bishop, the house mixes Oregon brick and Table Rock stone.

**North Hayes Street** centers a businessman’s district of respectable houses that Boisean’s call the Near North End.

One of its signature mansions is the John Haines house (919 W. Hayes, left) on the southeast corner of 10th. John and Mary Haines had emigrated from a Kansas homestead after losing a child. Entering politics in 1907, John Haines served two years as mayor then carried the Republican Party to the Idaho Statehouse in 1913. For two turbulent years his Hayes Street Queen Anne served as the governor’s mansion.

**Daly House, 1015 W. Hays** (left). At last in 1910 the Queen Anne craze had run its course in the capital city. Classical symmetry replaced off-center gingerbread houses. Templelike porticos with columns and subdued ornamentation replaced the turrets and patterned shingles once preferred by the nuevo riche.

**1100-1200 blocks of Hayes Street.** Where the Daly House once shared the fashionable district with some of the city’s best architecture, the First United Methodist Church (left) has razed houses for surface parking and
a proposed apartment complex. One fine old Queen Ann in the path of the surface parking has been sold for dollar, moved, and lovingly rebuilt with new cedar singles on the northwest corner of 12th Street (right). Rising behind the house is a controversial "in-fill" condominium development on the site of the old Whittier School

In 2003 these street were lined with yard signs protesting the razing of historic homes for new apartments and condos. City council responded with the 22-block Near North Historic District. Fifty percent of its buildings predate the Craftsman Bungalow craze that remade Boise housing in 1912.

**Hays crossing 14th Street.** Sheep and cattle were still grazing on Hays when President Benjamin Harrison signed Idaho into Statehood. W.E. Pierce & Company renamed 17th Street to honor Harrison’s visit to Boise in 1891. The company landscaped with hundreds of elms before any houses were built. Trolleys, sewers, wooden pipes for indoor plumbing, and a landscaped median followed. Arc electric lighting replaced the dull orange of coal burning lamps. But when the city offered to cement the sidewalk, Boiseans balked. Homeowners with hammers and nails preferred to repair the planks of their curbside boardwalks. Cement meant more taxation. Already the North Enders complained that their annual taxes had soared to $30 per lot.

Touring the **Harrison Boulevard Historic District** is like a visit to an open museum of 20th century architectural styles. Gingerbread Queen Annes share blocks with ready-made mail-order housing. The English Tudor style is well represented. There are also Georgians, Colonials, a French Chateau, a Frank Lloyd Wright Prairie Style ranch house, and a storied Mission Revival that allegedly houses a ghost.

North on Harrison to Lemp

**Morrison House, 912 Harrison** (right). A 1954 *Time Magazine* cover story called him the American who done the most to change the face of the Earth. Harry Morrison, the cofounder Morrison-Knudson Company, lived in this modest ranch house while his company was damming the West.

**Tudor House, 1111 Harrison** (left). With its steep-pitched roof, multi-stack chimneys, leaded glass, wrought-iron, and striped half-timbering, this 1938 house is a near-perfect Boise example of the English Tudor. Sober North Enders built more Tudors than anything else in the lean years
of the Great Depression. Curved walkways and manicured hedges characterized the style.

**Oaks House, 1201 Harrison** (left). This 1913 Georgian Revival, recently restored, had an upstairs bed on rollers that ingeniously folded onto the balcony in the days before air-conditioning. The house was built for a wholesale grocer. Briefly a governor’s mansion, it later became the home of the man who brought trolleys to Boise, the developer Walter Pierce.

Some of the last of the lavish Queen Annes grace the boulevard’s 1300 block. At 1304 Harrison the 1901 **Meyer Mansion** (right) remains Harrison’s oldest house. It faces a tall Queen Anne (left) with a wrapping verandah that was built for a Boise butcher and sold to the CEO of lumber giant Boise Cascade.

**Bond House, 1505 Harrison** (left). The most storied house on the boulevard dates back to the time of the great San Francisco Earthquake. Architects took note of the cast concrete houses that survived the earthquake and fire. In 1910, Californian George Washington Bond commissioned Tourtellotte & Hummel for a quake-proof thick-walled house of indestructible concrete. Its courtyards and Spanish tile introduced Boise to the Mission Revival. Fortesslike and presumably bomb-proof, it housed Governor Davis W. Davis during his battle with labor unions at the height of the Bolshevik Red Scare at the close of the First World War. Subsequent owners complained that an attic ghost named Anna was haunting the house’s electrical system. Anna, North Enders say, had lost her child to a tragic drowning in a basement swimming pool.

East on Lemp, south on 16th

Realtors understood that the health of a civilized city rested on neighborhood school. In 1899 the developer Pierce donated a lot at a streetcar crossing for **Washington Elementary School** (left). Today Washington is so beloved that the size of its PTO parent-teacher organization exceeds its student body.

**1300 Block of 16th**. Neighborhood schools, narrow streets, houses with function porches and alley garages, corner stores and street car service are now the defining features of a smart-growth urban design. Planners call it The New Urbanism. Boise’s leafy North End is the movement’s poster child.

East on Eastman to Hyde Park.
As we turn toward the **Hyde Park Historic District** we see fine examples of the mail-order catalog housing that catered to modest incomes and diversified Boise’s North End.

**Queen Anne cottage, 1301 North 16th St.** (northwest corner, left). In 1906 a family of modest income may have ordered this house from a Sears catalog. Shipped in a housing kit from from Chicago or California, the cottage replicated the Queen Anne pretensions of its light-blue twin just up the block.

**Queen Anne cottage, 1403 15th St.** (northwest corner, left). Compare this mail-order house to its sibling. Notice the four-sided turret and decorative porch. Architects say the houses are “Queen Ann in front, Mary Ann in back.” Ornate in front but modest in back, they were the houses of working people who strived for the sophistication of boulevard’s more opulent villas. The annual income of a mechanic or clerk—perhaps $1,000—could by a catalog kit from Sears in 1910. Imagine if your annual income could purchase a house like this today.

