

This Urban Idaho

When Congress created the Idaho Territory on the last day of the session in 1863, the new territory, carved from Washington State, had more residents than Puget Sound. Quartz, silver, and gold brought Confederate and Union refugee alike into the Idaho territory in massive numbers. Idaho's first year population of 32,342 dwarfed Oregon's 9,083 residents and Washington's 3,695.¹ That original population boom in Idaho was a harbinger of things to come: a population concentrated, but not yet urbanized.

Growth in Boise Basin cities accelerated in 1864 when the federal government authorized the construction of Fort Boise to protect the growing mining industry from Indian troubles. With the soldiers in place, commerce and agricultural production grew around the military presence and extractive resource trade. Boise in one year's time became the new capitol of the territory, replacing Lewiston, and saw its population grow to 725 in 1864 while Lewiston's declined to 414.²

Other Idaho cities at the time were larger still. Idaho City boasted a population of 6,275; Centerville 2,638; Pioneer 2,743; and Placerville 3,254³ - the population concentrating near mining strikes. Almost half of Idaho's residents lived in the Boise Basin in 1864, nearly 40 percent in the Virginia City region (now in Montana, just outside of Idaho), with the remaining 10 percent in the Lewiston region.

Though population concentrated in those areas, Idaho retained a rural character. By 1890, the year the Federal government admitted Idaho to the Union, no more than 29 percent of Idaho's population lived in what could be considered an urban area.⁴ The state's population that year totaled 88,548.

Still, the West largely remained the frontier. Of the 100 largest urban areas in the U.S. in 1890, only seven were cities on the Pacific Slope: San Francisco (8) with 298,997; Los Angeles (57) 50,395; Oakland (60) 48,682; Portland (61) 46,385; Salt Lake City (63) 44,843; Seattle (70) 42,837; and Tacoma (84) 36,006.⁵ Boise, Idaho's largest city by far, counted 3,391 residents in the census published June 1, 1890.

In 2004, 29 of the nation's 100 largest cities are located on the Pacific Slope. Despite its

Ten Largest Idaho Cities in 1890		
Rank	City	Population
1	Boise	3391
2	Rexburg	2967
3	Moscow	2861
4	Pocatello	2330
5	Idaho Falls	1558
6	Preston	1505
7	Montpelier	1379
8	Franklin	1330
9	Dayton	1230
10	Caldwell	1194
Blackfoot, Oakley, Bellevue, Hailey, Lewiston, and Malad each had over 1000 in regional population.		
From Merrill ¹ D. Beal and Merle Wells, <i>History of Idaho</i> . Vol II. (New York: Franklin Historical Publishers, 1959) ix.		

recent growth, Salt Lake City the nation's 63rd largest city in 1890, has fallen from the list, as has Tacoma, WA. Boise, ID currently ranks as the nation's 112th largest City with an estimated population of 190,122 residents.⁶

As former University of Idaho Professor Carlos Schwantes writes, "It has often been said of the United States that the

nation was born in the country and moved to the city. Idaho, by contrast moved from its mining camps and agricultural villages into the country."⁷ If Schwantes is correct about Idaho's urban beginnings, Idaho has returned to its roots, in a big way.

Idaho's current population boom began in the 1970s at a time when the nation identified Boise as a corporate headquarters town. Construction giant Morrison-Knudsen (now Washington Group) built reclamation projects that helped companies such as Simplot, who in turn sold agricultural products through Joe Albertson's growing retail chain. Simplot also invested profits

into the founding of Micron. Amidst that boom, Boise Cascade and TrusJoist flourished, as Idaho's natural resource economy traditionally had.⁸

The year 1970 marked the first time that more people lived in Idaho's urban areas than in rural areas, and by 1980, after five decades of net out-migration, Idaho posted a net in-migration of 130,000 – a population increase from 1970 of 32.4 percent.⁹ In that period, L.J. Davis (of “Tearing Down Boise” fame) reported in the *New York Times Magazine* that Boise ranked as America's sixth fastest growing city, and Idaho the nation's fastest growing state.¹⁰ This rapid growth represented the shape of things to come.

By 1980, Idaho's population was 54 percent urban; by 1990 57.4 percent; by 2000, 66.4 percent – and all living on .4 percent of the state's land mass.¹¹ By 1990, the U.S. Census Bureau counted two Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) in Idaho: Boise, encompassing Ada and Canyon County; and Pocatello and portions of Bannock County.¹² Growth continued.

