



Fort Coeur d'Alene (Sherman) early 1880s from Blackwell Hill. Oregon Historical Society, Davidson photo

The Fort Coeur d'Alene Scandal.

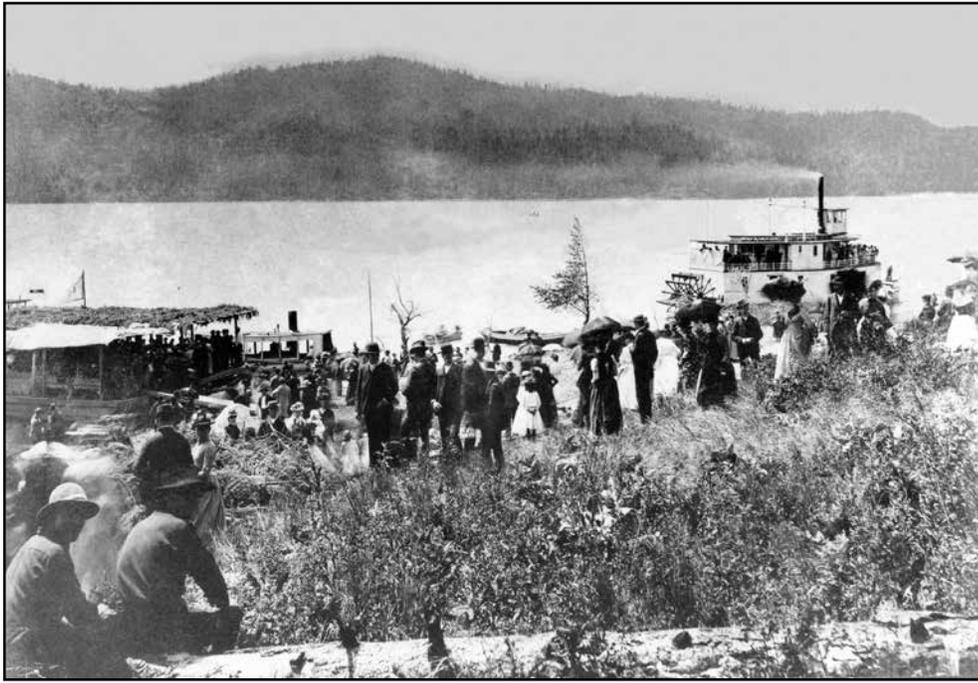
By John V. Woods

The title and typeface for this article are pulled from a newspaper article in the *Evening Star* from Washington D.C. on July 2, 1887. They refer to a part of Coeur d'Alene history that has been buried for many years. Although my great grandparents (George and Amelia Thomson) arrived soon after this, in 1890, and their daughter, my grandmother, was very fond of relating stories of the soldiers and fort, I never heard a hint of this; nor, in the many years of my own historical research did I uncover this story – until only a few years ago. However, I long had had suspicions.

As a boy I read Ruby Hult's *Steamboats in the Timber* with great fascination, but I was puzzled by her statement about 1883 gold rush up the North Fork of the Coeur d'Alene River which claimed, "The government al-

lowed the *Amelia Wheaton* to be used to transport the miners and their outfits to the head of navigation on the Coeur d'Alene River...."¹. I couldn't understand why an Army steamboat would haul miners (private citizens) from Coeur d'Alene (City) up the lake and river to the Old Mission Landing. Much later I discovered this lingering question was only the tip of a much bigger issue – the subject of this article.

But, in exposing the scandal, I need to state that the facts I give are not the complete story. Clearly, for a thorough investigation, the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) needs to be used to access the original transcripts of the Army proceedings from this scandal, but I will leave that to others. Also I need to state that my intention here is not to blacken the reputation of Gen. Wheaton



*The Army steamboat Amelia Wheaton off the Fort Sherman Grounds 1888.
Idaho State Historical Society*

new command was to seek construction of a steamboat, the *Amelia Wheaton* (named for his 13-year-old daughter), to bring supplies to the fort and provide a quicker means of moving troops along the waterways. When this boat was put in operation in 1880, it became an example of how Wheaton seemed to blur the lines of military operations vs. his attempts at “civilizing the wilderness.” While the boat did perform its intended purposes, the General often used it to take fort visitors on boat trips on the lake.

or anyone else involved, but I do think this is a story of early Coeur d’Alene that needs to be told.