**Hyde Park, Eastman and 13th.** Built for the Boise streetcar, Hyde Park mixed commercial storefront architecture with set-back Victorian homes. Shoppers could reach Hyde Park for a nickel on a lightweight electric streetcar. A pharmacy, grocery, a gas pump, and the city’s best soda foundation lined 13th Street by 1910. Even then, the narrow streets and canopied boardwalks invited bicycle riding and walking. **Fraternal Order of the Oddfellows** hosted Saturday dances in their red-brick meeting hall (left).

South on 13th to Fort Street

Turning south on 13ths we follow the streetcar line. Notice the circle cemented and bricked into center of the intersection. The circle recalls the turnabout for the light electric streetcar. Passenger’s disembarked and waited while motormen turned the cars.

A grocer in the **Waymire Buidling** (right) adapted to the automobile with a drive-up delivery window. The pressed cement blocks replicated the look of expensive sandstone. Worker pressed the cement at a North End brickyard nearby. Notice also the trolley scene on the south face of the **Waymire Building** (right). **Harry’s of Hyde Park** (left), a sports-bar restaurant, also has trolley mural.

**Two bungalows on 13th Street and Sherman** (right). Sycamores, oaks, chestnuts, and sweet gums predate the neighborhood’s asphalt. By WWI the Craftsman Bungalow had replaced the pattern-book Queen Anne cottage as the neighborhood’s dominate style. Blue and white Bungalows
stand side-by-side on the northwest corner of 13th and Sherman (right). Note the exposed eves, enclosed porches, and the decorative elbow brackets that appear to hold up the roof. Bungalows still dominate the North End Historic District. A city preservation commission regulates the look of the streetscape by requiring the new construction conform to traditional styles.

*Cottage Living* magazine recently praised the architectural mix of North End housing in an article that called Boise “unspoiled” and “a hidden gem.” But the North End is no longer hidden. Featured in *Forbes*, *Sports Illustrated*, and *The Wall Street Journal*, the neighborhood has been transformed into a bar-and-restaurant district with 20,000 car trips each day. One-bath Craftsman Bungalows routinely sell for $300,000. Mountain bikes and Volvos began replacing the Schwins and Chevys after Kelloggs Cornflakes pictured Hyde Park on the back of its cereal box.

Still, the North End recalls the greener places lost to suburbanization. Two elementary schools, a middle school, a high school, a corner store, an ice cream parlor, bike trails, toddler parks, a nature preserve, and the city’s best sled hill are still within a ten-minute walk.

**North Junior High** (right). Art Deco was the vogue when the Federal Works Progress Administration gave Boise its first Junior High—one of the first in the nation to segregate teenagers from “tweens.” The 1936 school overlooked a baseball diamond called Lemp’s triangle. Little leaguers from all over the city still use the field.

**East on Fort to 11th Street**

As we leave the North End we see that history can be urban planning, that architecture can be urban identity, that the politics of preservation can be a longing for the front porch and the corner store. The North End recalls how people interacted before the coming of the automobile. Although Boiseans love their autos and consider driving their birth right, the love of community is more basic in the historic North End. “Urbanity is about mingling,” writes Jane Holtz Kay, a prophet of New Urbanism. “Livable cities are lived-in cities that have worn well over time.”

**Fort Street** was the northern boundary of the territorial city. Regan’s Row (1100 block of Fort Street, left) was the city’s first working class in-fill project. The aquamarine house with yellow trim at 1110 Fort Street (left) is closest to the original Victorian Folk House design.

**South on 11th to Franklin**
Cathedral of the Rockies, 11th and Hayes.  In 1958 the First United Methodist Church broke ground for their handsome cathedral on a street of Victorian houses across from Senator Borah’s old home. Ground was broken again on an $8 million expansion in 2001. Built with sandstone and flagstone from Indiana and Arizona, the cathedral is Modern Gothic. Philadelphia artisans stained and leaded the magnificent glass. Some windows tell secular stories. One panel recalls the territorial founding of Boise. Another has horses and cattle. Others honor Idaho role as the seed of technological innovations—the russet potato, the electronic television, the great Hoover Dam.

Across the field of Boise High School we take in the changing skyline: the silver-grey needlelike spire of the First Baptist Church (far right), the brown glass of the rectangular Boise Cascade Building with its indoor tree atrium (directly ahead), and the chalk-white energy-efficient eleven-story Banner Bank Building (ahead to the left).

East on Franklin to 9th Street

Bush Mansion, 1020 W. Franklin (left). We turn left at the beautifully restored Bush Mansion with its golden oak staircase and roof of copper and slate. Built in 1892 for $6,000, the house is American Queen Anne Victorian. Banker James Bush got his start in mining, having crossed Panama, steamboated up the Columbia, and walked 500 miles to the gold in the Boise Basin. An imposing man with granite fists and a temper, he was known for his prowess in bar fights. His Central Hotel ran freight to the mines from Idaho Street where City Hall now stands.

Boise High School (right). Boise is the oldest of the city’s four high schools, a neoclassical landmark since 1903. Senator Frank Church graduated in 1942. Ten years later KIDO commercial radio began as a science project. The lore of the school includes a steam-boiler basement with mysterious utility tunnels. Renovated in the 1990s, the school won national recognition for modernizing the campus without destroying its link to the past. Consistently the school wins academic acclaim for advance placement courses. In 2006, Newsweek named Boise High the top academic school in the state.

South on 9th to Washington (one block).

Central Christian Church, 615 N. 9th (right). Built in 1910, Central Christian Church with its octagonal dome is Boise’s only example of a style called the “Akron Plan.” Sliding wooden door allowed the chapel to
be subdivided. Boise’s relentless sunshine is melting the lead holding the glass.

**Boise High School Gymnasium** (left). A WPA project completed with federal money in 1936, the flat-roofed high-school gym is the Art Deco twin of North Junior High.

East on Washington to 6th Street.

**Carnegie Library, 815 W. Washington** (right). “More reading, less drinking” was the battle cry of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and its Boise auxiliary called the Columbian Club. Inspired the neoclassical “White City” at the 1892 Columbian Expedition in Chicago, the Boise Columbians wanted a wholesome alternative to smoke-filled reading rooms in saloons. Pittsburgh steel tycoon Andrew Carnegie donated $25,000. Tourtellotte & Hummel designed the brick and sandstone building in the Renaissance Revival style. “Women are good for something in the world beyond simple domesticity,” the *Idaho Statesman* conceded when the library opened in 1905.

