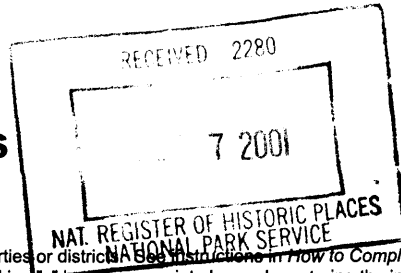


United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Registration Form



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This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. *Instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
other names/site number Eastern Idaho State Fairgrounds

2. Location

street & number 97 Park Drive N/A not for publication  
city or town Blackfoot N/A vicinity  
state Idaho code ID county Bingham code 011 zip code 83221

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide X locally. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments. )

Kenneth C. Reid June 27, 01  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
KENNETH C. REID, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. ( See continuation sheet for additional comments. )

Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
See continuation sheet.  
 determined eligible for the National Register.  
See continuation sheet.  
 determined not eligible for the National Register.  
 removed from the National Register.  
 other, (explain:)

X Signature of the Keeper Date of Action  
[Signature] 3/10/01

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**  
(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

**Category of Property**  
(Check only one box)

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

**Number of Resources within Property**  
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>	buildings
<u>1</u>		sites
<u>2</u>		structures
		objects
<u>9</u>	<u>1</u>	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**  
(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/  
fair

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Current Functions**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/  
fair

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

Art Deco

No Style

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Materials**  
(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation CONCRETE

walls WOOD

CONCRETE

roof METAL

other \_\_\_\_\_

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

X See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria Areas of Significance**

(Mark "x" on one or more lines for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**  
(Mark "x" on all that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

**Period of Significance**

1925-1956

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/Builder**

Unknown

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 8

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested  Other State agency
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Eastern Idaho Fair Administrative Offices

See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 9

**10. Geographical Data**

Acreage of property 25 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

A 1/2 3/9/1/0/6/0 4/7/8/3/4/6/0 B 1/2 3/9/1/3/8/0 4/7/8/3/2/0/0  
Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

C 1/2 3/9/1/2/0/0 4/7/8/3/0/0/0 D 1/2 3/9/0/9/1/0 4/7/8/3/2/3/0  
Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property.)

X See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

X See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 10

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Troy Reeves/Oral Historian  
organization Idaho SHPO date March 30, 2001  
street & number 210 Main Street telephone 208-334-3863  
city or town Boise state ID zip code 83702

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.  
A **Sketch map** for historic districts and/or properties having large acreage or numerous resources.
- **Photographs:** Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.
- **Additional items** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Property Owner**

name Eastern Idaho Fair District  
street & number 97 Park Drive telephone (208) 785-2480  
city or town Blackfoot state ID zip code 83221

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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National Park Service**

# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

Section No. 7 Page 1

Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho

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The Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District is located on the north side of the City of Blackfoot in Bingham County, Idaho. Blackfoot is in the far eastern portion of the State of Idaho in a largely rural and agricultural area. The Historic District encompasses approximately 25 acres on what would be approximately a 50 acre total site. The bulk of the acreage in the district is comprised of the racetrack; the 9 buildings and structures of the district cover a much smaller area. The district's buildings sit in the southeast corner of the fairgrounds site, with the racetrack immediately to the northwest.

**1. Agriculture (Commercial Exhibits) Building  
Contributing  
1929**

Constructed in 1929, this post and beam building faces west and was originally known as the Commercial Exhibits building. The vertical board building measures 85 feet by 200 feet and has a crenelated false, boomtown front at both the east and west ends. The building has three sections - a center section with a shallow-pitched roof and two shallow-pitched, shed-roofed, flanking sections that are stepped down from the center section, providing a monitor roof form. These shed-roofed sections house the animal stables on the inside. There are two entrance doors on each of the front and rear facades. These are large sliding doors, each of which has a small, projecting gable above. There is no fenestration on the front or back of the building, but there is a regular series of aluminum sliding windows along the entire length of the building on the walls above the shed-roofed projections. This building faces west and is located to the right as one enters through the fairgrounds archway.

**2. Antiques (Ladies Arts) Building  
Contributing  
1930**

Constructed in 1930, this building was originally known as the Ladies Arts Building. Measuring 25 feet by 90 feet, the building has drop siding and a hipped, metal roof. Facing north and located immediately to the west as one enters the fairgrounds, the Antiques building has three regularly spaced entrances, providing what little decoration there is on the utilitarian building. The entries consist of shallow projecting gables with return eaves, supported by simple pilasters. Each has a pair of double doors with transom lites above. Between the first and second, and second and third entries, are four, six-lite, fixed-frame windows, set high on the wall, above the door height. In addition, there is one window between the corner of the building and the entry doors. The rear and side elevations have no embellishments except for evenly spaced six-lite, fixed-frame, fenestration at the same height as on the main elevation.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho

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**3. Covered Grandstand  
Contributing  
1938**

Constructed by the WPA in 1938 at a cost of \$20,000, the covered grandstand at the fairgrounds measures approximately 200 feet wide and 50 feet deep, and is of post and beam construction. The grandstand is divided into four sections and has 20 rows of poured concrete bleachers. The roof forms an open projection over the bleachers providing protection from sun and rain. The roof is supported by a simple truss system that is open and visible from below.