The scandal centered on Gen. Frank Wheaton,¹ the commanding officer of Fort Coeur d’Alene (later renamed Fort Sherman April 6, 1887). And while the event that precipitated the scandal was the gold rush to the North Fork Country, there were issues that predated that as well.

Gen. Wheaton was appointed commander of the fort on Aug. 14, 1879. Quickly he and some of his officers became popular with civilians both around the fort and in nearby Spokane (Falls). It was this popularity that appears to have caused the later events to have been “glossed over.”

One of Wheaton’s first decisions with his

¹ Frank Wheaton’s official rank when appointed commander of Fort Coeur d’Alene was Colonel of the 2nd Infantry, but reports of the time usually referred to him as “general,” and I will do the same. He had received a “brevet” promotion as a major general of volunteer forces during the Civil War, but after the war this was removed. “Brevet” rank was a temporary one in which the officer held the rank, but did not receive the pay for that grade. It wasn’t until after Wheaton’s service in Coeur d’Alene that he was promoted to brigadier general on April 19, 1892.

An example of this was reported in August of 1883. “Prof. Tierman [and large group including W.H. Armstrong, US Commissioner of Railroads, US Interior Dept.] has made arrangements to take the party to Fort Coeur d’Alene, where they will, through the extended courtesy of Gen. Wheaton, embark on the government steamer to view the varied and beautiful scenery of Lake Coeur d’Alene



Colonel Frank Wheaton. National Archives

JOY'S
Opera House.

... —
MOZART & JOY, MANAGERS.

—
GRAND
Operatic Concert
—BY THE—
COEUR D'ALENE
2nd Infantry Band,
FRIDAY EVENING, APRIL 25.
JAMES A. GIBSON, Leader.

PROGRAMME:

PART 1ST.

1. Overture to "The Sirene".....Auber.
2. Marien Walzen.....Gungl.
3. Grand Potpourri from "Der Preis-
chuetz".....Weber.
4. "La Belle Helene" Lancers.....Offenbach.

PART 2ND.

1. Duet from "L'ultimo giorno de Pome-
pe".....Pacini.
2. "Two Melodies," (Lieder).....Wolfe.
3. Cavatina from "Nabucco".....Verdi.
4. "La Sylphe" (Fantasia and Character
Obligato).....Prondville.

Principal Musician, A. Wedemeyer.

PRICES OF ADMISSION:

General Admission,	75cts
Gallery,	50cts
Reserved Seats,	\$1.00

Seats may be secured at Porter's Drug
Store.

Spokane Falls Review

no distant day to be one of the most popular summer resorts on the Pacific coast."³

In addition to civilians being entertained, there were also issues of the illegal cutting of timber and the sale of liquor to Indians among others. It is unclear to the author if Wheaton received any remuneration for these, but at the very least he seemed to turn a blind eye to these practices.

When the gold rush came in 1883 and along with it a demand for steamboat transportation on the lake, the only steamer on the lake was the *Amelia Wheaton*. The route to the mines from Rathdrum was described for prospectors as a, "...wagon to Post Coeur d'Alene and thence by government steamer to what is known as the old Coeur d'Alene Mission at the head of Coeur d'Alene lake [this was in error as the Mission was up the Coeur d'Alene River] about 45 miles from this place."⁴ The General did allow the government boat to haul prospectors up the lake and Coeur d'Alene River to the Old Mission. Later in that year construction of two private steamboats, the *Coeur d'Alene* and the *General Sherman*, began and Wheaton

and surroundings."² Admittedly, some visitors given rides on the boat were military, but showing civilian visitors a "good time" was clearly a high priority. There were balls, operas, band performances, and other entertainments. There is no question as to how the General became popular with civilians both around the fort and in nearby Spokane (Falls). The *Spokane Times* extolled that, "...visitors are kindly received by the people at the post, and Coeur d'Alene lake is destined at

allowed the fort sawmill to cut lumber for the boats and in other ways aided their construction. One of the men involved in building the *General Sherman* was C.B. King who was the fort sutler (trader) at that time.