In 2006, the Census Bureau counted five MSAs entirely within Idaho's borders – Boise-Nampa, Coeur D'Alene, Idaho Falls, Lewiston, and Pocatello – and a sixth, Logan, Utah which includes Franklin County, Idaho. In addition, Idaho now claims six “micropolitan” areas – boomtowns – within its borders. Blackfoot, Burley, Moscow, Mountain Home, Rexburg, and Twin Falls all have their sites set on being Idaho's next metropolis. Ontario, Oregon, the agricultural powerhouse which includes Payette County, Idaho, also makes the list as a micropolitan climber, as does Jackson, Wyoming which includes Teton County, Idaho, and its recreational tourism - one of the more robust economic sectors in Idaho.¹³

Some areas, such as Boise, grow via centrifugal forces, casting development outward from the city center. Others, like Coeur D'Alene, benefit from centripetal forces consolidating

populations from the smaller surrounding towns. However Idaho cities grow, they all face urban growing pains.

The news headlines across the state appear strangely similar. The Twin Falls area *Times-News* in 2005 ran a story from Gooding, ID entitled, “Rural group’s new leader will help cities prepare for growth.”¹⁴ Also in 2005, the *Times-News* editorial board endorsed the concept of local option taxes to help Twin Falls pay for public transportation – a resource available to most urban areas, but not in Idaho where state legislators routinely reject the idea, though perhaps not much longer.¹⁵

In northern Idaho, the *Spokesman Review* ran stories such as, “Post Falls, Idaho, grapples with its growth.”¹⁶ In the Treasure Valley, the *Idaho Statesman* on January 2, 2006, declared, “Small town Boise lives only in memory.”¹⁷ For many Idahoans, growth is shocking, if not surprising. Surprising, though, is that these stories of rapid urban growth are nothing new.

In 1997, Blackfoot, Idaho considered an urban renewal plan.¹⁸ In 1999, Salmon, Idaho residents battled over renewing their urban renewal tax.¹⁹ In 2000, the East Central Idaho Planning and Development Association celebrated its twenty-fifth anniversary.²⁰ The urbanization of Idaho, well documented in the annals of history and the mainstream media, to many in rural Idaho, still represents a well guarded secret.

Urban areas comprised a majority of the Idaho Legislature for the first time in March of 2001.²¹ Thirty-four of the 105 state legislators – nearly a third of the entire legislature - represent Ada and Canyon Counties.²² With the legislature transitioning from rural-agricultural interests to urban-industrial interests, cities, their people, their politics, and their culture will shape the state in ways unimaginable to long-time Idaho residents.

But the story of Idaho, today, like yesterday, is the story of its cities. These cities - from fast growing up-and-comers like Driggs, to the modern metropolis of Boise, point to one certainty: this is no rural state with pockets of civilization. Today, with more than two-thirds of the state concentrated in five metropolitan areas, most Idahoans cannot identify with being part of America's "empty quarter." Rather, they see themselves as part of a national and global trend of urbanization, part of this urban Idaho.

By The Numbers

Idaho Metropolitan Statistical Areas and Primary Cities: Population Totals by Decade 1940 - 2000²³

1. Boise-Nampa (Ada, Boise, Canyon, Gem, Owyhee Counties)

Trend		1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Up	Boise City	26,130	34,393	34,481	74,990	102,249	125,738	185,787
Up	Caldwell	7,272	10,487	12,230	14,219	17,699	18,400	25,967
Up	Eagle					2,620	3,327	11,085
Up	Garden City		764	1,681	2,368	4,571	6,369	10,624
Up	Nampa	12,149	16,185	18,013	20,768	25,112	28,365	51,867
Up	Star						648	1,795
Up	Meridian	1,465	1,810	2,081	2,616	6,658	9,596	34,919

Bolstered by a high quality of life, comparatively affordable housing prices, and some large employers such as HP, and Micron, the Treasure Valley has been booming for several decades. Note that Boise’s population doubled between 1960 and 1970. Nampa nearly did the same between 1990 and 2000. Between 200 and 2004, Canyon County added 26,597 residents – a 20.4 percent increase in total population, which now stands at 158,038, making it also one of the nation’s fastest growing counties in 2004.²⁴ Meridian’s population nearly quadrupled between 1990 and 2000!

2. Lewiston

Trend	Year	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Up	Lewiston	10,548	12,985	12,691	26,068	27,986	28,082	30,904
Up	Lapwai	426	480	500	400	1,043	932	1,134
Neutral	Culdesac	219	175	209	211	261	280	378
Neutral	Genesee	678	552	535	619	791	725	946
Neutral	Juliaetta	337	365	368	423	522	488	609
Down	Kendrick	407	409	443	426	395	325	369
Up	Orofino	1,602	1,656	2,471	3,883	3,711	2,868	3,247
Down	Weippe				713	828	532	416

Lewiston, the original territorial capitol, shows signs of a comeback. It, like Coeur D’Alene, shows centripetal growth – Lewiston the traditional urban center is consolidating population from smaller outlying cities. This is most likely a response to Idaho’s changing economy, one that now is based upon services and manufacturing – typical economic sectors in

urban centers. Lewiston more than doubled its size between 1960 and 1970 – the same years as its rival Boise.

