

Central Bench

..... HISTORY

for the Central Bench Neighborhood Association

By Jim Duran



Boise, Idaho

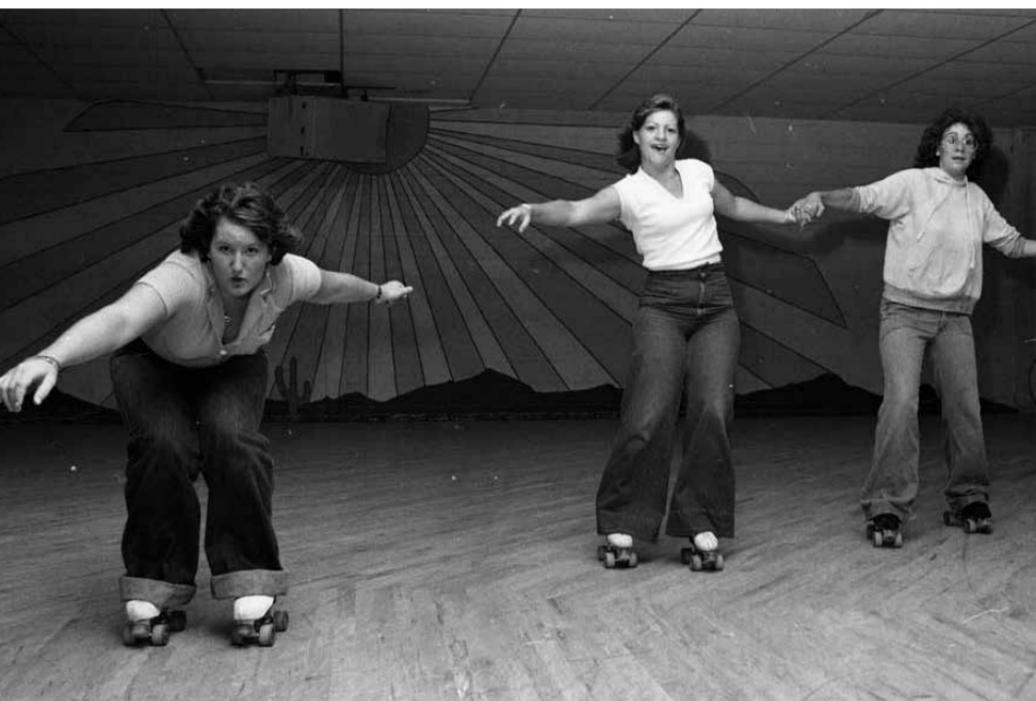
— CENTRAL BENCH HISTORY —

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By Jim Duran

for the
Central Bench Neighborhood Association

Sponsored by the City of Boise's
Neighborhood Reinvestment Grant program



{Skateland (6633 Overland Rd.), 1979}

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by Jim Duran

Edited by Shari Hennefer and
Boise City Department of Arts & History staff
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Photograph of Traffic Box at Orchard and Overland featuring original art of the Franklin School by Anne E. Watson Sorenson.
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Back:
Skateland, 1979, *Idaho Statesman*
Maxine Briggs, Briggs Family

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Shari Hennefer, Randy Harkelroade and Boise's Central Bench Neighborhood Association (CBNA) launched the Central Bench History project in 2013. Shari wrote the following preface.

As lifelong residents of the Central Bench (hereafter central bench/bench), my brother Randy Harkelroade and I witnessed dramatic changes in our neighborhood over the past 60 years. Most notably, the closure and ensuing demolition of the historic Franklin Elementary school in 2008 jeopardized our community spirit and sense of place. We began to recognize the importance of recording and preserving memories of the central bench to have a tangible record of the past.

Time was of the essence due to the advanced ages of longtime residents. Sadly, our mother and aunt were gone before they could be interviewed about growing up on their five-acre farm on Albion Street. Both attended Franklin School from first through twelfth grades.

We knew we needed to take action.

As part of the City of Boise's Sesquicentennial celebration the CBNA received a 2013 grant from the City to embark upon a structured oral history project with our longtime neighbors. We hired historian Jim Duran to interview and record residents who were interested in sharing their experiences, photographs, and ephemera. In addition to the interviews, Jim and fellow historian Angie Davis conducted research, gleaning from a variety of archival documents and secondary sources. The CBNA obtained additional grant monies from the City in 2014 to publish this document and to share central bench history with others. In these pages we are reminded that history is best told in the lives of everyday people, those who love their neighborhood and want to improve it. This narrative of our past puts in focus our lives today with a nod to the future of our bench community that we love.

