

## 8 becoming basque

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### Introduction

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**P**oplars and cottonwoods arched over the four-foot canal on the street that gave Boise its nickname, the City of Trees. Grove Street, later planted in elms, once paralleled the Oregon Short Line. In the Gilded Age of the Gothic Revival, when the world came to Boise to invest in the Idaho gold rush, Grove Street was the city's most fashionable address. Water wheels fed flumes and irrigation ditches. Grand villas with gingerbread millwork flanked an opulent French chateau. The chateau, called the DeLamar, was later cut into rooms and remodeled into a Basque hotel. A link in the Basque migration from Bizkaia in northern Spain to the shadows of the northern Rockies, the DeLamar fronted a Chinese-Basque immigrant district. Before 1972, when the DeLamar fell to urban renewal, Grove Street



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Basque shepherders winter in Boise, about 1910.

with its boarding houses was a cultural treasure as joyously rich as any in Boise.

Today, the street that gave Boise its nickname represents the past and uncertain future of downtown's urban renewal. The Grove Hotel now marks the grave of the two-story Hop Sing Building where a Chinese tong from Canton once ran a cultural center. In 1972, in defense of Boise's redevelopment agency, the Idaho Supreme Court upheld the ruling that the Hop Sing was "a serious menace" and "injurious to the public health." Ethnic stakeholders on Grove still fear the wreckage of urban renewal to the west, near

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the entrance to Grove, is a brewing dispute over a phalanx of bus ramps for an underground transit center. Neighbors foresee a traffic nightmare. To the east in the grey-field of surface parking the concern is that glassy construction might dwarf Grove Street's pedestrian scale. If the damage can be mitigated, if the city can work to preserve a walkable streetscape, a treasure unique to Boise can still tell meaningful tales.

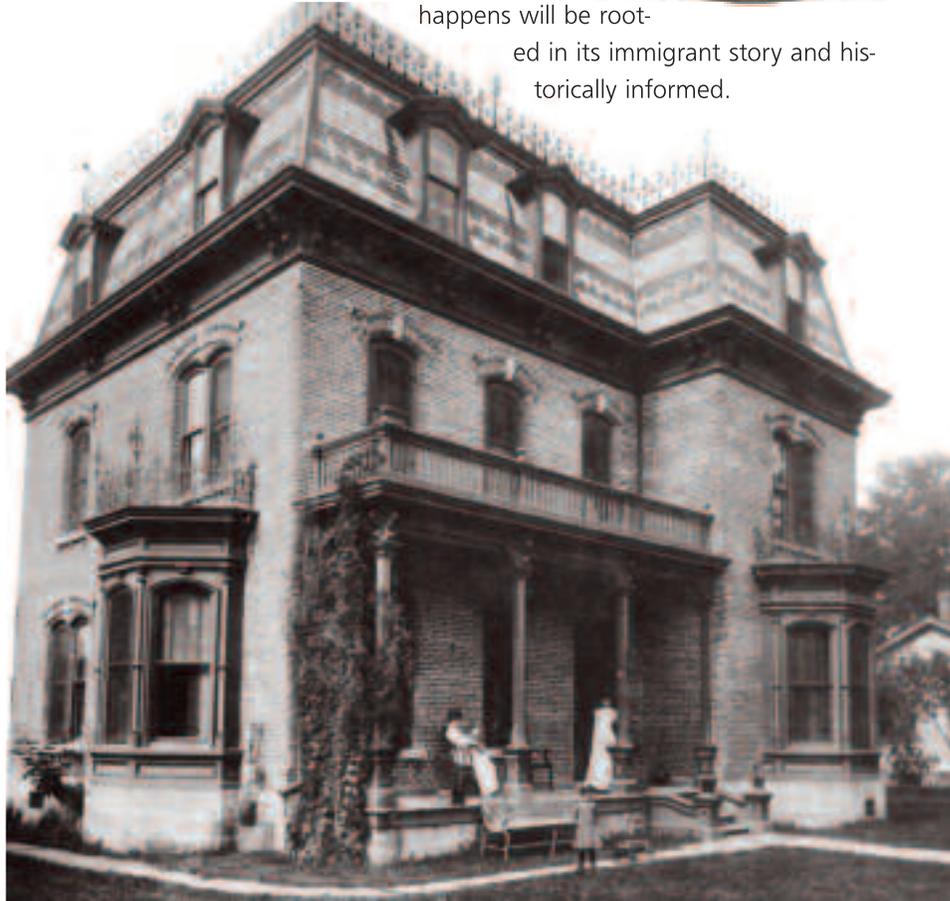
We dedicate this book to the hope that whatever

happens will be root-

ed in its immigrant story and historically informed.



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Plans for an Eighth Street transit complex place bus ramps and an office building within 50 feet of Grove Street's cultural district. Opposite: the DeLamar, a Basque hotel from 1912 to 1972; Hinkey token, Anduiza Boarding House, 619 Grove Street.

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Mike Edminster



Brick warehouses became restaurants and a distillery on the north side of Grove Street. In 2001, the Basque Block won top Idaho honors for historic preservation.

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The Basque identity at the heart of our story was not always so mainstream quintessential. "Filthy, treacherous and meddlesome" was how the *Caldwell Tribune*, in 1909, disparaged the valley's immigrant Basques. "These Bascos," the paper continued, were no less foreign and clannish than straw-hatted Chinese. Boise-based fear of the Basques fueled Protestant nativism in

the WWI-era campaign to shut off immigration. Poor, dark-haired and Roman Catholic, the Basques seemed a cultural threat. Some Basques responded by booking passage back to their homeland along the French-Spanish border. Others sought ethnic assimilation—speaking English, playing American sports, aping the dominate culture. Few of those Boise Basques from the first generation could have foreseen the rise from sheep camps to white collar status as teachers, entrepreneurs and politicians, even secretary of state.

It took that process of assimilation about three generations for the children of the immigrant children to pridefully value old world traditions and strive to reclaim what was lost. “Grandchildren fight to remember what their parents wanted to forget,” said the sociologist Marcus Lee Hansen in words that capture the theme of our book. Several of our fourteen contributors are Basque from that third generation. Most are university students working with professional mentors. Their narrative essays, herein, are the fifth in a Boise State University series of community research reports. Collectively they seek to explain how the Basqueness on Grove Street became as genuinely basic to Boise as Bogus Basin or business suits with cowboy boots on Republicans in the Idaho Statehouse. A study of cultural persistence—of heritage and assimilation, of politics, music, food, sports, language, dance, religion and landmarks—*Becoming Basque* is also a book about becoming a Boise Idahoan on a street that connects who we were to the ethnic mosaic we are.

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