

A Hard Places Driving Tour

Todd Shallat and Molly Humphrey, with John Bertram

Austere places of repellent beauty are the most ordinary of American landscapes yet the most disdained and misunderstood. In a society that cherishes wealth, equating success with virtue, memories repress misfortune. Historic preservation can contribute to that memory loss. In Ada and Canyon counties, of the esteemed 201 “historically significant” sites on the National Register of Historic Places, only hay barns and a Boise dairy recall the manual toil of everyday lives. Two-thirds of those National Register listings are mansions, mausoleums, and banks. No plaques memorialize migrant housing. None recall the irrigators without irrigation, the paupers remanded to poor farms, or the whiskey-and-morphine districts where risk-takers gambled and lost.

This driving tour features 24 alternative sites. Recovered from history’s void, most meet the National Register’s criteria for historic places, being older than 50 years and “associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.” We group them loosely by type: the *forgotten* places, nearly lost to community memory; the *neglected* places, too common for veneration; and the *misunderstood* places, remembered in ways that obscure the darker side.

Tour maps (pp. 131-133) mark the woeful places on a valleywide driving tour.

The Forgotten

1 *Levy's Alley, Boise*



UCLA

"CRIB GIRL," 1897

Downtown alleys from 6th to 9th, between Main and Idaho streets, now mostly occupied by city hall

Prostitution flourished in downtown Boise before and during the gold rush era. In the 1890s, prostitutes rented small rooms and shanty "cribs" behind about 20 saloons on Main Street. Levy's Alley, named after a notorious brothel landlord, anchored the east end of the district on the block now occupied by Boise City Hall. Women's temperance organizations worked with Boise mayors to eradicate prostitution by closing saloons. Boise's temperance fountain, dedicated in 1910, stands on the northwest corner of City Hall Plaza as a reminder of the anti-saloon, anti-prostitution crusade.

2 *Orchard Town Site, Ada County*



MOLLY HUMPHREYS

ORCHARD SCHOOLHOUSE

At the junction of the Union Pacific Main Line Railroad and Orchard Access Road, east of Boise and 4 miles south of the Boise Stage Stop off I-84

In 1883, with the coming of the Oregon Short Line, two speculators established a fruit ranch and invested in an ill-fated reservoir and canal from Indian Creek. Water rights were advertised, prune trees and potatoes were planted, and in 1895 the town site of Orchard was platted and registered with Ada County. Drought and dust had forced most homesteaders from the town site by the time the railroad rerouted the main line in 1925. Today only a rail crossing, clapboard schoolhouse, and steel water tower remain.

3 *Hendrickson Shootout, Boise County*



MOLLY HUMPHREYS

HENDRICKSON'S HEADSTONE

About 50 yards off Boise Ridge Road north of Eagleson Summit, approximately 10 miles north of the Boise Barracks

On July 31, 1940, in a small cabin on U.S. Forest Service land near Bogus Basin, a posse of at least 50 men gunned down homesteader Pearl Royal Hendrickson. African American, he had been a WWI combat doughboy before retreating to his foothills homestead. Well liked, he watched after open-range livestock, tended a garden, and survived mostly on bear meat. In 1936, when the Forest Service sectioned off his homestead for Bogus Basin, Hendrickson went to court and eventually lost title to his homestead claim.

Hendrickson, in protest, barricaded the homestead with scrap metal from abandoned cars. He shot and killed the first two federal marshals sent to evict him. FBI agents, sheriffs, state police, and prison guards with machine guns laid siege and opened fire. Hendrickson kept them at bay for 4 hours with a single rifle. Wounded but captured alive, he died en route to a Boise hospital. A headstone marks his grave in Morris Hill Cemetery.

4 *Five Mile Cemetery, Meridian*



MOLLY HUMPHREYS

HOMESTEADER HEADSTONES

At 2400 W. San Remo Court, off W. Ustick Road via Towerbridge Way

Seven graves on a tiny plot in an upscale subdivision mark the misfortune of homesteaders cut short in life. Enclosed by the Meridian's BridgeTower subdivision, the cemetery recalls the heyday of dry farming along Five Mile Creek.

