

## Village Improvement Society Kate Curley, President



In its day, the influence of the Village Improvement Society was far-reaching. Membership consisted of local women who banded together to secure the morals, dignity, and beauty of the City of Idaho Falls. An early problem they tackled was how to keep the city clean, as trash littered every street and sidewalk. The women decided to hire a carpenter to build fifty trash boxes equipped with rope handles. Several society members volunteered to paint the boxes white, apply a stencil on them with the letters “VIS”—Village Improvement Society—and place the containers around town. Dues of fifty cents collected from each of the forty members were used to cover expenses. (To see a replica box, visit the Idaho Falls Museum of Idaho’s “Eagle Rock USA” exhibit.)

With a goal to bring a permanent library to Idaho Falls, in 1905 members applied for and received a grant of \$10,000 from the Carnegie Library Foundation. In 1908, H. W. Keefer donated the land, and the building was completed in 1916. In 1938, the city undertook a library remodeling project, in conjunction with the Public Works Administration, to modernize and enlarge the structure at a cost of \$70,000. Today the building is part of the Museum of Idaho, on the corner of Elm Street and N. Eastern Avenue, and is listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

One of the society's lasting legacies started with plans for a city park. They chose a site bordered by 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> Streets in 1903 and purchased it with money from back county taxes. The hardpan on the property had to be broken up with dynamite before anything could be planted in the soil. For several years, potatoes were grown in the park to raise money for further improvements. President Kate Curley and Second Vice President Alice Boomer and other VIS members helped plant, harvest, and sell the potatoes.

When the VIS had sufficient funds to create the park, Charles Shattuck, a retired head of the Forestry Department at the University of Idaho, advised the group and helped plan the park's layout. Bowen Curley, who was Mayor of Idaho Falls from 1902-03 and 1911-13, paid for landscape plans, which stipulated only hardwood trees be planted. The VIS Entertainment Committee funded the cost of the trees and shrubs by sponsoring plays, festivals, and other programs. Unfortunately, VIS founder and president Mrs. Bowen (Kate) Curley, who first proposed the park, died of cancer in 1903. The society carried on with her wishes; the park was completed in 1908 and named in her memory.

In her last years, VIS vice president Alice Boomer lived with her daughter in Salmon, and occasionally returned to Idaho Falls to visit old friends and reminisce about the Village Improvement Society. They agreed "The old VIS days were among the happiest of [their] lives." The society was disbanded in 1918 after nearly twenty years of service, when the members voted that the City Council should take over its civic duties.

Through the years, countless citizens have enjoyed the park's charm and tree-lined shade. In the center of a quiet residential neighborhood, families continue to play and picnic there. Kate Curley Park is truly an enduring tribute to the foresight and efforts of Mrs. Kate Curley, Alice Boomer, and other tenacious members of the Eagle Rock Village Improvement Society.



**Kate Curley**