**700-600 blocks of Washington** (right). Reflected views of the Carnegie Library, GAR Hall, and the Idaho Statehouse make the box-like **Hall of Mirrors** one of Boise’s most photographed landmarks. Officially the Hall of Mirrors is the Joe R. Williams Building. A state auditor, he was one of the last of an endangered species—an Idaho Democrat. A courtyard monument is a tribute to NASA and ill-fated **Space Shuttle Columbia**.

Next door the state board of education resides in the **Len B. Jordan Building**. Jordan, a governor, lobbied for Alaska’s statehood when he served in the U.S. Senate. Wife Grace Jordan, a fiction writer, gained fame for a Depression-era memoir about the hardscrabble life sheep ranchers in Idaho’s Hells Canyon.

**Geothermal pump house** (left). A 2,000 foot well in a cinderblock parking lot pump house provides geothermal water and heat to nine government buildings. Governor Cecil Andrus extended the hot water system to the capitol building in 1983. Some say Idaho politicians have been in hot water since.

South on 6th Street to Main Street

**Old Ada County Courthouse** (left). In recent years no matter of Idaho statecraft has been more hotly debated than the simple question of where the debates should be held. Overcrowding has forced the legislature to meet in the **Old Ada County Courthouse** (left). Whether the New Deal
landmark is an eyesore or a treasure depends on who you ask. So creepy is the Deco courthouse that Clint Eastwood shot a scene from a cowboy movie in its green-metal attic jail. Stranger still are its awful murals. One badly rendered scene of the founding of Boise has a horror-movie posse of villages with pickaxes and shovels. Another has a distorted pioneer woman with two rights arms. A third depicts men with a noose who appear to be hanging a kneeling Indian with hands tied behind his back. “We have to pay for them but we don’t have to look at them,” said an Ada taxpayer when the courthouse opened in 1940.

Boiseans, nevertheless, rallied by the hundreds to save the old building when the legislature wanted it razed. Bad taste or not, the building was the city’s link to the era of the Great Depression when federal programs saved workers from breadlines. The Ada Courthouse was the county’s most massive work relief project. Its austere geometry perfectly reflected the Art Deco aesthetics of the 1930s New Deal. As for the kitschy murals, they comment, preservationist say, on the emotions of the 1930s and the evolution of taste. Besides, the murals had been glued to plaster and they probably can’t be removed. “Good, bad, or indifferent, the murals are part of our cultural heritage,” wrote historian Arthur Hart.

Central Fire Station, 520 Idaho St. (left). Fire hoses hung inside the tall brick tower of Central Fire Station where horse-drawn wagons were still manned by volunteers. Irishmen built the firehouse from a brickyard nearby. In 1913 the tower overlooked a Basque handball court. Pickpockets worked the alleys. Miners and shepherds who wintered in the capital city found female companionship in hurdy-gurdy brothels like “The Bucket of Blood.”

Irish-made redbrick still dominates the Old Boise Historic District. Landmarks include the 1910 Pioneer Tent Building (left) where immigrant fingers stitched canvas into awnings and wagon covers. Another redbrick Main Street landmark is the Turnverein Building, completed in 1906. Once a German athletic club for gymnastics and polka dancing, the Turnverein shared 6th and Main with an Irish saloon, a Bohemian madam, a brewery, the Idaho Statesman, and Senator William Borah. Jacob’s canal supplied a laundry district where immigrants from Canton pressed collars and cuffs for whites.

Leku Ona, 117 S. 6th St. (right). Paella, chorizos, roasted meats, and stews recall the Basque county at restaurant Leku Ona, a restored sheepherder’s boarding house.

West on Grove to Capital (one block).
Basque Block, 600 block of Grove. The Basque Center on Grove (left) anchors the largest population of Basques outside of their mountainous homeland in France and Spain. The 1864 Jacobs-Uberaga House (left) is shaded by a freedom oak from Gernika, the medieval capital of the Basqueland and a symbol of its independence. The restored boardinghouse is now part of the lively Basque Museum and Cultural Center (left). Next door is the brick Anduiza Building (left) where Basques still play a punishing kind of handball called pelota in a court they call a fronton. Other Basque block landmarks include the Basque Market (left) and authentic Bar Gernika. Engraved spirals in the sidewalks display Basque surnames. A metal sculpture and flag wave the colors of Basque independence. The city closes the block to traffic for dances and social events.

North on Capitol to Main (one block)

Egyptian Theater (directly ahead, left). The 1922 discovery of King Tut’s mummy in his gilded tomb ignited a fashion craze. The Egyptian Theater recalls those opulent times. Opened in 1927 with John Barrymore in the starring role of the legendary lover Don Juan, the Egyptian also premiered Robert Redford’s Jeremiah Johnson and a Mae West movie about a gold-hearted madam from Boise named Diamond-tooth Lil. Jimmy Stewart practiced on the pipe organ while the actor-turned-bomber pilot was stationed at Gowen Field. Barely the landmark survived the frenzy of urban renewal. Restored after Boiseans rallied to save it, the Egyptian with its luxurious balcony seating now hosts concerts and films.

East on Main to 4th

Old Main Street. Proponents of Main Street revitalization need look no further than the Old Boise Historic District where local owned businesses and in brick-and-brownstone storefronts recall the blue-collar come that made Boise a regional hub. Heavy arches of Table Rock sandstone give a brooding medieval look to the Telephone Building at 690 Main Street (right). Rocky Mountain Bell Telephone sold service for six-cents-a-day a year after the building opened in 1899. The Telephone Building butted against the third home of The Idaho Statesman, a pro-abolition, anti-Confederate tri-weekly newspaper at its founding in 1864.

A butcher, a grocer, a brewer, and a row of brass-rail spittoon saloons lined turn-of-the-century Main Street. Today a hookah bar with bikini dancers suggests that not much has change. Push-cart vendor still lavish mustard on sauerkraut hot dogs. Lime-green neon still lights the fog of the Cactus Bar where blacks straps attached to the wall help steady the table
dancers and smokers in denim and work boots still put away dollar drafts.