And while the local civilians and some of his officers looked with favor on the commander, certainly not all of his officers agreed. There were rumors of discontent in the ranks, but the earliest the author found mentioned was in July of 1886 and, by that time, things had clearly gone beyond mere talk. The *Spokane Falls Review* reported, "It has been whispered about for many days that not the most amicable relations have existed among the officers of the garrison at Post Coeur d'Alene.... The existence of trouble has been known for a long time, but those in military circles kept mum on the subject, and the civilian knew of the unfriendly relations among the brother officers only by the rumors that occasionally reached the outside."⁵

By the time this report reached the paper, Gen. Wheaton and his 2nd Infantry command had already been ordered transferred to Fort Omaha, Nebraska – effective July 6, 1886. Much had been happening behind the scenes and only now did some of it become public. "It seems that some time ago a couple of officers preferred charges against three of their fellow officers, for perverting government property for their own use." The paper didn't name any of the officers involved, but Wheaton was clearly among them. The paper went on to say the, "...examining officer exonerated the officers of the charges...." The editor from the *Review* clearly showed his prejudice by claiming, "...the efforts to lay unfounded charges against the officers for appropriating government property was as barren of fact as it was disgraceful."⁶ However, this wasn't the only view as the results were branded a, "...whitewash' by the instigators of the charges."

But this was far from the end of the fiasco. In turn, "The commanding officer [Wheaton] then preferred charges to the department against the officers who were implicated in the original trouble for conduct unbecoming

officers and gentlemen....” So officers were called back to Fort Coeur d’Alene for another inquiry. It was during this time that local sentiment (especially in the papers) was demonstrated and reveals why and how the scandal was covered up. “We regret exceedingly that the inexorable rules of the department require this change [the transfer of the 2nd Infantry to Fort Omaha]. During his long stay at Coeur d’Alene Gen. Wheaton has never hesitated to favor the people of Spokane Falls when within his power so to do, and he has frequently been called upon in more ways than one. His social relations with our people have been of the most pleasant character and the General and his amiable lady will be missed by those who have enjoyed their hospitality.” The editor went on to, “...congratulate the General upon securing what is claimed to be the most desirable post [Fort Omaha] in the service.”⁷

So what became of the second inquiry at Coeur d’Alene? That, too, is unclear except that a third proceeding was brought! The *Spokane Falls Review* reported a story from a New York newspaper that charges were filed by the War Department against, “...C.B. King & Co., post traders at Fort Coeur d’Alene, alleging many irregularities in which officers at the post were interested. The investigation of the alleged scandalous condition of affairs was made some time ago, and resulted in the dismissal of the post trader and the removal of the Second Infantry, which was mixed up in the irregularities, to another post.”⁸ Apparently the *Review* blamed George McCabe, one of the instigators of the initial charges against Wheaton (et al.), for McCabe wrote a letter in his defense to the *Review* which was published in January of 1887.

You state that there has [sic] been three investigations of the charges filed, and each and every one of these investigations resulted in an unequivocal exculpation of three of the parties accused [which included Gen. Wheaton], which statement is without foundation, and if you had had the opportunity of reading these reports I think that you would be of the same opinion that I am.

You claim that the parties accused of the irregularities were honorably exonerated by three of the most prominent colonels on the Pacific coast

who composed the last investigation held at Fort Coeur d’Alene last summer. I simply wish to say that this statement is false....

You seem to lay great stress upon the social and commercial standing that it would be impossible for me to reach. I can’t see as that has anything to do with my substantiating the charges that I have made against C.B. King & Co., post traders at Coeur d’Alene, and some of the officers of the second U.S. Infantry and the Coeur d’Alene Steam Navigation company....⁹

The actual charges were finally publicly reported in April 1887; not in Coeur d’Alene or Spokane Falls – but in Washington D.C.!

An Army court of inquiry is in session at Fort Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, investigating charges of irregularities against Col Frank Wheaton, 2d cavalry [sic, infantry], late commanding officer at the fort; 1st Lieut. S. E. Clark, 2d infantry, late acting assistant quartermaster, and 1st Lieut. C. W. Rowell, 2d infantry, late adjutant. The charges are collusion with the post-traders in giving them the use of Government teams and the Government steamer; in denuding the public lands of timber and carrying on a large lumber traffic; appropriating stores from the commissary department, tools from the Government shops and explosives from the Ordnance stores, for which they were to share in the mines discovered and located by the miners and prospectors to whom they were given; ordering out a detachment of soldiers, all armed and equipped, under charge of a commissioned officer, to frighten and drive off miners from their claims so that they could get possession of the same; making fraudulent contracts in erecting and building the Government buildings, performing the labor with enlisted men and pocketing the appropriation; permitting the post-traders to sell Indians intoxicating liquors on the military reservation, in violation of an Executive order, and other minor irregularities.¹⁰

The outcome of the proceedings was apparently not published locally either, but it did appear in the same Washington D.C. paper a few months later under the heading of this article, “Fort Coeur d’Alene Scandal.”