Only two of the seven lived past their 40th birthday. In 1883, Hercules Young of Missouri arrived with his wife to farm 120 acres. He patented the land in 1889 but died the following year. Brothers George and Samuel Nisbet, also emigrants from Missouri, filed claim on nearby homesteads. Samuel died at age 35, less than 6 months after receiving his homestead patent. George received his patent after his death at age 40. The brothers share a single marker. Nina McGinnis, daughter of area homesteaders, is the youngest resident of the Five Mile Cemetery. She died at age 13.

5 *Riverside Hooverville, 8th Street, Boise*



LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

HOOVERVILLE SHANTY

West of the 8th Street Bridge, on the banks of the Boise River

In the 1930s, in the depth of the Great Depression, the homeless built tarpaper shantytowns near depots and rail yards. Called "Hoovervilles" in disdain for President Herbert Hoover, they housed the evicted and dispossessed.

In Boise they clustered in encampments near bridges where abutments and levees stabilized the wandering floodplain. Residents were mostly young men—"not hoboes," said a railroad official quoted in the *Idaho Statesman*, "just boys who don't know where they are going nor why." Smaller camps dotted the junglelike hollows hidden by willows and brush.

Hoovervilles swelled in Boise as the average income of Idahoans, from 1929 to 1933, plunged by 50%. New Dealers responded with farm relief, construction projects, and 270 Idaho camps for 80,000 workers under the supervision of FDR's Civilian Conservation Corps.

6 *German POW Camp, Upper Deer Flat, Canyon County*



©BRIGITTE CARNOCHAN 2008

SURRENDERING POW

At the junction of S. Powerline and Deer Flat Road, east of State Highway 45, south of the New York Canal

Only a shack remains of the Upper Deer Flat camp, one of six in southwestern Idaho. In all, 18 Idaho "branch camps" radiated from the War Department's prison compound near Paul. German soldiers captured in combat worked for Idaho farmers under light security. Inmates slept in tents on a cement pad on the Swartz farm south of Nampa where the Upper Deer Flat Branch Camp was located in May 1945. Another branch camp held prisoners near the junction of Franklin Boulevard and Ustick Road.

The Neglected

7 *Morris Hill Cemetery, Boise*



MORRIS HILL CEMETERY

At 317 N. Latah, off Emerald Street on the South Depot Bench

Mayor James Pinney signed City Ordinance 60 in June 1883, officially establishing Morris Hill Cemetery. Elaborate crypts mark the graves of the wealthy. Paupers share the mostly anonymous Ada County section near the cemetery's northeast corner along Emerald Street. Dozens were hastily buried during the 1918 flu pandemic. Many were enclosed in wooden coffins and planted under slabs of hand-etched concrete. Other graves were simply unmarked.

8 *Idaho State School and Hospital, Nampa*



STATE SCHOOL AND HOSPITAL

At 1660 11th Avenue North, off I-84

This facility, located on the outskirts of Nampa, was established in 1911 as the Nampa State School and Colony to house profoundly mentally and physically disabled children. When Whitehall Dormitory opened in 1918, there were 40 residents. However, once admitted to the institution it was almost guaranteed that a child would never leave. Eventually the State School and Colony became a warehouse for the severely disabled of any age, and dormitories were filled substantially beyond capacity.

Institution directors recommended sterilization of the mentally incapacitated to prevent them from producing any more social misfits.

The Idaho Legislature passed this into law in 1925 and sterilizations began at the hospital in 1931. What they did not pass was sufficient funding for adequate staff, building maintenance, or new construction. By 1956, more than 900 severely challenged residents were residing in cramped dormitories stacked in bunk beds sometimes three high. Whitehall was on the verge of being condemned in the 1960s after the roof collapsed several times and the urine-rotted wood floors of the upper-story wards started to sag. Initially, residents were simply moved to the bottom floor. Eventually they were rehoused in other buildings or sent to State Hospital North in Orofino.

