

# Emmett, Idaho Cherry Festival

*Submitted by Theta Chapter in Emmett, Idaho*

The Emmett Valley was first inhabited by wandering members of the Mountain Shoshone tribe, then in the early 1800s by trappers associated with the Hudson Bay Company seeking beaver pelts for the hat trade. Once gold miners passed through the area in the 1860s, it wasn't long before several bold entrepreneurs settled in the fertile land along the Payette River and established a small community that eventually became known as the town of Emmett. With plenty of water available from the Payette River, some of these early settlers planted gardens and fruit trees and helped supply food to the mining camps in the mountains. By the time an elaborate canal system had been developed, and with the completion of Black Canyon Dam above the town in 1924, hundreds of orchards had been planted in what became known as the Valley of Plenty. Apples, peaches, apricots, pears, prunes and plums were available for market, and by 1940 Emmett had become the largest shipping point in Idaho for sweet cherries.

With abundant harvests of all that fruit, it stands to reason that early residents would choose to celebrate their good fortune, and so in 1928 the tradition of the Cherry Festival was born when an employee of one of the local packinghouses decided an end-of-the-season dance would be a grand idea. The idea of Shorty Britton became so immediately popular that he was afraid he couldn't manage the planning well enough so he enlisted the help of the local American Legion. The first year the Legion organized two dances that historians refer to as a "howling success." Unfortunately the dances erupted into massive cherry throwing contests inside the buildings, so the following year a carnival was booked and the dance was held outside.

By 1934 a parade and a queen contest had become part of the outdoor festival, and those two events, along with many more activities, became part of the continuing Emmett Cherry Festival held the second full week in June each year. Each year thousands of visitors travel to Emmett to enjoy a plethora of activities: a Cherry Pie Eating Contest, a Pit Spit, the Great Cherry Bakeoff, the Miss Gem County Pageant, the Junior Miss Cherry Festival Pageant, the Valley of Plenty Quilt Show, a Fun Run, the Kiwanis Breakfast, the Emmett Lions Car Show, a softball tournament, a children's parade on Friday and the grand Cherry Festival Parade on Saturday, a carnival along with a food court, numerous free concerts featuring area entertainers and dancers—and the list of offered activities goes on and on.

The Emmett Cherry Festival features entry-free family entertainment, mostly located in the Emmett City Park near downtown Emmett. If the weather cooperates, visitors can also enjoy picking Bing and Lambert cherries in many of Emmett's orchards located just a few miles out of town. For anyone looking for an historic good time celebrating Idaho's fruit industry and the beginning of summer, next years dates have already been set, and additional information can be found by checking the Emmett Chamber of Commerce website. You won't want to miss the 2014 celebration, and should you decide to attend you just might go home the winner of the Pit Spit or the very yummy Cherry Pie Eating Contest!

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