The court is of the opinion that, while the actions of the accused may have had their origin in a zealous desire to create a military post for which no adequate appropriation had been made, the methods and processes were deplorable, and were greatly to the detriment of the

service and subversion of all discipline; that through the disregard of law and regulations by the officers concerned a lawlessness was engendered which, when it reached the enlisted men of the command, greatly demoralized them and scandalized the Army.

The President [of the court, Col. H.M. Black, 23rd infantry], in approving the proceedings of the court, concurs in its opinion that the methods and processes employed by Col. Wheaton and Lieut. Clark were deplorable, subversive to discipline, and detrimental to the service.

*'These methods involved, in the President's opinion, a disregard of law and Army regulations highly discreditable, for which no valid excuse was afforded by any existing exigency, and betrayed a recklessness and a degree of evasion which, happily, are very unusual in the conduct of Army officers, and which merit emphatic condemnation.'*¹¹

The report recommended no further proceedings be initiated as the statute of limitations had run out on the "most serious charges." This is rather surprising as Wheaton had only been the commander less than eight years. But given that he was a distinguished veteran of the Civil War, and a man liked in influential circles it was probably thought wise to let the issue drop.

How should Wheaton's actions be viewed? On

one hand is the side that Wheaton wanted the best for his command and it was only the lengths he went to achieve this that became his downfall. The final report does seem to substantiate that the funds the Army supplied for the fort were meager. Wheaton might have been praised for using his initiative for being "creative" in supplementing them. On the other hand are the accusations he used the funds he "creatively generated" for personal gain, and his methods were clearly against the law and regulations. Perhaps the truth is somewhere in between. In any case, it's part of the history of Coeur d'Alene and a lesson that the ends don't justify the means.

(Endnotes)

1 Ruby El Hult, *Steamboats in the Timber* (Caldwell, ID: Caxton, 1953) 28.

2 *Spokane Falls Review* 11 August 1883.

3 *Spokane Times* 14 August 1880.

4 *Spokane Falls Review* 27 October 1883

5 *Spokane Falls Review* 13 July 1886.

6 *Spokane Falls Review* 13 July 1886.

7 *Spokane Falls Review* 11 July 1886.

8 *Spokane Falls Review* 29 December 1886.

9 George McCabe, letter, *Spokane Falls Review* 20 January 1887.

10 *Evening Star* [Washington, D.C.] 4 April 1887.

11 *Evening Star* [Washington, D.C.] 2 July 1887.

Museum Calendar of Events Inland Northwest Milestones

Free program presented by Robert Singletary
Coeur d'Alene Public Library, 7 pm, 4th Thursday of the month

Feb. 22: Sacred Heart Mission - The story of Idaho's oldest building and its role in the history of the region's first people, the Coeur d'Alene Tribe.

March 22: Lewis and Clark in Idaho - The Corps of Discovery faces some of its most challenging days.

April 26: Fort Sherman and the Beginning of Coeur d'Alene - In the aftermath of the Battle of the Little Big Horn, a fort and town were born in the Idaho Territory.

May 24: The Museum of North Idaho - Celebrating 50 Years of Keeping Our History Alive!

Museum exhibit hall reopens April 3. Open: Tuesday through Saturday 11-5

Annual Banquet, April 17, Tuesday, at the Hayden Lake Country Club

Sponsored by Super 1 Foods and Cd'A Service Station Equipment

From the Board President

I would like to wish everyone a Happy New Year! I hope 2018 brings you great joy and many new opportunities!

The new year marks a major milestone for the Museum of North Idaho as we prepare to celebrate our 50th anniversary. For the last half century, the Museum served the community through educational programs, historical exhibits, publication of regional history books and preservation of North Idaho's heritage.

The story of how we grew from modest beginnings to an exceptional regional museum is also an amazing bit of history. Throughout the year, we plan to host events and exhibits telling the history of the Museum and honoring the many individuals who contributed to our success. I hope you will join us for these special celebration!