9 *Overland Trailer Park, Boise*



FIRE-RAVAGED MOBILE HOME

At 5615 Overland Road

Boise's first trailer park was established in 1947 near the corner of Curtis and Overland roads as affordable housing for returning soldiers at the close of World War II. Since that time, it has been home to the poor, disabled, elderly, and recent immigrants with limited English speaking ability, all members of the community that are often ignored.

In the early winter of 2006, as the temperatures dipped into the freezing zone, the City of Boise threatened to cut power to the park because of the imminent fire danger posed by an electrical system that had not been updated since the park was established. The problem was identified when a couple was found living in a burned-out shell of a trailer earlier that fall. The park owner was given 5 days to initiate the repairs or residents would be evicted. Many residents owned their homes and planned to stay even if the power was shut off. The trailers were from the 1970s or earlier and too old to move. If residents abandoned their homes, they would be left with nothing.

10 *Abandoned Mines at Pearl, Gem County*

GEM COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



PEARL, IDAHO, 1902

Pearl Road, off State Highway 55 south of Horseshoe Bend, about 8 miles southeast of Emmett

Hard times in the hard rock mines were what most hopeful miners experienced when they arrived in the developing town of Pearl in the late 1890s. Wages were the equivalent of \$10 to \$11 in today's market, but the work was extremely demanding and often incredibly dangerous. Rising early, miners spent most of their working hours in the damp, dark mines. On a daily basis miners were exposed to toxic cyanide leaching compounds that caused suffocation and lung disease. Extremely sensitive nitroglycerine blasting compounds emitted significant amounts

of carbon monoxide that, if handled improperly, poisoned miners in the shaft. Accidents resulting from falling rock, dynamite blasts, and electrocution were not uncommon.

After a heyday between 1900 and 1907, the town of Pearl began to decline. The large mines began to sink due to the massive amounts of subsurface material removed and profits began to plummet. By the 1970s all active mining operations had come to a halt. Today one can see mining adits, wooden remains of mills, and scarred hillsides, all that remains of the once booming town of Pearl.

11 *Coaling Station at Nampa Train Depot, Nampa*

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



NAMPA COALING STATION

At 1200 Front Street, off 12th Avenue

Some 250,000 American teenagers rode the rails in search of work during the Great Depression. Many were rousted and arrested at the coaling depot in Nampa en route to Yakima or La Grange. "I still feel the sting of a cop's billy club beating on the bottom of my soles from snoozing in a RR station to keep warm," said Bill Bender, a hobo in 1937.

Peggy Easton of Wyoming, arrested for vagrancy, recalled her escape from Nampa after a cold night in jail. "The bulls [railroad police] were patrolling the area with rifles and lanterns. . . . When the engine started up a wave of bums rose up like one person and rushed for that open door. I was the first one there. Someone behind me picked me up by the nape of neck and the seat of the pants and pitched me into the car."

12 *Convict Quarries, Boise*

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



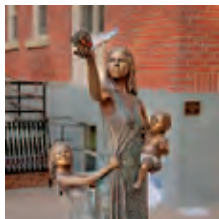
QUARRYING STONE

At 2150 Old Penitentiary Road, off Warm Springs Avenue

Bad men made good roads, according to the prison officials who hoped to profit from prison labor. Idaho needed gravel and sandstone. Its territorial prison fronted the Boise hillside with strata of marblelike stone. In 1893 convicts uncovered a boneyard of "grinning skeletons" said to be Indian graves. Prison labor cut stone in 20-inch blocks for stately landmarks—for Boise City National Bank (1891), the Union Block (1901), and hundreds of Queen Anne layer cake homes. In 1906, with work beginning on the Idaho Statehouse, prisoners expanded the quarry under Table Rock Butte. Broken stone from the original quarry flanks an interpretive trail above the ward for notorious women at the Old Idaho Penitentiary Museum.