**4. Administration Building  
Contributing  
1940**

The administration building was constructed in 1940 as a WPA program project. It is a two-story building constructed of concrete block, measuring approximately 30 feet by 45 feet. The flat-roofed, building is essentially utilitarian in nature and has no details that lend themselves to a specific architectural style. The primary decorative elements are recessed, vertical panels for the fenestration bays that have a continuous lintel course that runs around the entire building. The south elevation, which is the facade visible as a patron walks up to the fair entrance, has three such recessed bays. Two are paired toward the east edge of the building and the third is wider and sits closer to the west edge of the facade. The windows on this building have been replaced with modern aluminum and vinyl windows, though they are approximately the same size as the original windows. At the southeast corner of the building, a false tower has been applied which serves to anchor the west half of the arched entry gateway to the fairgrounds. This rectangular tower projects above the roofline of the building and has a stepped, art deco frontispiece. Within the frontispiece is a long, two-story blind arch.

The east elevation has two entrance doors, above each of which a window is situated, both in recessed bays. The rear elevation has irregular fenestration, with a variety of doors and windows. The west elevation mimics the east, but has two windows on the first floor, rather than doors.

**5. Grounds Keeper's Building  
Contributing  
1940**

The Grounds Keeper's Building was also constructed as a WPA project in 1940, and is virtually identical to the Administration Building. It sits approximately 25 feet from the Administration Building and supports the other half of the entry arch, which is supported by the twin towers on the buildings. The arch has letters reading "East Idaho State Fair." The sign was erected by the WPA in 1940 at the same time that the two buildings were erected.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho

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The primary difference between these two buildings is that the windows on the Grounds Keeper's Building have not been replaced. These are multi-paned, metal, casement windows.

**6. Bleachers**  
**Contributing**  
**1950**

The open bleachers were constructed in 1950 and measure approximately 180 feet long by 50 feet deep. They rise at a slightly steeper pitch than the covered grandstand and have 23 rows. The structure of the bleachers is poured concrete like the grandstand, but the benches are wood, supported by simple brackets.

**7. Commercial Building**  
**Contributing**  
**1953**

Constructed in 1953, this building was built on the same foundation as a previous Commercial Building (1937) that burned in 1942. The original building was very similar to the Agriculture Building, as is this edition. The building measures 80 feet by 200 feet and also has a false front (at both the east and west ends) that shields the rounded, metal roof from view.

The main elevation faces west and has a center section with two lower wings, providing a monitor roof shape, similar again to the Agriculture Building. The main section is supported by four art deco-inspired pilasters. The front and rear facades are of poured concrete and have a row of multi-paned, fixed-frame windows above the two large, off-center, sliding doors as well as above a center fixed bay. There are no projecting entry gables. The flanking wings are constructed of concrete block and have metal, shed roofs. As with the Agricultural Building, above the shed-roofed additions is a row of evenly spaced fenestration comprised of sliding, aluminum windows.

Although this building was constructed in 1953, it is considered eligible because it is part of a district where the majority of the properties are older than 50 years and the building itself is very similar in massing, scale, and design to the others in the district.

**8. Arts Building**  
**Contributing**  
**1956**

Constructed in 1956, the Arts Building was built to house the hobby, craft, canning and baking exhibitions, and continues in this function today. The building measures 30 feet deep by 140 feet long. It is poured concrete and has a low barrel-vaulted roof with return eaves. The building has

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho

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evenly spaced fenestration on the front (north) and side elevations consisting of a row of 4-lite windows just under the eaves along the length of the building. The north elevation is divided into nine bays by simple concrete pilasters, with two windows in each bay. Entrances to the buildings are located in second and eighth bays from the east.

While this building was constructed in 1956, it is included as a contributing resource in the historic district because its massing, scale, and simple design fit harmoniously with the other contributing buildings in the district, and it is distinct from the buildings constructed later in the Fair's history.

**9. Race Track**  
**Contributing**  
**c.1890**

The race track at the Eastern Idaho District Fairgrounds Historic District predates the actual fair itself. It was constructed c.1890, as a race track, but without an associated fair. When the first fair was established in Blackfoot in 1902, the site was chosen because of the existing race track, as horse races have historically been a popular entertainment venue at fairs. The half-mile, dirt track at the fairgrounds today is essentially the same track that existed over 100 years ago. A fence and mature trees line the track along north, east and west sides; the grandstand and bleachers round out the fourth. In more recent years a straight extension has been added at the west end of the track, but this recent addition is not included within the boundaries of the district.

**10. Pole Building**  
**Non-Contributing**  
**c.1970**

In the 1970s, a metal pole-type building was added between the historic Agriculture Building and the historic Commercial Building. This building extends only as high as the lower wings of the two historic structures and has a very shallow-pitched roof. Although it appears to connect with the two buildings it sits between, this modern building does not share common walls with the historic structures. This building is the only visual intrusion into an otherwise cohesive historic district.



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho

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The Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District is eligible for the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A, at the local level, as an excellent example of historic fairgrounds. These fairgrounds have represented a place for locals and citizens from all over the region to gather, compete, learn, show their wares, and be entertained for nearly a century. The annual agricultural celebration has been an important social event in Bingham County and the surrounding counties since its inception in 1902. Except for one year in the early century, and a brief interruption during World War II, the fair in Blackfoot has been an annual tradition, drawing people from all over eastern Idaho. The agricultural nature of the county and surrounding region made the event especially important to the attendees, who could show their products, sell their livestock, learn about new techniques and technologies, and have an opportunity to socialize, which, for a rural populace, was often a much anticipated treat.