Fifth and Main. The Veltex Sign recalls the era of the Studebaker when the Fletcher Oil Company serviced the corner with gas pumps. The Romanesque Revival Belgravia Building (right) dates back to 1904.

South on 4th Street; east on Grove

Grove Street at 4th. Visiting Boise in 1891, President Benjamin Harrison asked to see this portion of Grove Street where a French surveyor had planted a remarkable tree farm. Beer King John Lemp and Banker C.W. Moore built their first mansions on Grove Street. Today it is hard to imagine that this street at the edge of downtown was once Boise’s most exclusive address.

Returning to Julia Davis Park on 3rd Street

Conclusion. Two centuries after the pioneers first encountered the Boise Shoshone we reflect on a booming city still growing with a sense of its past. No the hub of an empty desert, no longer a hidden gem, Boise is now a manufacturing center for Hewlett Packard and Micron. Its valley grows faster than any region in the booming Northwest.

Still there are vast stretches of open spaces where Boiseans go to savor the peace of the great outdoors. Whitewater thunders through vertical chasms. Canyon’s house the world largest population of . Wildflowers patch in jagged formations. Cliffs house the world’s most dense population of eagles, falcons, and hawks.

“Boise,” says the New York Times,” is still a mining and farming town at heart. It offers all the outdoor advantages of more ballyhooed Western towns but with less, well, ballyhoo. A rejuvenated downtown and a budding arts community mean that after a day of rafting on the Payette River, mountain biking in the foothills or carving at Bogus Basin Ski Resort you don’t have to turn in with the fading sun.”

The return to Julia Davis. The shade trees of Julia Davis mark the end of historical tour. But the park has much to offer: a Discovery Center with interpretive science exhibits, an art museum, a Black history Museum, the state history museum with its village of pioneer cabins, a old-time small-town bandshell, and the state’s most wondrous zoo. The depot shop provides information. Come back and see us again.
GHOST Tour loop************

10th and Main

The Idanha Hotel opened in 1901 and quickly became the social and political center of life in Boise. This beautiful and historic hotel might have itself become a ghost when it was closed and nearly toppled by a wrecking ball in the 1970s. Fortunately, the hotel was rescued and the guest rooms have now been remodeled into private apartments and the lobby into a restaurant.

The grand old lady has seen her share of plottings, murder and suicide. One of the former hotel's more recent ghosts first appeared almost 40 years ago. He is the spirit of an 85-year-old former bellman who lived in the hotel. While the old bellman was innocently walking in the hall one day, a guest in Room 410 suddenly threw open the door and without warning (SOUND OF MULTIPLE GUN FIRE) fired shotgun blasts down the hallway, hitting and killing the poor old man. The murderous guest was a transient who may have been suffering from delusions. He ran and later (SOUND OF A MUFFLED SINGLE SHOT) committed suicide in the hotel.

It wasn't long before people reported a distinctly eerie something in the air in the fourth-floor hallway. A night clerk said she saw the bellman's ghost strolling through the lobby one night. He looked like a white shadow and walked about a foot off the floor (GHOSTLY SOUND). He would also take the elevator (ELEVATOR SOUNDS) from the fourth floor to the lobby, hijacking guests who didn't want to go to either of those places. Apparently, the old bellman just wasn't ready to die that day.

9th and Main

The most famous criminal to stay at the Idanha was a man named “Dynamite Harry” Orchard, an assassin who confessed to the killing of 17 men. Here in 1905, while unions battled capitalists for control of the Idaho mines, Dynamite Harry came to the Idanha to murder Idaho Governor Frank Steunenberg. The assassin rented a room next to Steunenberg, rigged dynamite to an alarm clock, and planted it under his bed. But the bomb never exploded. Some say Orchard had been smitten by an Idanha chambermaid and decided to dismantle the bomb. Orchard later rigged the bomb to the governor's gate in the nearby city of Caldwell. (BOMB EXPLOSION) Steunenberg died in the blast.

In 1907 the eyes of the world turned to the Idanha when the famous attorney Clarence Darrow came to defend the union leaders who allegedly financed the plot. Senator William “The Lion” Borah, a future Presidential candidate, prosecuted the union and lost. Orchard cheated the gallows with the help of Seventh Day Adventists who claimed the murderer as sudden convert. Sentenced to life in the Idaho pen, he died of natural causes in 1954.

8th and Main

Before the Idanha Hotel, Idaho's finest inn was the two-story Overland House, built in 1864 on this long empty — some say cursed — corner on your left. One day back in 1880 a notorious bad guy named Hank Vaughn galloped down Main Street past the Overland with a couple of sidekicks, Billy and Jim. The drunken gang galloped fired shots into the air (SOUND OF HORSES AND GUNSHOTS), probably creating a panic on the dirt road crowded with wagons and carts. Looking for trouble, Vaughn and the boys ordered the volunteer fire company, which happened to be out testing a new hose, to turn a stream of water on a row of shacks occupied by Chinese immigrants. Just then Jo
Oldham, the 6-foot-4-inch sheriff of Ada County, Idaho Territory, rode up. To avert a shoot-out, the sheriff persuaded the troublemakers to join him in the bar at the Overland. A few drinks later, the sheriff subdued all three with Vaughn's own gun and gave them 48 hours to clear out of Idaho Territory. When the sheriff rode out to their ranch up Dry Creek to check, they were gone.

In a surprising twist, the sheriff moved to the gold-boom town of Idaho City, 40 miles northeast of here, where by 1884 he was running a gambling house like he did the law, with a strong hand and a soft heart. He also ran a fashionable gambling place in Boise before finally retiring to live quietly off his real estate investments.

Capitol Boulevard and Main

We are entering Old Boise, a historic district with many structures dating back to the late 1800s. City Hall, on your left, sits on the site of the former Levy's Alley, a red-light district full of brothels and saloons (SOUNDS OF CLINKING GLASSES, LAUGHTER). Despite anti-vice crusades beginning in the 1880s Levy's Alley flourished well into the 1900s. We need to add the story of a sensation murder of David Levy and the notorious Bucket of Blood. I have this material in my apartment.