13 *Women's and Children's Alliance, Boise*

ANDREW CRISP, BOISE WEEKLY



WCA "TAKING FLIGHT" STATUE

At 720 W. Washington Street

A butterfly of stained glass takes flight from the outstretched hand of a young mother with children in the bronze sculpture in the shadow of the Idaho Statehouse. The sculpture fronts a crisis center that shelters victims of rape and domestic abuse. Founded by church congregations in 1910, the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) of Boise began as a cafeteria and social haven for young ladies in an uncouth city. In 1940, the association moved to Washington Street, and gradually the mission expanded into a women and children's shelter. In 1996, the name changed to the Women's and Children's Alliance (WCA).

14 *Oregon Short Line Rail Bridge, Boise*

JOEL SLAGG



RAILROAD BRIDGE, 1985

At the river along the Boise Greenbelt just west of Shoreline Drive

About 250 young men from Japan worked near Boise on the Oregon Short Line in the decade of Idaho's statehood. Three-man teams lifted lava rocks onto flatcars for levees and bridge abutments. Quarantined for fear of smallpox, they slept outside the city in trackside camps and boxcars. Japanese road gangs, in 1893, completed the two timber trusses that bridged the railroad onto an island and into downtown. A steel structure replaced the wooden truss in 1923.

15 *Old Ada County Jail, Boise*

ADA COUNTY



CELL AT THE COURTHOUSE JAIL

At 514 W. Jefferson Street, now the top floor of the Boise campus of the University of Idaho Law School

Ada County's original jail and courthouse faced Jefferson Street at 6th in 1867. Prisoners used buckets for toilets and slept on straw mattresses on the barren floor. In 1925, the jail held 25 inmates, most of them awaiting their day in court for drinking whiskey during Prohibition.

In 1940, with New Deal labor and funding, the county topped its imposing new limestone courthouse with its austere rooftop jail. In 1980, Hollywood's Clint Eastwood used the jail as a set for a scene in the film *Bronco Billy*, shot mostly in Boise.

16 *Nampa Fire of 1909, Nampa*

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



DOWNTOWN NAMPA, 1907

An entire city block fronting the depot, bounded by 12th and 13th avenues, Front and First streets

On Saturday afternoon, July 3, 1909, a stranger with a cigar accidentally set off the fireworks that ignited the devastation. Within 3 hours, the fire had scorched 25 stores and burned out 60 businesses—about half the business district. Few merchants had fire insurance to cover their loss.

When Nampa's volunteers began fighting the fire, the hose was coupled up and water turned on, but there was no pressure. In changing from wooden to iron pipes, disconnections had been made, rendering the system useless. After receiving a call for help, the Boise Fire

Department loaded their equipment onto a special train and made the run to Nampa, a distance of 20 miles, in 18 minutes. Caldwell also answered the call. Although the fire devastated the buildings and businesses on that block, creating hardships, within a year most had been rebuilt.

17 *Notus Canal and Bridge, Caldwell*

RONALD VAN HOOK



BRIDGE AT CANYON CROSSING

At Canyon Crossing, where W. Plymouth Road spans the Boise River to join Old Highway 30

A deep-cut canal with an unreliable source of water gave false hope to settlers near Notus. Built from 1919, expanded in 1924, the canal tapped a shallow reservoir on the Payette River. In 1941, a Bureau of Reclamation powerhouse increased the flow with a system of pumps.

The original wagon bridge at Canyon Crossing replaced the ferry in 1886. A steel camelback truss improved the crossing for motor traffic in 1921.

18 *Chula Vista Acres, Wilder*

LIBRARY OF CONGRESS



FSA RESETTLEMENT CAMP
WILDER LABOR CAMP, 1941

Southern edge of Wilder, off 5th Street at Simplot Road

Labor camps sprung up throughout southern Idaho during the Great Depression. One of these was established by the Farm Security Administration on the western edge of Wilder to provide new opportunities for farmers and their families fleeing the dust bowl in the Midwest and South. The onset of World War II created a labor shortage, and the predominately white workers at the camp were replaced with Mexican, Jamaican, and Japanese workers. By 1943, the Wilder Labor Camp was the largest and most successful in the state. In the mid-1970s, the Wilder Housing Authority assumed control of the Wilder camp and reinvented it as Chula Vista Acres. Today most of the residents are Latinos working as farm laborers.