## FAIRS IN THE UNITED STATES

American agricultural fairs diverged from their European and British counterparts. Where most European fairs were held to trade goods and services and most agricultural societies were peopled by upper-class “gentlemen” farmers, these festivals and clubs in the fledgling United States of America formed to educate a more inclusive group of farmers, ranchers, and home economists through the display and judging of exhibits, including cows, horses, sheep, and handmade goods. Elkanah Watson, a wealthy landowner and sheep raiser in Massachusetts, contributed greatly to the American agricultural fair, so much so that he gained the moniker of “Father of the County Fair.” Watson began in 1810 by displaying his merino sheep, along with the sheep of other ranchers, at the public square in Pittsfield, Massachusetts.

This first event was small and only included sheep. Over the next few years, however, this show, with Watson’s indefatigable spirit, grew. By 1815 the event included an opening prayer, exhibits, and judging in both animal and home manufacture groups, and a grand ball as its finale. This plan, which had both entertainment and social aspects, along with the agricultural and educational aspects, became known as the Berkshire Plan. Watson, himself, created the Berkshire Agricultural Society and spent the remainder of his life trying to create these groups in other New England and northeastern states.

After a lull period in the growth of fairs from the 1820s to the 1840s, the agricultural fair blossomed during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. The period from 1850 through 1870 has been called “The Golden Age of Fairs” as agricultural fairs proliferated in virtually all regions of the country, particularly in the midwestern United States. These events incorporated entertainment aspects (including horse racing) along with agricultural, educational, and social aspects. During this period, the events were typically held at temporary locations within major towns or cities that served as hosts. These state fairs were generally held at various locations throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century and did not get permanent homes until the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century. Frequently, smaller, local fairs in these states had permanent homes before their larger counterparts; however, they lacked the capital to build permanent structures on their fairgrounds.

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Eastern Idaho District Fairgrounds Historic District  
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By the late 19<sup>th</sup>/early 20<sup>th</sup> century, fairs had achieved a foothold in the cultural milieu of the country. By this time the state or county fairs also began purchasing and developing land to hold the festivals on a permanent site. These events continued to focus primarily on agriculture but also still included social and entertainment aspects.

Agricultural fairs had an eventful first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Two legislative acts—the Smith-Lever Act and the Smith-Hughes Act—in the 1910s led to the creation of the Cooperative Extension Service and the 4-H program for the country's youth. Both programs affected fairs through the involvement of the county extension agent (usually through a state's land grant college) and through the increase in displays and exhibits by youth in their local 4-H program.

These five decades also brought national and world events that affected fairs throughout the nation. The Great Depression and World War II caused leaders to shut down fairs for several years in the 1930s and 1940s. Some fairgrounds with permanent structures loaned their buildings to the state or federal government during the war. After the war, fairs returned to the cultural landscape, and many locales created new fairs and grounds.

## FAIRS IN IDAHO

Before the influx of white settlers to Idaho territory, Native Americans generally eschewed farming and livestock raising, having traditionally been a hunter/gatherer population. Missionaries in northern Idaho and Mormon settlers in southeastern Idaho were the first to begin planting fruits and vegetables and raising domesticated animals. The first permanent agricultural settlement in the territory was established in Franklin, Idaho, just north of the Utah border, by a group of Mormon settlers who believed they were still in Utah.

The mining boom in the 1860s and 1870s spurred the beginnings of commercial agriculture efforts in the state, as many who did not find the riches they hoped for in the mines found success, instead, in the fields. The thousands of miners who flooded into the gold and silver camps needed food to survive and many saw an opportunity to fill the void with crops and beef.

After the mining boom subsided or changed to a structured business, agriculture persisted in the state with help from agricultural societies, experimental stations and extension agents, and irrigation and reclamation. Early in Idaho's territorial period, governmental leaders addressed the importance of agriculture and encouraged societies to meet and discuss ways to improve their techniques.

In 1865, Territorial Governor Caleb Lyon addressed the need to create agricultural societies. Lyon, while speaking to the Territorial Legislature, said,

For the better encouragement of ranchmen and farmers, . . . I would suggest the propriety of incorporating a 'Territorial Agricultural Society' for the improvement of the breeding of stock, as well as in the labors of the dairy; being confident

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho

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that the annual fairs . . . would be promotive of great good and mutual benefit.<sup>1</sup>

After Lyon's speech and through the rest of the 1860s and 1870s, various attempts were made to create a territorial agricultural society and hold an agricultural fair, but all proved unsuccessful. Ultimately, the first agricultural fair in the territory came not through the territorial legislature but through a local farmer's club which met in Boise in 1872. In September of that year, they decided to change their organization to better serve all aspects of agriculture in the city and county and so they created the Ada County Agricultural Association. They chartered a constitution and found a large site on the then western edge of town (21<sup>st</sup> street between Idaho and State) on which they hastily erected a pavilion to hold the exhibits, which included animals, agricultural, and home-manufactured products. The Ada County Agricultural Association - a volunteer, non-profit group - ran that first fair, but the county eventually bought the land (at the fair's second location) and has run the event ever since through an appointed County Fair Board.