The famous actress Mae West ("Why don't you come up and see me sometime?" AUDIO CLIP FROM MOVIE) immortalized one of Boise's most famous shady ladies in a movie called "Diamond Lil." As you might expect, the real "Diamond-tooth Lil" had a gold front tooth with a large diamond set in the middle of it. Lil got in the business when she was 13 with the gangster Al Capone in Chicago. She settled into life as a businesswoman in Boise from 1909 to 1943, running what were politely called rooming houses or female boarding houses. Her famous tooth was buried with her when Lil died in California at age 89.

6th and Main

On your right at the corner of 6th and Main streets is the Boise Turnverein Hall, built of red brick and local sandstone by Boise's large German community. It opened in 1906 as a men's health and social club, with a 600-seat theater upstairs. Many a lively night was spent drinking beer and enjoying the polka here (OM PAH PAH MUSIC).

The ghost who haunts the Turnverein belongs to an actress by the name of Jessica Salisbury. Seems she had a jealous understudy who persuaded the janitor to help her murder the actress. The janitor delivered food to Ms. Salisbury that had been sprinkled with rat poison (SOUND OF SCURRYING, SQUEAKING RATS). The actress died and the janitor, stricken with remorse, hung himself. During the last renovation, the owner reported strange goings-on (GHOSTLY SOUNDS). The coffee pot turned on by itself. Chairs stacked and unstacked themselves. A woman even reported feeling invisible hands clutching her throat as if to strangle her.

5th and Main

Boise was founded in 1863 and by the 1880s had grown into a fairly town. Boise was more ethnically diverse than you might think, but the majority of the population was European and Christian. They were well acquainted with the stories of spirits, ghosts, trolls, vampires, witches and werewolves of their heritage.

Boise's educated citizens certainly knew the ghost in Shakespeare's "Hamlet." They were likely familiar as well with the new horror and science fiction novels that first started appearing about the time Idaho was being explored and settled. Mary Shelley's famous book, "Frankenstein," which first appeared in 1818, is considered the first science fiction
novel. Edgar Allen Poe, an American writer who died in 1849, was a well-known master of horror with tales like “The Fall of the House of Usher” and “The Raven.” And Bram Stoker explored the sexuality and dark secrets of the Victorian era in 1897 with a horror story of a blood-sucking vampire named Count Dracula.

5th and Idaho

Such stories have helped people cope with their terrors of death, disease and darkness since ancient times. Mix those primal human fears with ignorance and anxiety about what might lurk in the vast sagebrush plains surrounding this lonely outpost, and you've got the ingredients for the legend of Big Foot, a myth that exists in a variety of forms throughout the West.

Boise’s Big Foot was a savage giant of a man, half African, half Cherokee, who weighed 300 pounds and ran faster than a galloping mustang. Legend has it that in 1856 a white women rejected his marriage proposal. Enraged, Big Foot supposedly led the local Shoshones on a killing spree that left pioneer wagons charred, victims brutally tortured and men, women and children slaughtered (SOUNDS OF FIRE AND SCREAMS). Big Foot died in a hail of bullets near Boise (GUNFIRE), then later was reported to have died in a shoot-out (MORE GUNFIRE) in New Mexico in 1939. Without any physical evidence, we may never know the truth, if there is any, about Big Foot but we know a lot more about the fears of early settlers.

5th and Bannock

Miners were among the first to come here when gold was discovered in the Boise Basin in the early 1860s. The road to the gold fields took off straight north of here into the Boise Foothills. At one time the boom town of Idaho City was bigger than Portland and Salt Lake City. Idaho City was first called Bannock City and was notorious for violence, including an Indian attack that killed the man who discovered the gold. We need to add something.) Many enterprising businesspeople soon learned, however, they could make more money growing food in the fertile Boise River valley and selling it and other supplies to the miners — and the town of Boise hasn't stopped growing since.

Of course, not everybody is willing to work for their pot of gold. Robberies were a constant threat as the precious mineral was hauled back and forth over rugged dirt roads.

6th and Bannock

Stagecoach robbery story
(Research the history of stage coach robber Charlie Chambers, who escaped from the Idaho State Penitentiary in 1882 and again in 1883. He went to a California prison, was released in 1896 and sent back to the Idaho State Pen. Or, George Hamilton sent to prison for highway robbery. A draftsman and telegraph operator by trade, he designed the dining hall and supervised its construction. In recognition of this services, he was given a pardon in 1898, with the condition that Hamilton leave the state. Despondent over this order and unable to control his drinking, he committed suicide in Nampa the evening of his release.)

Capitol Boulevard and Bannock

On your right you can see the state Capitol building. Right in front of the Statehouse across the street is a statue of Frank Stuenenberg, the governor who was killed by that bomb planted by Harry Orchard. He was a mason, and his hand is pointed in a mason secret. We need to mention the masonic conspiracy theories that ran rampant in Boise and elsewhere.
Coming up on your right is the former federal building, now owned by the state. The offices of Gov. Butch Otter SCARY! I think we should mention something about Otter’s tight pants contest. It’s not gruesome but quirky and pure Idaho. and other state officials are temporarily located here while the Statehouse undergoes a massive three-year renovation. I think we should mention that geothermal heat that keeps our politicians in hot water.

8th and Bannock

These seats of government are potent symbols of a society based on law and order. One of Boise’s most famous law enforcers was Deputy United States Marshal Orlando Robbins. Everybody called him Rube.

Robbins was a constable in Idaho City in 1864 before arriving in Boise in 1882. He was famous for his fearless and relentless pursuit of criminals. It would sometimes take him a week or two, but he nearly always brought in his man – alive.

He sported a heavy mustache and long brown beard — an oil painting shows him looking a bit like Gen. George Custer. Maybe that’s because Robbins was an Indian fighter, too. He battled the Nez Perce in 1877, which led to the tribe’s tragic 1,500-mile flight to Canada where Chief Joseph famously declared, “I will fight no more forever.” Robbins fought in the Bannock War of 1878 and was chief scout for the U.S. Army in the Sheepeater Campaign. Robbins was just as single-minded in the war on demon rum. He got religion in the growing temperance movement in the 1870s and fought against the use of alcohol until he died in 1908.