3. CDA/Post Falls

Trend	Year	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Up	Coeur d'Alene	10,049	12,198	14,291	16,228	19,913	24,563	34,514
Up	Post Falls	843	1,069	1,983	2,371	5,736	7,349	17,247
Up	Rathdrum	511	610	710	741	1,369	2,000	4,816
Up	Hayden			901	1,285	2,586	3,744	9,159
Down	Harrison	362	322	249	249	260	226	267
Down	Kellogg	4,235	4,913	5,061	3,811	3,417	2,591	2,395
Down	Worley	241	233	241	235	206	182	223
Neutral	St. Maries	2,234	2,220	2,435	2,571	2,794	2,442	2,652
Down	Pinehurst		2,183	1,432	1,934	2,183	1,722	1,661
Down	Wallace	3,839	3,140	2,412	2,206	1,736	1,010	960

Shoshone County was the 8th largest County in Idaho in 1950; by 2000 it had fallen to 22nd.²⁵ This region shows the clearest trend of centripetal growth as the populations in Shoshone County moved west to Kootenai County. The decrease in mining explains the decline of towns such as Wallace and Kellogg, town that are reinventing themselves as recreational tourist attractions. In Southern Idaho, Driggs is taking advantage of its proximity to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, and is now listed as a “micropolitan area.” Donnelly, Idaho, also in the southern part of the state, is also pursuing recreational tourism with the construction of Tamarack, the first full-service resort built in the United States in two decades. Like Kellogg, Wallace, and Driggs, Donnelly and Cascade are transitioning from a natural resource (timber) economy.

4. Idaho Falls

Trend	Year	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Up	Idaho Falls	15,024	19,218	33,161	35,776	39,739	43,929	50,730
Up	Rexburg	3,437	4,253	4,767	8,272	11,559	14,298	17,257
Up	Ammon	363	447	1,882	2,545	4,669	5,002	6,187
Up	Iona	518	502	702	890	1,072	1,049	1,201
Up	Shelley	1,751	1,856	2,612	2,614	3,300	3,536	3,813
Up	Blackfoot	3,681	5,180	7,378	8,716	10,065	9,646	10,419

With a new LDS Temple in Rexburg, and the conversion of Ricks College to a four year University, BYU Idaho, the Idaho Falls area has now passed the Pocatello MSA in size – which

at one time rivaled Boise and Ada County as the population leader. The Idaho National Laboratory drives patent creation and innovation in Idaho (along with Micron), and employs over 3,400 people in the Idaho Falls region.

5. Pocatello

Trend	Year	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Up	Pocatello	18,133	26,131	28,534	40,036	46,080	46,117	51,466
Up	Chubbuck		120	1,590	2,924	7,052	7,791	9,700
Up	American Falls	1,439	1,874	2,123	2,769	3,626	3,757	4,111