From the initial success in Boise, fairs and eventually fairgrounds were established in cities and towns throughout Idaho Territory, and after 1890, in the State of Idaho. During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, fairs sprouted in Caldwell, Moscow, and Genesee; during the first years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Lewiston, Pocatello, and Blackfoot also hosted these agricultural expositions. Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people held fairs in numerous Idaho locales, including Bonners Ferry, Sandpoint, Coeur d'Alene, St. Maries, Nampa, Nez Perce, Orofino, Cottonwood, Council, Cambridge, Homedale, Glens Ferry, Fairfield, Carey, Arco, Salmon, Gooding, Shoshone, Filer, Jerome, Burley, Malad, Preston, Grace, Downey, Idaho Falls, Rigby, Ririe, Rexburg, and St. Anthony.

Establishing a fair served as a sign of importance to a community. Town boosters were frequently the primary instigators of the event. They brought the rural populous to the urban center and drew attendees from other localities. If successful, these events brought regional prominence to the locale and provided boasting rights for a year.

These Idaho fairs followed the national trends and were held initially either on land on the outskirts of town or land inside town loaned out by the owner. Organizers used extant buildings, built multi-purpose halls, or created temporary structures to display the state, county, or local wares. Eventually, permanent grounds were usually acquired to hold fairs and other events during the year.

These local fairs generally fall into the category of being primarily a competitive agricultural exhibition, but usually with accompanying entertainment and amusements. In Idaho, these events, almost without

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<sup>1</sup>James Hawley, ed., *History of Idaho: The Gem of the Mountains*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1920), 470. For the full text of Lyon's speech, see "Annual Message of Governor Lyon," *Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman (ITS)*, 12/9/1865.

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# **National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet**

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Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho

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exception, arose from cattle or horse shows or from an either publicly funded or privately backed agricultural association. Their primary focus was agriculture (farming, ranching, granges, home manufacture) with entertainment (mainly horse racing) thrown in. Now, over time, agriculture still holds a primary location, but other aspects have grown. These include entertainment aspects (horse racing; night shows; tractor, truck, and horse pulls; "free stage" entertainment), commercial aspects (local businesses, traveling businesses, farm machinery exhibits), non-profit aspects (food booths run by churches and other groups), social aspects (benches, tents, chairs), political aspects, and even religious aspects.

The first fairs were held at the end of the harvest season, allowing farmers a chance to bring in their crops before they came to town to display their wares. Eventually though, these late-September/early-October events shifted to coincide more with the summer vacation schedules.

Along with this educational aspect, the officials (either farmers, ranchers, or civic leaders) tied entertainment aspects to almost all the fairs in the state. They did this primarily in terms of tying the agricultural event to horse racing. The first fairs in Boise, Lewiston, and Pocatello (just to name three) attached a fair to an already existing horse racing meet. This fact meant building race tracks and grandstands to serve the public better, or creating structures, such as display or exhibit buildings and an administration building, around the existing racing facility.

Fairgrounds, today, mainly sit on land purchased by the counties, giving the county commissioners a role in the local fair process. Prior to the 1920s, it was typical for fairs to be sponsored and run by private citizens and groups. A transition to publically controlled fairs began early, but did not gain momentum in the years before and after World War II. By 1950, public fair boards ran most of these festivals in the state. These boards are hired or appointed by the county commissioners, and often have legal authority to purchase land and build structures.

Early fairs in the state (1870s to 1920s) started on roughly the same amount of land, one to three city blocks. Eventually, the fairs either encroached on surrounding property to become a multi-acre facility or moved to a multi-acre site. Generally, fairgrounds grew slowly as the county had money to invest in either land or buildings. Some fairgrounds saw major expansion as a result of New Deal-era programs. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) was particularly active at fairground sites, often constructing new buildings, grandstands, roads, and so on.

## **EASTERN IDAHO DISTRICT FAIR GROUNDS**

Southeastern Idaho has a long agricultural tradition. Those that settled the area were generally not seeking the "get rich quick" schemes that lured miners to central and northern Idaho, but rather, they focused on working the land, growing potatoes, barley, hay, and sugar beets, and raising cattle, horses, pigs, and sheep. Blackfoot, Idaho - the county seat of Bingham County - epitomized the agricultural primacy of this region, and conducted a thriving market with the surrounding farming communities. Those living in adjacent hamlets flocked to Blackfoot regularly to do business.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho

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By the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, there was enough interest in the area to follow others in the state and country by holding an annual agricultural festival to display the fruits of the region's agricultural labors. A group known as the Southeastern Idaho Fair Association held this first event in October, 1902.<sup>2</sup> The event was described in area newspapers as "...a red letter day in the history of Blackfoot," and "...a grand success."<sup>3</sup> This Southeastern Idaho Fair ran continuously until 1917. In 1918 the festival's officials could no longer afford to continue the event, and so the Bingham County Farm Bureau took over the event and held it from 1919 to 1924.<sup>4</sup>

The structure of fair organization changed abruptly and permanently in 1925. During that year Idaho state legislators passed and the governor signed a "fair district" bill. This law allowed interested individuals in three or more counties to form a fair district, if they gathered petitions that affirmed the idea from fifty-one percent of the voters in each participating county. Bannock, Bingham, and Bonneville counties' leaders met, earned the necessary support, and decided to create a district fair. They also determined to hold this fair in Blackfoot at the existing fairgrounds.<sup>5</sup>

Throughout the spring and summer in 1925, the now-named Eastern Idaho District Fair's board of directors met on numerous occasions to set the stage for the first district fair. They held the agricultural event from September 15-18, 1925. According to an advertisement in the (Blackfoot) *Idaho Republican*, "After a quarter of a century of acting as hosts for the visitors at the annual fair in Blackfoot, the town accepts the proposal to be the host to the multitudes of all Eastern Idaho for this, the First District Fair."<sup>6</sup> The district fair gained permanence in the region, and the festival's leaders reinforced this permanence by building permanent structures to hold the animals, fruits and vegetables, and other exhibits and displays.