8th and State

Coming up on your left you will see the old Carnegie Library and its wide grassy grounds. Thanks to philanthropist Andrew Carnegie, the city library was able to expand from a single reading room to this lovely structure in 1905.

Now, imagine a time before Boise had a library. It’s 1892 and this street is lined with homes large and small. On the grounds of the former library sat a two-story home, perhaps in the shade of those towering pine trees. The house belonged to Jesse Black, who owned a cigar store downtown. The Black household included a young cigar maker named Dan O’Brien, a friendly, jolly Irishman who was no more fond of drink than any other man, according to the newspaper.

Now sit back and let us tell you one of Boise’s most famous ghost stories.

8th and Washington

On a moonlit night in November 1892, Dan O’Brien was sleeping peacefully in his room. In the middle of that cold, dark night, he awoke drenched in sweat, scared half to death by the sensation that someone else was in the room. He called out. There was no reply. A chair moved (SOUND OF CHAIR SCAPIING FLOOR). The door rattled and clicked as though being shut behind someone, (SOUND OF DOOR CREAKING SHUTTING). He saw no one. He heard a voice. (WHISPERS)

The next morning, Mr. Black got a good laugh out of O’Brien’s story. All day O’Brien tried to shake off his feeling of dread but couldn’t do it. He persuaded a friend of his, a Mr. Weaver, to stay with him the next night. At midnight, O’Brien heard scary rattles and bumps, turned on a lamp and awoke Weaver. They shuddered at what happened next. A
bright light suddenly burned and began moving on the bedroom wall. The men described it as someone writing with a trail of fire, though they couldn’t make out the letters.

8th and Franklin

Poor O’Brien was speechless, frozen with fear. Weaver managed to call out to Mr. Black, who ran into the room. Meanwhile, O’Brien remembered that the spirit of the night before had said a dead sister would write a message on the wall. Just then, the flaming trail of writing returned and all three men fled the room in terror. Later that same night, O’Brien saw faces on the wall of another room. The other two thought he had was losing his mind, truly scared out of his wits.

You can imagine how fast word of the eerie goings-on spread along 8th Street and through town. Hundreds of onlookers flocked to the house, hoping for a glimpse of something other-worldly. On the third night 30 brave souls, including what the newspaper called reliable businessmen, gathered in O’Brien’s bedroom. They weren’t disappointed. There was no writing in fire but they all heard tapping (TAPPING SOUNDS) in different parts of the room and indescribably strange noises (STRANGE NOISES). O’Brien bolted from the house in a panic and never returned. The Blacks moved out of the house for good, too. No word on whether O’Brien ever regained his senses.

7th and Franklin

As the story swirled around town, a deputy marshal reported that a similar event had occurred in the house 12 years earlier, before it was moved to 8th Street. People said they had moved out of the house because doors opened mysteriously and they felt weird sensations. Several people, it seemed, had died in the house, so it’s hard to say whose spirit was revealing itself to poor old Dan O’Brien and friends.

Remember Rube Robbins, the lawman and Indian fighter we told you about? After he joined the temperance movement, he allowed the Ensor Institute for curing alcoholism to move into his own home a few blocks away. Just two days after the Ensor Institute moved in, a man by the name of “Pancake Bill” Nelson died there of a fit brought on by delirium tremens.

What caused Pancake Bill’s pitiful state? Well, Bill had volunteered to stay in the 8th Street home and unravel the mystery. Turns out it was Bill who became unraveled. After visiting the house, he went straight to the Ensor Institute, delirious. He never spoke of his experience at the haunted house and his story died with him.

6th and Franklin

The home eventually vanished to make way for the library, taking with it one of Boise’s best ghostly mysteries. Who wrote on the walls with fire and what were they trying to tell us?

5th and Franklin

The large white house on the corner to your left was built by the O’Farrell family, who were among Boise’s first pioneers. John O’Farrell was an Irishman who worked the goldfields of the West before settling in Boise as a blacksmith. He and his wife had seven children. One of their daughters was convicted of embezzlement, a common crime among women in the 1930s, and spent five years in prison. When we get to Fort Street at the end of this block, look up Fort Street to your left. You will see the O’Farrell family’s first home, a tiny one-room log cabin built in 1863. It is considered the first family home in
Boise, as well as the first place of Catholic worship. It is the oldest structure still standing in Boise.

4th and Franklin and Fort

We are now entering Fort Street, named for Fort Boise, which was established right here in 1863. Civilians congregated around the fort for safety. When any community of souls gathers, a burial ground is needed, of course, especially 150 years ago when disease, childbirth and accidents cut many lives short. Boise’s first cemetery was located here, but it was poorly situated in sandy soil in the path of a creek. Spring floods would occasionally unearth caskets and bones. The remains of Civil War veterans were dug up and moved to a drier site further up in the hills. Bodies also were buried in Pioneer Cemetery, which we will see in a few moments, starting in 1864. Boise’s first official burial grounds, Morris Hill Cemetery, began accepting the dearly departed in 1882.

3rd and Fort

Entertainment was another important element in early Boise life. Theater evolved from dogfights and drunken brawls in the rough-and-tumble frontier days to opera, musicals and plays. Boise’s first large space for theatrical performances was built in 1869. Traveling troupes of actors brought everything from minstrel shows to Shakespeare to Boise in the late 1800s.

Those early halls are long gone and no ghost stories survive. But you can be sure that just about every theater has its ghost tales. Boise Little Theater, the round building you will see coming up on your left, is no exception.

2nd and Fort

The friendly ghosts at this theater, built in 1957, have been around since it opened. Actors and production people have reported everything from moving props to the sound of someone crying. Some believe the spirits may belong to two men who died in a fire in 1956 at the theater’s first location out by the airport. Others believe they are spirits from that old cemetery at Fort Boise.

How else to explain how a little boy survived after crashing through a trap door onstage (SOUND OF A CRASH)? Fearing the worst, several adults rushed to the basement and were shocked to find the little boy standing upright, completely unhurt. He said a man had caught him, breaking his fall. But the doors to the basement had been locked and no one could ever find the rescuer.