The Misunderstood

19 *Fort Boise Refugee Encampment, Boise*

BOISE ARCHITECTURE PROJECT



FORT BOISE OFFICER'S QUARTERS

Above the Boise Barracks, W. Fort Street, between 6th and Reserve

At the base of the Boise foothills, where the road climbed west toward Idaho City, the U.S. Army claimed land as contested as any on the Oregon Trail. Here in 1863 and 1864 more than 300 captured Shoshone endured bitter winters in a tent encampment. Enclosed for their own protection, they shivered and starved without adequate rations or blankets. Some died from tuberculosis. Some wandered away and were shot on sight. In 1865, the camp moved to Arrowrock on the Boise River where the dam now impounds the canyon. In 1867, some 200 refugees were corralled into wagons and shipped to Fort Hall.

More than a century passed before a lawsuit over a housing project uncovered the embarrassing truths. Historians discovered that no ratified treaty had ceded claim to the foothills. The City of Boise has since purchased a grassy hillside overlooking the army barracks that guarded the refugee camp.

20 *Erma Hayman House, Boise*

JOHN BERTRAM



HAYMAN HOUSE

At 617 Ash Street, off River Street

A squat square house of whitewashed sandstone stands among vacant lots in a district slated for urban renewal. To developers, it is land well suited for high-density infill. For preservationists, the small house on Ash Street is a solitary reminder of Jim Crow segregation in a city that, even now, remains too insular to appreciate how stigmas of race and class keep minorities marginalized.

Built in 1895, the Erma Hayman House fronts River Street in a vanishing “colored town” of blacks, Basques, and Slavic Europeans.

Erma Hayman and her husband Lawrence purchased the house in 1950, when covenants barred people of color from housing north of Front Street. Erma—a clerk in downtown Boise, a beloved caretaker to neighbors and children—lived in the house for more than 50 years.

21 *Kuna Caves, Ada County*

GARY PAULSON



ENTRANCE TO KUNA CAVES

Half-mile south of Kuna Road, off Swan Falls Road

Mystery shrouds the snake-infested lava blister 2 miles south of Kuna. Once the entrance was marked by the graves of diphtheria victims. A small stone corral flanked a primitive stage-stop saloon.

Tales of travail abound. Nearby, according to legend, Indians killed a stage driver as he fled toward the stage stop. Another legend has two cowboys, exploring with ropes and lanterns, finding a full skeleton on an underground ledge. There is also the tale of the outlaw who buried \$40,000 in gold-coin treasure, escaping through a secret exit. Allegedly that back door collapsed when dynamite shook a nearby construction site.

Today the caves are on public rangeland. A 35-foot steel-cage ladder makes the lava a popular underground party location.

22 Spanish Village, Boise

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY



MULE PACKER'S CABIN

Off the canal behind the medical office plaza at Second and Main streets

A line of trees shades a downtown canal where elderly mule packers lived out their lives in a circle of cabins. Children imagined the tenants were dwarfs and called the place “tiny town.” But the cabins had once been a depot for mule trains. Entrepreneur Jesus Urquides, its founder, had blazed a supply route to the Boise Basin during the 1863 gold rush. Born in Mexico and seasoned in the Sierra Nevadas, Urquides had employed about 20 Mexican or “Spanish” packers. After 1928, with the death of Urquides, his daughter Dolores Binnard cared for the last of

the aging packers. Bulldozers razed the cabins to make room for parking in 1972.

23 Halverson Bar, Ada County

BOISE STATE UNIVERSITY



WILLIAM “DOC” HISON

Off-road about 3 miles east of Celebration Park in the Morley Nelson Snake River Birds of Prey National Conservation Area

Hard-living men built lava rock cabins on the north banks of the Snake River during the era of railroads. In 1896 a rail bridge at Guffey brought construction workers and sluice miners. Today the site seems forlorn. Among ruins reclaimed by the desert, in a rocky corner of Ada County cut off from motor traffic, it is hard to imagine the life of the loners who terraced the land, dug ditches, and sluiced fine grains of gold.