Early maps for Blackfoot, specifically Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps, showed the location of the fairgrounds beginning with the 1911 edition. (The 1907 map does not show the fairgrounds, since the

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<sup>2</sup> Davis Bitton, "The Making of a Community: Blackfoot, Idaho, 1878-1910," *Idaho Yesterdays* 15 (Spring 1975): 1-15, quotes on 12; Premium List, 1907 Southeastern Idaho Fair, Eastern Idaho State Fair Records, Eastern Idaho District Fairgrounds, Blackfoot, Idaho. Eastern Idaho State Fair Records, Eastern Idaho District Fairgrounds, Blackfoot, Idaho will be cited hereafter as EISFR. "History of the Fair," EISFR.

<sup>3</sup> "Up at the Big Fair," *Pocatello Tribune*, October 7, 1902; "Ho! For the Big Fair," *Pocatello Tribune*, October 9, 1902.

<sup>4</sup> "History of the Fair," EISFR; Premium List, 1925 Eastern Idaho District Fair, EISFR.

<sup>5</sup> Chapter 131, *Idaho Session Laws* (Boise, Idaho: Syms-York Company, 1925), 185-188; "Fair Committee Hold Meeting in Blackfoot," (Blackfoot) *Idaho Republican*, May 7, 1925.

<sup>6</sup> "Eastern Idaho Agricultural Exposition," *Idaho Republican*, September 3, 1925.

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location seems to be outside the 1907 city boundaries.) The 1911 and 1921 maps and the 1935 and 1944 revisions to the 1921 map placed the fairgrounds firmly on the northeast corner of this southeast Idaho agricultural town. The early maps also displayed the various buildings on the fairgrounds; these structures changed with each edition.<sup>7</sup> By 1935, however, the maps show structures that still stand today.

In 1929 the Eastern Idaho Fair District's leaders hired contractors to build a "Commercial Exhibits Building," and in 1930 the group hired builders to create a "Ladies' Arts Building."<sup>8</sup> Both structures continue in use today. The Commercial Building is now the Agricultural Building, and the Ladies' Arts Building is now the Antiques Building.

The Eastern Idaho District Fair greatly benefitted from the Works Progress Administration (WPA) in the late 1930s and early 1940s. WPA workers built four structures that still stand on the present-day fairgrounds. In 1938, they constructed the grandstand, and in 1939, built a new Commercial Building (the 1930 Commercial Building became the Agricultural Building). In 1940, WPA workers built twin administration buildings and an electrified arch that connected them.<sup>9</sup> Today, these buildings house the Fair administration's permanent staff offices in the west building and miscellaneous rooms, including living quarters and a ticket booth in the east.

During one year of this WPA building boom, 1939, another permanent change occurred. In March, during a regular board of directors' meeting, the fair board learned that the Utah State Fair had changed its dates to run concurrently with the Blackfoot event. The board refused to change its scheduled time frame and challenged the Utah fair for livestock and entertainment. At the end of the meeting, almost as a footnote, the officials decided to change the name of the festival to the Eastern Idaho State Fair.<sup>10</sup> This new name stuck. So, by statute, the grounds are the Eastern Idaho District Fairgrounds; by tradition the fair became the Eastern Idaho State Fair.

World War II resulted in the fair's leaders canceling the festival in 1942 and 1943. Even without fairgoers inside the grounds, some unique events marked these two war years. Two events during 1942, for

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<sup>7</sup> 1907, 1911, 1921 maps, and 1935, 1944, and 1949 revisions, Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho, Sanborn Map Company, MF 58, Idaho State Historical Society Library and Archives, Boise, Idaho.

<sup>8</sup> "Fair Board Lets Contract Building," (Blackfoot, Idaho) *Daily Bulletin* (cited hereafter as *Daily Bulletin*), July 19, 1929; "New Buildings Ready for More Exhibits," *Daily Bulletin*, August 26, 1930.

<sup>9</sup> Dedicatory Exercises [copy], September 20, 1938, EISFR; "Night View of New Fair Grandstand," *Daily Bulletin*, September 19, 1938; "New Commercial Building at Fair Was Christened Yesterday," *Daily Bulletin*, September 20, 1939; "State Fair to Be Exciting Event As New Improvements Add to Show," *Daily Bulletin*, September 4, 1940.

<sup>10</sup> Minutes of the Executive Board of the Eastern Idaho Fair District (cited hereafter as Minutes), March 4, 1939, EISFR.