Reserve and Fort

The spirits are unusually active and helpful in the wardrobe room. When a prop can’t be located, actors often find it in the middle of the floor moments later. Some folks report being tapped several times on the shoulder and turning around to find the lost item they were seeking.

One woman saw the full form of a man, oddly wearing bright blue eye shadow, one night. A woman also has been seen walking through walls and fading away before one’s eyes. When a cool breeze rushed through a doorway one day, a dog frantically barked at this unusual wind (SOUND OF BARKING DOG). We’ll hear another story of a barking dog later tonight.

It seems the ghosts at Boise Little Theater believe the show must go on!
In the late 1800s, many of Boise’s most wealthy citizens began moving to the newly fashionable Warm Springs Avenue, where they built mansions and magnificent gardens. A trolley used to take residents and visitors down the avenue to the exotic Moorish-style Natatorium, a natural hot-springs resort.

On your left is Pioneer Cemetery, where many prominent citizens were laid to rest. The Masons and Odd Fellows, two fraternal organizations to which many prominent men belonged, bought the cemetery in 1872. That same year, the Idaho State Penitentiary was constructed at the other end of Warm Springs Avenue. With a cemetery on one end of the street and a prison on the other, the avenue’s residents must have felt confident that could overcome anything, dead or alive.

Gov. Frank Gooding lived at 615 Warm Springs Avenue, in this elegant Queen Anne-style home on your right. Gooding was governor when the 1907 trial of union mining leaders was under way. After receiving angry letters and death threats, Gooding was afraid that union radicals might kill him or his family as they had Steunenberg. Though grand, the house that the state had rented for Gooding felt isolated so the governor, his wife, Amanda, and their two children moved into a third-floor suite at the Idanha where the governor was constantly protected by body guards. Gooding was also the heavy in the Diamondfield Jack Davis murder fiasco. A great story that relates to Diamond Lil.

In 1913 Dr. Carl J. Hill built the colonial house at 916 Warm Springs Avenue, on your left, for $5,000. He was heard saying that he loved the house so much he would never leave it. Apparently, that included in death, too. For reasons unknown, the physician did move out of the house in 1927 and lived in Boise’s North End until he died three years later.

A newspaper columnist reported being at a cocktail party in the house in 1934 and hearing talk about a ghost living there. The next report came 40 years later when the couple who bought the house told the same society columnist that a resident ghost was indeed active. The attic door would open after it had been carefully closed, sometimes twice a day. Noises came from the attic like someone walking or dragging chairs or moving boxes (SOUNDS OF WALKING, DRAGGING). The couple accepted the unusual happenings with good grace and would sometimes take party guests up to the attic to see if they could find the ghost. Later, after learning the story of the home’s original inhabitant, they started talking to Dr. Hill. The hospitable couple even put a rocking chair up in the attic so the old doctor would be more comfortable. (CREAKING ROCKING CHAIR)

1703 Warm Springs

1703 Warm Springs, on your right, looks much different today than it did when John Maynard bought this land for $100 in 1866. The price included a small adobe house. By 1879 the house had been greatly enlarged and included a pointed cupola, which was later removed. The Maynards’ daughter Ruth married Frank Hunt, who served a term as governor in 1900. The couple lived in the house for several years.

One of the Manards’ granddaughters was an adult when she told the story of the night that she, then 6 years old, and her mother sat listening in fear to the sound of feet pacing above their heads. (SOUND OF FOOTSTEPS). The truly frightening thing was, no one
else was home that night. They waited anxiously for the girl’s aunt to come home from a party. When she got there, she too heard heavy, terrible footsteps.  

Though they took the unknown something to be a ghost, the aunt grabbed the family gun and opened the door to the staircase leading to the second story. Closing her eyes tight, she fired twice up the stairwell (TWO SHOTGUN BLASTS). The footsteps continued, then ceased abruptly. The next morning, the bullet holes were found, but the source of those awful footsteps was never discovered.

Old Penitentiary

Today, all that remains of the lavish Natatorium, to your right, is the swimming pool. It was torn down after a violent windstorm in 1934 damaged the resort beyond repair.

Up here on your left, Inmates and visitors would pass under a large stone arch on their way to the Idaho State Penitentiary, a castle-like fortress ahead of us made of local sandstone. The doors clanged (CREAKING, CLANGING SOUNDS) open in 1872. The Old Pen housed 13,000 prisoners before it closed in 1973. Ten men were executed by hanging at the pen, the last one in 1957. This is where assassin Harry Orchard became religious, grew old and served a record 46 years. He was 88 years old when he died in 1954.

Today the Old Pen is a fascinating museum. You also can tour the adjacent women’s ward and the Idaho Botanical Garden, located on the old prison farm.

In all, 50 men and seven women escaped from this place. The first one occurred just a month after the pen opened. The bars on the windows didn’t quite reach the top and a convict named Al Priest slipped out. A Chinese man named Ah Hood followed right behind and neither man was ever caught. The first woman sent to the prison was a Native American named Henebe, who escaped in 1887. She went over the wall and made it all the way to the Fort Hall Indian Reservation about 200 miles away before she was recaptured.

Lyda Southard

One of Idaho’s most famous inmates was a female charmer named Lyda Southard. She earned the nickname Lady Bluebeard by poisoning four husbands to death. Her MO was always the same: boil the arsenic out of flypaper and serve it in food to the unsuspecting victim after persuading him to take out a sizeable life insurance policy. In 1931 she and a man from the main prison hatched an escape plan. By hooking two garden trellises together for a ladder, she scaled the wall of the women’s ward and the pair lived on the outside for several months before parting ways. She may well have knocked off her fifth husband if she had not been caught after 15 months on the lam and returned to the women’s ward to serve another 11 years. After getting out of prison in 1941 she actually married a sixth husband who — surprise! — disappeared without a trace two years later. Southard died in 1958 and is buried in her hometown of Twin Falls.

929 Warm Springs

C.C. Anderson built the Golden Rule of Boise, a downtown department store, into a chain of 35 stores. He became a wealthy man and built this beautiful Tudor manor and formal back yard gardens designed by the famous Olmstead firm that built Central Park in New York City.
He may be the person behind this story of a horseman who nearly every day went out for a ride every morning into the Foothills. Though he was a driven businessman, he was praised after his death for his extraordinary kindness and generosity.