Our 50th year is also a time for us to look to the future to shape the legacy the community will celebrate at the Museum's centennial in 2068. Our accomplishments over the last year provide a strong foundation as we begin our journey into our second half-century.

In 2017, we completed the transition to our new storage building. Finding and purchasing a new building followed by moving hundreds of artifacts was an enormous effort. I sincerely thank the Museum staff, volunteers and community partners who worked tirelessly to ensure artifacts representing North Idaho's heritage were carefully moved and safely stored in the new building.

Also in 2017, the Museum staff and Board evaluated our community engagement efforts with a formal self-assessment. The assessment

was administered by the American Alliance of Museums and a summary of results appears in this newsletter. In addition to the assessment, we completed a five-year plan outlining a financial and resource road map for the Museum's future growth.

As we look forward to 2018, our self-assessment and plan will be instrumental in guiding our activities. We will work to increase awareness of the Museum and to ensure we meet the needs of our growing community. Since we have outgrown our current exhibit hall and work space, our priorities will be seeking donations for our building fund and evaluating options for a new facility.

I am excited about celebrating our golden anniversary and invite you to become part of the Museum's future legacy. The Museum welcomes your thoughts and encourages your participation as a board member, volunteer or committee member. Your generous contributions will be important for our future success and I hope you will consider us in your giving plans this year.

Julie Gibbs, President MNI Board

Thank You

We thank those who sent in a year-end donation. As members you are our first line of supporters. We appreciate you. There are several things you can do to help such as:

- Meet with Robert Singletary, a board member or Dorothy Dahlgren to discuss your interest in the Museum and how you would like to be involved
- Tell people about the Museum, what it means and why it is important to you and our community
- Serve on the board and/or the development committee

- Consider giving regularly to the building and endowment funds
- Pledge over a span of years
- Include us in your estate planning
- Volunteer
- Keep your membership current (your dues renewal date is on the mailing label), give gift memberships and encourage others to join.

Building Fund Donations

D.L. Martin
Cort & Brenda Sims
Marty & Julie Westbrook
Terence & Debra Neff
Dan Gookin
The Sausser Family
Denny & Kathy Arneson
Ron & Betty Mills
Chuck & Kathy Hosack
Mike West
Schedler Mack Insurance
John & Helen Yuditsky
John Giesen
Bruce & Colleen English
The Garner Trust
Chet & Nancy Morris
Caroline Crollard
Jack Russell
Sandy & Jeanne Emerson
Todd and Julie Swindell
Ken & Victoria Roberge
William & Julie Gibbs
Tom & Kirste Richards
The descendants of the Tom and Lola Kerl Family. Kerl Family member Margaret Gates made an additional donation.

Cash Donations

George Wilhelm
Marilyn & Robert Hunt
John & Helen Yuditsky

Richard Kochansky & Jennifer James
 Beta Sigma Phi
 Harald Haarfager Lodge #11
 Eleanor & Ray Grannis
 Michele Williams
 Wayne & Faye Sweney

Serve on the Board

As our communities grow and change the Museum is working to expand its programs, facilities and staff to preserve regional history. Board leadership is needed to ensure history has a place in our future. Please consider serving on the Museum of North Idaho's Board of Directors.

The nominating committee will recruit as many new directors as there are openings. Please contact Committee Chairman Mike Dixon at 208-659-2807 or visit www.museumni.org for more information.

Museum Assessment

In 2017 we were selected to participate in the Community Engagement Assessment, one of three offered by the Museum Assessment Program (MAP) funded by the

Memorials

- For Robert Hulick from Maxine Hulick
- For Todd Hudson & Jennifer Wagner from Bob Macdonald for the Fort Sherman Chapel
- For Barry Rust from Sonny Long
- For Svendsgaard Family from Mae Ann Henderson
- For Willis Moody from Ray & Vickie Johnson
- For Dean Satchwell from Dorothy Satchwell
- For Dick Whitney from Klaus & Marie Rau

Remember your loved ones and friends with a memorial donation. These donations help build our endowment.

Please include the address of the family member you would like us to notify.

Federal Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), and administered by the American Alliance of Museums (AAM). The one-year process of self-assessment, institutional activities and a peer review helped us examine better ways to serve our region, plan for the future, and meet national museum standards.