The most famous was the hermit William “Doc” Hison (aka Hison). Half-black, half-Native American, a thin scrubby man with a sweet honest smile, Hison was called “Doc” for his skill as a healer of sick animals. His closest neighbors celebrated Hison’s 94th birthday in Melba in 1944.

Today a BLM trail branches through the lava ruins of Hison cabin at a cove of the Snake River called Halverson Bar. Ditch irrigation run-off trickles into a pond, stocked for fishing with bluegill, called Halverson Lake.

24 The Curse of Billy Fong, Boise

IDAHO STATESMAN



BILLY FONG

At 706½ Front Street, now the Grove Hotel

Lore has it that Chinese miners somehow built a network of tunnels to connect their opium dens. But there were probably never more than 250 Chinese in downtown Boise and they had no need for tunnels. Businessmen, restaurant owners, apothecaries, doctors, and vegetable farmers, they first clustered in a laundry district near 8th Street. Moved in 1901 when Boise condemned their wooden buildings, they relocated two blocks to Front Street dissected by 7th (Capitol Boulevard).

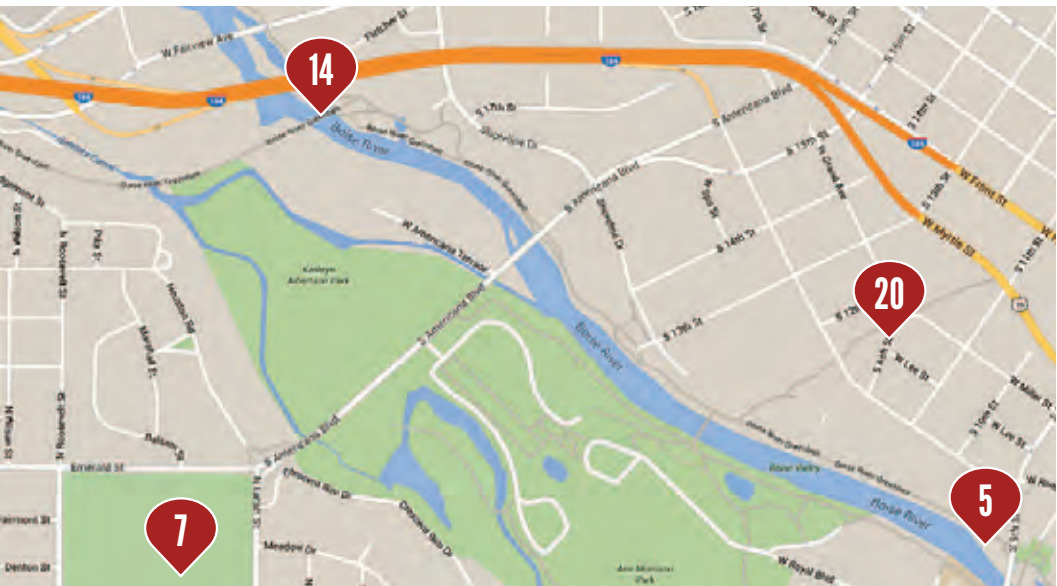
A cook named Billy Fong became a symbol of that district when the Hip Sing Company hired him to occupy its empty building. He had become, said the *Idaho Statesman*, “the last Chinese in Boise.” In June 1972, at age 84, he left the building just hours ahead of its demolition. Fong was not actually chased from Boise. Front Street was already abandoned. But more than 80 buildings had fallen to the frenzy of urban renewal, and some had been cultural landmarks. The devastation left surface parking and crippled commerce downtown.

Legend has it that Fong cursed the construction site as he boarded a bus for San Francisco. Eighteen years passed before the Grove Hotel reclaimed the lot.

Boise: Downtown



Boise: West of Downtown



The Boise Valley

