



521 West Grove Street History

Grove Street dates back nearly as far as Boise City itself, and its development over the years reflects the city's history. In many ways, Grove Street history is Boise history in microcosm.

But before there was Boise City, there was the land. For thousands of years, Native people occupied the Boise Valley and relied upon its resources. Today it continues to be the ancestral, cultural, traditional, and unceded territory of the Shoshone, Bannock, and Northern Paiute peoples.

Boise City was founded in 1863 after the discovery of gold in the Boise Basin. One of the valley's first houses (the Davis cabin), was located at what is now the intersection of Eighth and Grove Streets, and when Boise's first ten blocks were platted in 1863, what would become Grove Street appeared as the city's southern limit. Originally called Market Street, it was renamed Grove sometime prior to 1871 to reflect its many shade and fruit trees, which were irrigated via a canal using waterwheels.

Given its proximity to offices on Main Street, Grove came to be associated with Boise's well-to-do. Between 1870 and the 1890s, prominent Boise residents like General Cartee, C. W. Moore, Frank Coffin, and John Lemp built lavish homes on the street. But this early association with Boise's upper crust belies a more complex history. In truth, Grove Street was home to a variety of people. Census records tell us that Basques, Chinese, Germans, Greeks, Italians, Norwegians, and other immigrants called it home. In the 1920s, there were two Chinese businesses on Grove, and Boise's second China Town was located just a block away on Front Street.

Beginning around the turn of the twentieth century, Grove Street underwent a series of dramatic changes. In the 1890s, Warm Springs Avenue became the popular place to live, so families moved and elites constructed new mansions. Today, Warm Springs retains its historic properties, while Grove Street looks nothing like it once did. All the historic homes are gone, the waterwheels that once lined the canal are no longer, and the canal itself is now almost entirely covered.

The streetcar, and later the automobile, contributed to Grove Street's transformation in the first half of the twentieth century as more people moved to Boise's growing suburbs. Also, the downtown core suffered greatly during the 1960s and 1970s from urban renewal, a program intended to revitalize American cities. Demolition to clear space for an enclosed shopping mall heavily impacted Grove Street between 10th and 5th, resulting in the loss of many historic buildings and Boise's Chinatown. No mall was ever built at the location. Today it is the site of Grove plaza.

The 521 West Grove Street property embodies the street's complex history. For much of the twentieth century, it was the site of a large, wood-framed residence before it was demolished during urban renewal. Originally built for Auren G. Redway, it may have been constructed as early as the mid-1860s. In 1887, the Redway family significantly enlarged the home and added a

second story. Fire insurance maps from the late 1880s through the mid-1950s show a wood-framed dwelling and several outbuildings. While the maps show that modifications were made to the home over time, its general footprint remained relatively unchanged during that period.

Auren G. Redway was born in New York state in 1835. He married Mary A. Outterson in the mid-1850s, and the couple emigrated to California via the isthmus of Panama. Auren moved to Boise, Idaho in July 1863 where he worked as a sutler provisioning Fort Boise. His wife and family followed roughly one year later. Auren continued to work as a sutler for several years and then became affiliated with the First National Bank of Boise where he held various positions over two decades. The Redways planted shade trees on the Grove Street property and maintained a fruit orchard on adjoining lots. They contributed to Boise's early social scene and helped establish St. Michael's Episcopal Church. The family continued to live at 521 West Grove Street until the early 1900s.

In 1926, the property was purchased by Antonio Letemendi. Antonio and his wife, Leandra, immigrated to the United States from the Basque Country around 1900 and settled in Boise circa 1908, where Antonio worked as the proprietor of the DeLamar Rooming House on Grove Street. After their purchase of the 521 West Grove Street property, the Letemendi family ran their own boardinghouse for roughly four decades. The business closed in 1968, and the century-old home was demolished a few years later. Antonio Letemendi passed away in 1943. Leandra passed away in 1973 at the age of 99.

Basques began immigrating to Idaho at the end of the nineteenth century. Established Basques helped new immigrants find footholds and employment within Idaho's unfamiliar landscape. Basque boardinghouses, like the Letemendi's, played central roles in this process. "Indeed, Letemendi's replaced home towns such as Motrico and Ispaster in America: it served as the village church, the town tavern, the neighborhood 'Quadrilla,' the bank, and the health dispensary for farm and village youth who came to the American West for a start in life." The area surrounding Grove Street emerged as the center of Boise's Basque neighborhood, and a Basque community center was built at 6th and Grove streets in 1951.