Reviewer Keni Sturgeon, Director of Science and Education, Pacific Science Center, praised us for our accomplishments and made recommendations to guide us. Given MNI's plans for a new facility and growth to meet the communities' needs, the reviewer recommended the Board focus on building relationships with its members, the community, business leaders and government officials.

Artifact Donations Since November

Margaret Gates: Painting of 721 Lakeshore Drive with Ellen and John Kerl as children in the yard.

Donna Henson: WWII canteen and radiophone.

Ron Evans: Ledger from the E.B. Modine store at Fighting Creek, Fighting Creek calendar and a Texaco plaque to Mrs. Modine.

Kenny Dingman: Gauges from the Potlatch Lumber Mill powerhouse and a 1940s guest log from Potlatch.

Bonner Co. Historical Society: Airmail envelope dated 1946 "First Flight - AM 78" showing route to Coeur d'Alene.

Clyde McCaw: Rope from the Dream Theatre used to raise and lower backdrops for vaudeville acts.

Charmaine Kolb: Photo of Jerry Deitz in his race car with his trophies.

Nez Perce Co. Hist. Society: Burke stereograph, circa 1890.

Field Trips

Several fourth graders, after visit-



MNI Celebrating 50 Years

Left: Museum Board member Carl Krueger, NIJC President Barry Schuler and Museum Board member Col. John McFarland are looking over the plans to renovate our first museum building, the Fort Sherman Powder Magazine. In the early 1970s the new museum board struggled to find a building for museum use. NIJC President Schuler canvassed prospective donors in the name of NIJC and the Museum. They raised \$4,820 for the restoration of the 1885 Powder Magazine. In June 1972 the College received title to the powder magazine. The Museum opened its doors in 1973. We moved to our present location in 1979 and kept the Fort Museum open until 2010.

ing the museum with their class, brought their parents in to show them the neat stuff. 744 students visited with 470 taking advantage of the free admission and bus transportation. Your contribution to this program will make it possible for even more students from throughout the county to visit the Museum.

Annual Meeting April

The Museum's annual meeting and banquet will be Tuesday April 17 at the Hayden Lake Country Club. Mark your calendar. The program and ballot will be mailed out in early April. Don Pischner will highlight the Museum's accomplishments as we celebrate our 50th anniversary.

If you have an experience with the Museum you would like to share please contact us.



PO Box 812
Coeur d'Alene, ID 83816-0812

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Non Profit
US Postage Paid
Permit #10
Coeur d'Alene ID
83814

Get on Board!

Send in Your Membership

- Friend of History* \$500
- Georgie Oakes* \$100+
- Idaho* \$100
- Flyer* \$50
- Amelia Wheaton* \$25

Make An Additional Donation To A Special Fund

- Memorial/Endowment \$ _____
- Building Fund \$ _____
- Chapel \$ _____
- Total enclosed \$ _____**

Membership Benefits Include: **Free admission to the Museum**
***10% off in the Museum Store * Quarterly Newsletter**

Please check your mailing label for your membership renewal date.

Name _____

Address _____

City _____ State/Zip _____

Phone _____

Email _____

Secondary Addr. _____

Museum of North Idaho * PO Box 812 * Cd'A, ID 83816-0812

To pay with credit card call 208-664-3448 or go to www.museumni.org

Please add dd@museumni.org to your email contact list

Museum of North Idaho

Our mission is to collect, preserve and interpret the history of the Coeur d'Alene Region to foster appreciation of the area's heritage.

Board of Directors

- President Julie Gibbs
- Vice President John McTear
- Secretary Connie McGee
- Treasurer Tom Richards
- Mike Dixon, Frank Darlington
and Kristen Rebmann

Staff

- Dorothy Dahlgren, Director
- Robert Singletary, Program & Marketing Director
- Lisa Hunt, Bookkeeper

The Museum of North Idaho Quarterly Newsletter is published in February (Winter), May (Spring), August (Summer) and November (Fall)

Editor Dorothy Dahlgren dd@museumni.org
PO Box 812, Coeur d'Alene, ID 83816-0812
208-664-3448 www.museumni.org

The Museum is a 501(c)3 non-profit organization and qualifies for the Idaho income tax credit for contributions to educational institutions and museums (the Idaho State Educational Tax Credit), in addition to the usual charitable deduction. Consult your accountant.