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example, caused particular stress for the event's managers. First, the fair completely closed down operations in July, allowing individuals to focus their attention on helping the American war effort. The buildings were leased to further assist the war effort, including converting the new Commercial Building into a food processing facility. On December 10, 1942, fire destroyed the aforementioned Commercial Building that then contained a potato dehydration plant. The flames consumed 250,000 pounds of potatoes and 50 tons of coal along with all the equipment inside the structure. Meyer Friedman—the company leasing the edifice—estimated its loss at \$80,000. The Fair received \$15,955 in the insurance settlement. The commercial building was rebuilt in 1953 on its same foundation with the same basic architectural design, except its frame was concrete, not wood.<sup>11</sup>

Although the official Eastern Idaho State Fair remained canceled in 1943, exhibitors did enter the grounds for an agricultural festival. A local 4-H fair in the fall of 1943 offered a chance for Bingham County to gather at the fairgrounds and “gave conclusive evidence that people of this section of Idaho consider fairs important enough to spend [their] time and money upon.”<sup>12</sup> With the success of this event, fair officials reconsidered renewing the Eastern Idaho State Fair in 1944.

On February 23, 1944, the commissioners of the now six southeastern Idaho counties that comprised the district gathered at a meeting with the president and vice-president of the fair board. “After discussion,” the officials approved the re-opening of the fair and appropriated a \$50,000 budget for the festival. By March 1944 the operators officially returned the Eastern Idaho State Fair to the region's cultural landscape. In the premium list for the 1944 festival, the organizers explained why they decided to resume the fair's operations. They noted that “the past history of this fair gives overwhelming proof of its practical value, . . . the sponsors sincerely believe they can achieve general public good.”<sup>13</sup>

Along with its direct appearance in Europe and Asia, World War II indirectly appeared at the district fairgrounds in Blackfoot. The 1944 celebration propounded the efforts of the young Americans off fighting throughout the world. On the last day of the fair, the officials “expressed gratification at interest shown in displaying the best in agriculture and livestock in this area.”<sup>14</sup> Before the dust settled on this year's activities, a tangible symbol of the war entered the fairgrounds.

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<sup>11</sup> Joint Meeting of the County Commissioners and the Board of Directors of the Eastern Idaho Fair District (cited hereafter as Joint Meeting), July 15, 1942, EISFR; “Board Cancels East Idaho State Fair,” *Daily Bulletin*, July 15, 1942; “Dehydrating Plant Destroyed,” *Daily Bulletin*, December 11, 1942; Minutes, December 14 and 22, 1942, EISFR; Joint Meeting, February 25, 1953, EISFR; Minutes, April 27, 1953; “Your Fair Gets a New \$39,000 Building,” *Daily Bulletin*, September 4, 1953.

<sup>12</sup> Premium List, 1944 Eastern Idaho State Fair, EISFR.

<sup>13</sup> Joint Meeting, February 23, 1944, EISFR; 1944 Premium List, EISFR.

<sup>14</sup> “Fair Draw to Close on Note of Success,” *Daily Bulletin*, September 16, 1944.

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The war had absorbed workers and created a vacuum that farmers desired to fill. The labor committee tried to replace their missing labor source with high school students, Japanese internees, Mexican recruits, and conscientious objectors. All of the avenues helped, but the need still outweighed the assistance the groups could provide. Therefore, the county (and country) looked to recently captured enemies.<sup>15</sup>

On September 22, 1944, less than one week after the festival's conclusion, the Blackfoot labor committee announced that 500 Italian prisoners of war would call the agricultural building inside the fairgrounds home during the "acute harvest labor crisis in the county." Four days later the Army set up headquarters in the east office building to guard and manage the prisoners who dug sugar beets and potatoes during their stay in southeast Idaho. During this time farmers in Bingham County planted crops on over 40,000 acres, the largest amount of farmland in any Idaho county. The harvest needed manual labor to augment the few machines and make the picking of potatoes and sugar beets successful. Historian Barbara Tucker noted that during "World War II the labor resources of the United States . . . had to be augmented, and new sources had to be located."<sup>16</sup>

Claude Johnson, who served as Bingham County's Extension Agent during this time, and Ruth Hartkopf, who worked as the fair's secretary, both related stories about the prisoners. Johnson thought these laborers "were no different than our boys. They were just fighting a different army." Hartkopf said that "she always spoke cordially to them. I always gave them a greeting when I passed them." Both individuals also mentioned, however, that some prisoners made suggestive or lewd remarks towards women, whether it was directed at Hartkopf or at some girls who played tennis on the concrete pad left after the 1942 fire destroyed the commercial building.<sup>17</sup>

After 1944 the festival's board of directors opened the grounds to the public continuously throughout the rest of the 1940s (and continuously through the present day). By 1950 Blackfoot's newspaper published articles before, during, and after the festival, including a "Special Fair Edition" on September 12, 1950. One article offered comments by the new secretary-manager of the fair, Ruth Hartkopf. Hartkopf reminded the paper's readers that the fairgrounds' staff rented the grounds out to various groups both before and after the fair. People held horse, cattle, and swine shows during the year, and horse trainers

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<sup>15</sup> *Bingham County History*, 120-125.

<sup>16</sup> "Bingham County to Have 750 Italian Prisoners for Work," *Daily Bulletin*, September 22, 1944; "Prisoners are Interned at Fair Grounds," *Daily Bulletin*, September 26, 1944; Minutes, November 24, 1944; *Bingham County History*, vol. 1 (Blackfoot, Idaho: Bingham County Historical Society Book Committee, 1990), 120-125; Barbara M. Tucker, "Agricultural Workers in World War II: The Reserve Army of Children, Black Americans, and Jamaicans," *Agricultural History* 68 (Winter 1994): 54.