There is a story that surfaces every few years in an elementary school near here that little girls would walk to school and hear horse steps behind them. They would turn and find no horse. A similar story was told by children became lost on the way to school. As they wandered angry and frustrated, they would hear the sound of a horse behind them, coming up so close they were afraid to turn around, so would run until they were exhausted. Then the horse sounds would stop, and they would feel warm arms pick them up and hear an old man's comforting voice say that he would take care of them and ask them if they would like a ride on his horse. Of course, they said yes. Soon the child would find himself or herself safely back at school.

What else would you expect from a man who names his store after the Golden Rule?

Pioneer Cemetery

Rube Robbins
Frank Gooding
Story from Steve Barrett
George Shoup and Jesus Urquides were in the Indian Wars. Is Adelman Buried here? Also, Merle Wells is here and I have some great Merle Wells stories. Finally, this is a chance to talk about the mysterious masons. This is also near Spanish Village and there is a legend of Spanish town gold mine.

1st and Idaho

On your left is the Idaho Heritage Inn, home to one of Idaho’s most famous politicians, Frank Church, who served for 24 years in the U.S. Senate until 1980. It was built in 1904 and purchased by Gov. Chase Clark in 1943. His daughter, Bethine, married Frank and the couple kept the home as their Idaho residence during their tenure in Washington, D.C.

2nd and Idaho

Coming up on your left is the Assay Office, looking much as it did when it opened its doors in 1872 to miners digging gold out of the hills around Idaho City. On your right, where this parking lot is now, sat the home of Frank Church’s grandfather, one of the first assayers. The family lived in the Assay Office until 1895 when they built their own two-story home across the street. What a great commute! In 1973 the old house burned in a strange fire (SOUNDS OF FIRE) and was torn down, ending the strange and spooky saga — as far as we know (SPOOKY GHOST SOUNDS) — of a ghost named Eddy.

The Churches had five children, including a youngster named Clair. One day Clair was playing in the garage where he found some turpentine and, as kids sometimes do, took a drink. With today’s medical care, he might have survived but back then he died a horrible death. Clair was only 5 years old and the family was devastated to have lost their sweet little boy.

3rd and Idaho

Church family members lived in the house until 1953 when it was sold and became a rental. After the 1973 fire, the last occupant reported numerous spooky events in her three years in the house with “Eddy,” a ghost who got his name from people who heard a
disembodied voice coming from the house forlornly calling out “Eddy.” There was a child associated with the house named Elmer Edmund around 1900.

The renter, who was unaware of the home’s history when she moved in, said she got bad feelings from her very first night. She could feel a current like electricity between an upstairs bedroom and the attic. One night the bathroom light went out while she was bathing. A moment later the light came back on – and the bathwater turned stone cold. She heard unaccountable noises, like the tinkling of a bell (SOUND OF TINKLING BELL). For several months, she heard someone calling for help.

4th and Idaho

Eventually, the renter saw Eddy’s form, the round, baby face of a young boy contained in what can only be described as an intensely bright, moving ball of energy that passed through walls. One day as she was sitting in the back yard, her 3-year-old son pointed to the attic window and said, “Can’t you see that boy up there?” Another one of her sons had to move out of the upstairs bedroom with the bad vibes when he woke up having difficulty breathing.

About a year before the fire, the renter took in a boarder to help pay the bills. She gave him the attic above the second story with a warning that it was Eddy’s territory. The man, who said he was a non-believer, wasn’t worried, but the first night he got the willies so bad he kept the light on all night. The second night, he woke up to find himself trapped in the attic by a fire. He jumped out the window and survived but had to spend a few days in the hospital. The fire destroyed the attack and the upstairs. The official explanation: faulty wiring.

5th and Idaho

The renter had another explanation. She said Eddy did it – maybe an angry little boy playing with matches? He moved to the basement, she said, where one of her friends tripped – or was he tripped up by an unseen hand? – and took a terrible tumble down the stairs while helping move stuff out of the house. This man, also claiming to be a non-believer, became unusually unnerved by inexplicable events in the basement and got the heck out of there. After the house was razed, no one heard from Eddy again.

6th and Idaho

We are now entering the area where Boise’s Chinatown once existed. This is where immigrants who were drawn to the Boise Basin by gold. Idaho Street between 6th and 8th streets once were lined by laundries, bars and restaurants as well as homes and gathering places for Boise’s sizeable Chinese community.

In 1916 local residents first spotted a woman in a blue dress who appeared and disappeared in Chinatown quite mysteriously. Rover, an enormous St. Bernard dog who liked to hang around the Canton Café, would announce her presence with a piercing howl. The woman, who wore a white scarf around her neck that billowed in the wind and long, loose hair. When she appeared on several successive nights, four Chinese men reported to the police that the woman in blue would stand in front of the former Midway saloon. When they approached, she disappeared into thin air. Tunnel legend?

Capitol Boulevard and Idaho

To quiet down the dog and make the apparition go away, the cooks would shove bowls of meat and vegetables under Rover’s nose to make him stop howling and to appease the spirit. Naturally, she didn’t appear the night the policeman investigated, but a couple of
nights later, she sprang out of nowhere and several Chinese men watched her walk to
the corner, gesture toward the saloon and walk in the alley. They men trailed her until she
suddenly — POOF! — vanished. The next night a newspaper reporter didn’t see a
woman’s form but did see a scarf and wind-whipped hair. At that instant Rover stopped
barking and began eating. The specter vanished.

8th and Idaho

Eventually it was decided that the best way to make the mysterious lady in blue go away
was to make Rover go away. Though he was fond of his station by the door of the
Canton Café, he was sent away to live many miles from here to live on a ranch and be a
companion for a little girl who lived there.

Local café owners weren’t sorry to see Rover go. He was costing them a fortune in fried
rice and steaming bowls of vegetables every night. But, most of all, they were happy to
see the lady in blue disappear. Without Rover’s howl to announce her presence, she
never made an appearance again.