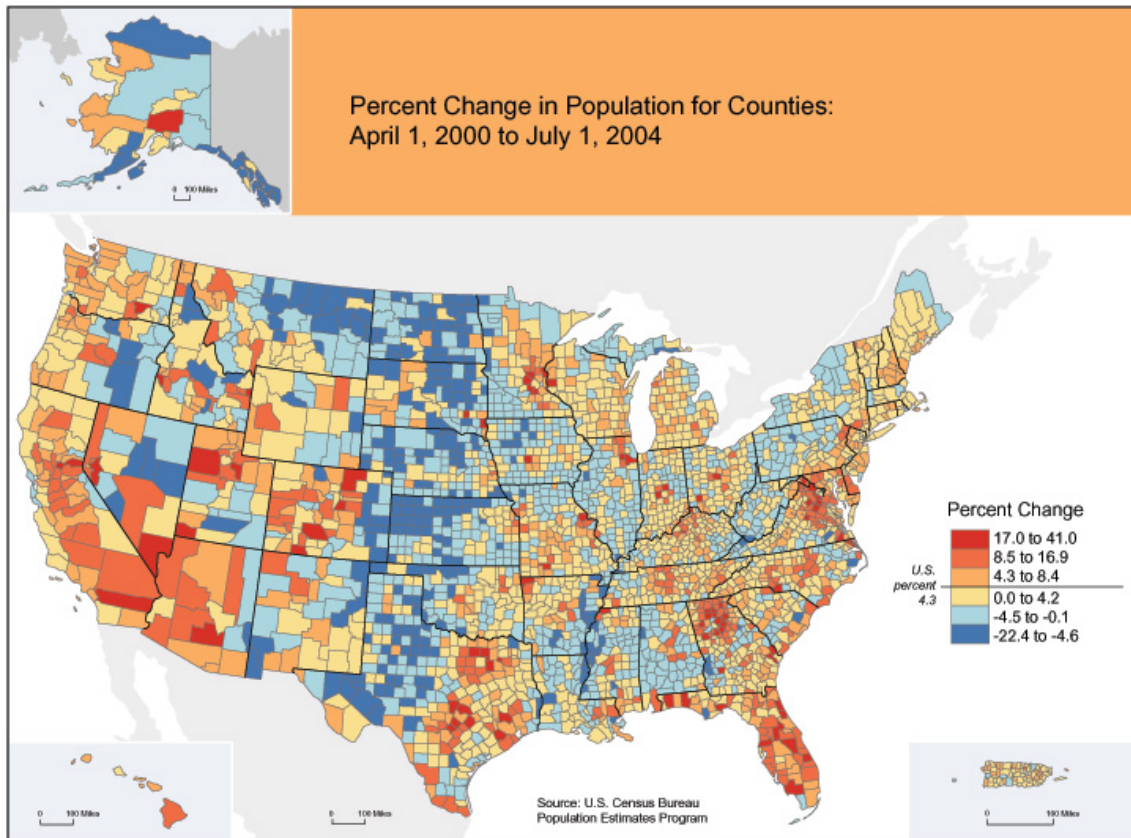
Once hanging its hat on the city’s railroad connections, Pocatello now prospers due to AMI Semiconductors, which employs nearly 1,000 people at its global headquarters in Pocatello, and from Idaho State University’s lead role in providing health sciences education.

Twin Falls – “Micropolitan” area

Trend	Year	1940	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000
Up	Twin Falls	11,851	17,600	20,126	21,914	26,209	27,591	34,469
Neutral	Filer	1,239	1,425	1,249	1,173	1,645	1,511	1,620
Up	Kimberly	963	1,347	1,298	1,557	2,307	2,367	2,614
Up	Buhl	2,414	2,870	3,059	2,975	3,629	3,516	3,985
Down	Murtaugh	272	239	214	124	114	134	139
Neutral-Down	Castleford			274	174	191	179	277
Up	Jerome	3,537	4,523	4,761	4,183	6,891	6,529	7,780
Up	Burley	5,329	5,924	7,508	8,279	8,761	8,702	9,316
Up	Rupert	3,167	3,098	4,153	4,563	5,476	5,455	5,645
Up	Paul	606	560	701	911	940	901	998
Neutral	Declo	238	219	237	251	276	279	338

The U.S. Census Bureau officially labels Twin Falls as a “micropolitan” area; it also includes Burley in that same category. Jerome, Burley, Rupert, Paul, and Heyburn continue their historic success as agricultural and food processing providers, while Twin Falls has become the service provider to the area, featuring large retail establishments, business services, and medical facilities.

Centripetal vs. Centrifugal Growth



Northern Idaho shows a clear picture of centripetal forces – city growth by concentrating population from outlying areas to the central city. In this case, as the mining economy in Kellogg spiraled downward (the blue area at the top right of the Idaho map), the population boomed just to the West in Kootenai County.

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End Notes

¹ Merrill D. Beal and Merle W. Wells, *History of Idaho*, 3 vols., vol. 1 (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1959).

² *Ibid.*, 342.

³ *Ibid.*, 343.

⁴ Beal and Wells, *History of Idaho*, ix.

⁵ U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Table 12. Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1890," (June 15, 1998).

⁶ U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Annual Estimates of the Population for Incorporated Places over 100,000, Ranked by July 1, 2004 Population: April 1, 2000 to July 1, 2004 (Sub-Est2004-01)* (2004 [cited February 25 2006]); available from <http://www.census.gov/popest/cities/tables/SUB-EST2004-01.xls>.

⁷ Carlos Schwantes, *In Mountain Shadows: A History of Idaho* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska, 1991).

⁸ *Ibid.*, 224-225.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 223; 228.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹¹ State of Idaho, "County Profiles of Idaho: Idaho State Profile (Idc 03-33120)," ed. Idaho Department of Commerce (2002).

¹² United States Office of Management and Budget, "Metropolitan Areas and Components, 1999, with Fips Codes," ed. U.S. Census Bureau Population Division (July 1999).

¹³ United States Office of Management and Budget, "Metropolitan and Micropolitan Statistical Areas and Components, December 2005, with Codes," ed. U.S. Census Bureau Population Division (January 19, 2006).

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