<sup>17</sup> Claude Johnson, interview by Troy Reeves, May 6, 1995, Blackfoot, Idaho, Tape Recording, and Ruth Hartkopf, interview by Troy Reeves, May 6, 1995, Idaho Falls, Idaho, Tape Recording. Both interviews are held by Reeves and the Fife Folklore Archives, Utah State University's Merrill Library, Logan, Utah.



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used the stalls and the track to better their chances at the state and region's numerous horse races.<sup>18</sup> So, during the war, after the war, and even to the present, the fairgrounds furnished opportunities for the region's residents to use the facilities throughout the year, not just at fair time.

Page one of the *Daily Bulletin* for September 14, 1950 - the day before the fair's commencement - displayed a map of the grounds. This map furnished a handy reference to the fair's physical foundation.<sup>19</sup> Since 1950 the grounds have swelled and the workers have replaced or razed old buildings and built new buildings. The grounds and a core group of edifices, however, have remained constant and have served as southeast Idaho's major agricultural festival throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### Summary:

The Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District is a significant site in Blackfoot and surrounding environs. The Fair has been an important annual event in southeastern Idaho, drawing attendees from surrounding counties for nearly a century. The buildings in the district are grouped closely together with only one intrusion and represent the period of significance 1925 (when the Eastern Idaho District Fair was established) to 1956 (see Criterion Consideration G discussion below). They provide a visually cohesive grouping of properties that evoke the feeling of a mid-century fair and represent the only historic properties remaining on the fairgrounds.

### Criterion Consideration G:

The period of significance for the Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District extends to 1956, and includes two buildings that are less than 50 years old: the Commercial Arts Building (#7, 1953) and the Arts Building (#9, 1956). While the buildings themselves do not have individual exceptional significance, per se, they are part of a significant grouping of buildings, and are included because they add to the visual cohesiveness of the historic district.

The Commercial Arts Building (1953) was built on the foundation of an earlier building that had been built in 1939 but burned down in 1942. This building is the same size, exactly, as the former building and is similar in design to the original and to the Agriculture Building, that it was adjacent to at the time of construction.

The Arts Building (1956) is also included as a contributing building within the historic district, and its construction closes the period of significance. Although it was the last constructed building within the district, its design is harmonious with the rest of the buildings. Its massing and scale are similar to the

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<sup>18</sup> "Fair Grounds Used on Year Round Basis, Five Major Events since Last Fair," *Daily Bulletin*, September 12, 1950.

<sup>19</sup> "Where the Big Show Starts Tomorrow," *Daily Bulletin*, September 11, 1950.

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adjacent Antiques Building, and its fenestration mimics the fenestration of its neighbor. This building represents the end of the period of significance for three reasons. First, the Eastern Idaho Fair Board chose 1956 to celebrate the Golden Anniversary of the Eastern Idaho State Fair. Why this year was chosen is not clear, since the golden anniversary would have more accurately been in 1952; regardless, 1956 was a year of celebration, and the Arts Building was unveiled at the fair that year.

Secondly, after the Arts Building was constructed, the Fair saw little need to construct new buildings for quite a while. The 1926 fair had an attendance of 8,000 people. By 1957, that number had swelled to 20,000 visitors, but after that, attendance held fairly steady, not greatly increasing and requiring new buildings. Indeed, by 1994, the attendance had only grown to 25,000, indicating that by the mid-1950s, the fair had reached a peak that lasted for quite a while.

Finally, the 1956 Arts Building represents a change in approach for new construction at the fairgrounds. Throughout the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the fair directors saved money and built new buildings only when they could pay cash for the new construction. The Arts Building was the last building to be built in this way. After 1956, new buildings were constructed on a lease-purchase arrangement with local banks, or with outright loans. The Arts Building represents the turning point after which those running the fair were more willing to enter into debt to expand the fair.

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Author's note: Most of the footnotes in the narrative for section 8 are from Troy Reeves' master's thesis, which is cited below. The other sources are sources researched specifically for this nomination.

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**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The boundaries of the nominated district are outlined on "Sketch Map A," and are as follows:

Beginning at the intersection of U.S. Highway 91 and Park Drive, then west along the exterior fence of the fairgrounds to the southwest corner of the Arts Building (#8), then northeast to the northwest corner of the covered grandstand, then west around the entire outer perimeter of the race track to the northeast corner of the open bleachers, then south to the exterior fence near the east corner of the Agriculture Building (#1), then along the fence line to the point of beginning.

**Boundary Justification:**

The boundary of the Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District includes all the buildings, structures and the race track, which represent the period of significance. These resources constitute the historic core of the greater fairgrounds, which has continued to grow and expand. The cluster of early buildings is largely intact with only one intrusion.

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## PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION

Eastern Idaho District Fair Historic District  
Blackfoot, Bingham County, Idaho  
Photographs taken by Troy Reeves, Oral Historian - Idaho SHPO  
Photographs taken, February, 2000  
Original negatives on file at the Idaho State Historic Preservation Office

Photo #1 of 10: Fair Entrance - view looking northeast

Photo #2 of 10: Administration Building - view looking northeast

Photo #3 of 10: Grounds Keeper's Building - view looking southwest

Photo #4 of 10: Ladies Arts (Antiques) Building - view looking southwest

Photo #5 of 10: Agriculture Building - view looking south

Photo #6 of 10: Commercial Building - view looking south

Photo #7 of 10: Agriculture and Commercial Buildings - view looking south

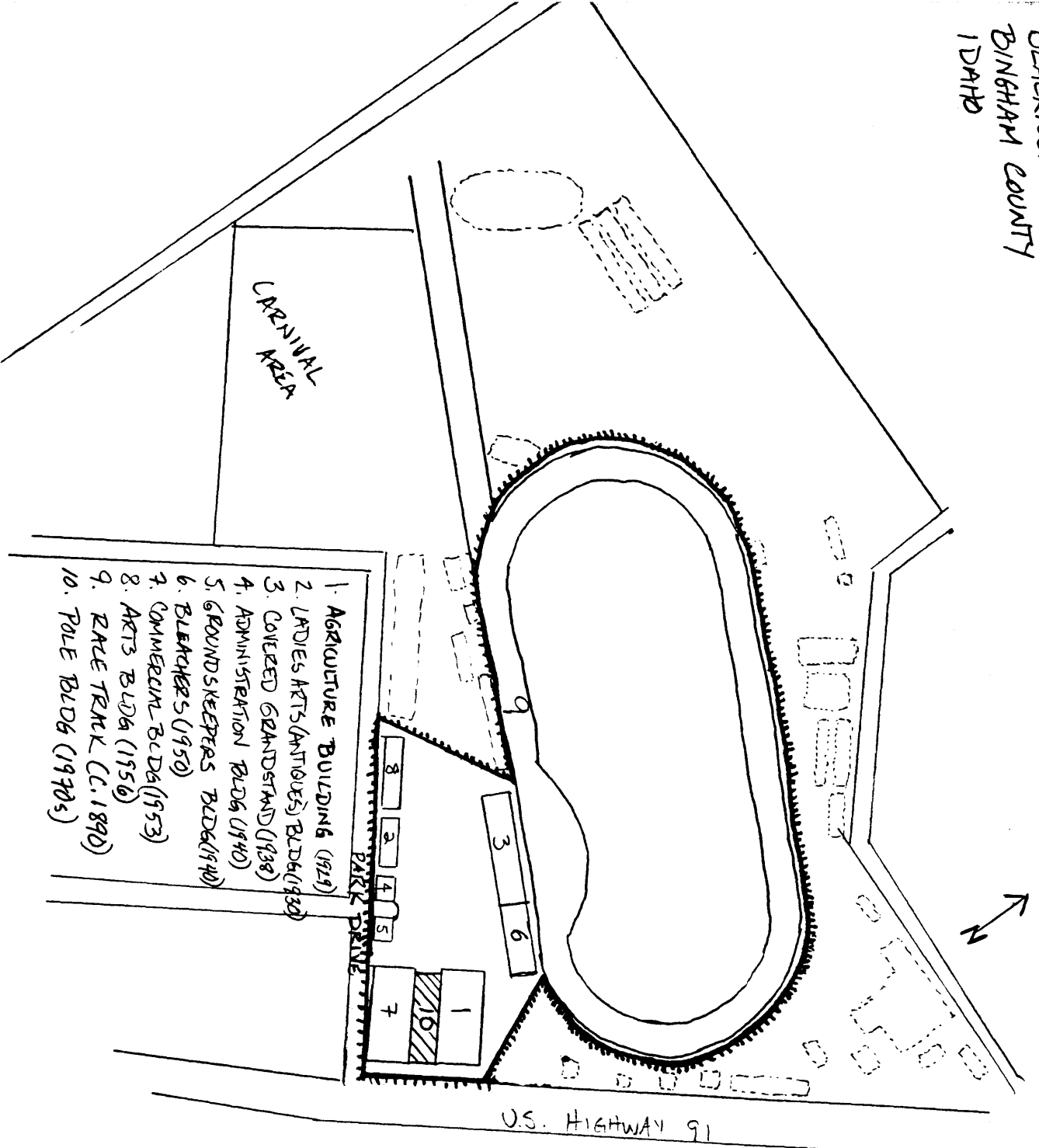
Photo #8 of 10: Race track - view looking east

Photo #9 of 10: Bleachers, Grandstand, and Race track - view looking west

Photo #10 of 10: Arts Building - view looking south





BLACKFOOT  
BINGHAM COUNTY  
IDAHO

SKETCH MAP 'A'



1. AGRICULTURE BUILDING (1929)
2. LADIES ARTS (ANTIQUES) BLDG (1930)
3. COVERED GRANDSTAND (1938)
4. ADMINISTRATION BLDG (1940)
5. GROUNDSKEEPERS BLDG (1940)
6. BLEACHERS (1950)
7. COMMERCIAL BLDG (1953)
8. ARTS BLDG (1956)
9. RACE TRACK (C. 1890)
10. POLE BLDG (1940s)

EASTERN IDAHO DISTRICT HISTORIC DISTRICT

-  - DISTRICT BOUNDARY
-  - CONTRIBUTING
-  - NON-CONTRIBUTING
-  - NON-HISTORIC BLDGS OUTSIDE OF H. D.

(NOT TO SCALE)