- Shari Hennefer – March 2015



The author would like to thank Randy Harkelroade, Shari Hennefer, Dick Anderson and other leaders of CBNA for steering this history project. This project also relied on Kathleen Lacey from the City of Boise's Planning and Development Services and Brandi Burns, Amy Fackler, and Terri Schorzman from the Department of Arts and History. Randy Johnson and Katie Mader Miller also supported publication of this book. Amy Granger provided graphic design and layout.

Many photos were supplied by Boise State University Library, Special Collections and Archives and the Idaho State Historical Society. Angie Davis provided hours of research assistance and collected many key documents. The Wright Congregational United Church of Christ also granted Jim Duran access to its historical archive. Finally, and most importantly, this booklet could not be possible without the support of our interviewees: Carlyle and Maxine Briggs, Mary Crist, Tom Eubanks, Shari Hennefer, Carole Hesse and Kim Coe, Jerry Lawson, Vicki Linderborn, Barbara Miller Johncox, Chris Miner, Marko Simunich, Mildred Tillotson, and Ben Wetzel.

The historical research and brochure were funded through the City of Boise's Neighborhood Reinvestment Grant program.



Welcome to the central bench neighborhood! Here you will find culturally diverse residents, well-established homes, newer apartment complexes and eclectic shopping centers with a history of growth that parallels the expansion of downtown Boise. As the name implies, the central bench is nestled in the heart of Boise's bench community. Bordered by the busy streets of Orchard, Overland, and Franklin, lay quiet residential streets where several families have lived for generations; their parents or grandparents tilled the land and founded a farming community with accompanying retail services. Interspersed among these established families are new residents looking to grow roots in this friendly and accepting neighborhood.

The Boise bench (also called the First Bench) refers to a plateau south of and considerably higher than the Boise River. The Boise community has called this area "the bench" since at least 1900. The bench is accessed by fairly steep grades from downtown Boise. The grades presented challenges for resident and wagon travel during early years of city and bench settlement. Boiseans called the trek up the hill to the Morris Hill Cemetery an "utterly desolate and forbidding journey."¹ In 1901 bench residents petitioned the board of county commissioners to build a road from the Ninth Street Bridge to Morris Hill Cemetery.¹ The community endured another ten years of unimproved roads to the bench until 1910 when the road to Morris Hill was significantly improved with oiled river gravel.² The clear natural boundaries of the Boise River and the rim of the bench helped solidify this community's identity.



{Franklin School Fair 1976}

The central bench is rooted in a tradition of diverse enterprises and demographic groups. Residents take pride in the community's uniqueness and history spanning nearly 150 years, when the first irrigation canal meandered through this area in 1878. For over a century the bench area offered newcomers an open canvas of opportunities to re-form landscapes and shape enterprises. When the first farmers and developers broke ground, their dreams and ambitions guided growth to today's community.



The bench community has maintained close ties to Boise's downtown business core. Ten years after Boise was first platted in 1863, farmers along the Boise River recognized the potential for expansion beyond the reach of the river's flood plain. From the 1870s through the 1910s the bench was an obvious place to consider for new agricultural and business enterprises. Astute investors envisioned opportunities on



Orchards Near Boise

{Orchards near Boise, 1905}

the inhospitable, treeless flatland in dire need of water. In 1876 as the national economy improved following the Panic of 1873, William B. Morris, a stage and freight businessman financed an irrigation canal project to carry water from the Boise River to the bench by way of a dam in Barberton, east of Boise. Morris's nephew, W.H. Ridenbaugh, continued the project and the canal channeled water in 1878. By the early 1900s, the ditch was known as the Ridenbaugh Canal.⁴



{Bird's eye view of Boise City, Ada County, 1890}

The 1894 Carey Act allowed private investors to design, build and profit from irrigation projects that provided water to settlers of arid land in the American West. The Act directly stimulated enterprise on the bench as investors expanded the existing irrigation system. Growth on the bench gathered around three distinct communities tied to the canals: the Rose Hill neighborhood near the bench rim, the Whitney community south of Rose Hill Street, and the Franklin community centered at present-day Franklin and Orchard streets. These communities established a rural network outside Boise City limits, connected by dirt roads and canals.

Benjamin Scott, one of the first investors, purchased 900 acres from W.H. Ridenbaugh sometime in the 1880s. Scott profited by subdividing his properties in the Morris Hill and Franklin areas and selling parcels of land to farmers. In 1883 the Union Pacific Railroad established a train station in Kuna, Idaho (15 miles south and slightly west of Boise), which provided transportation of agricultural goods from the bench to major markets in the Northwest, such as Portland and Salt Lake City⁵.



{Boise Packing House, Yates Packing shed, Franklin Road}

Some large-scale producers reached even larger markets. The Meyers Company became a prominent name in the area, in part for supplying canned fruit to soldiers during World War I.

William A. Rankin, R.A. Stansbury, Asa D. Clark, Benjamin Scott, and M.F. Eby were among the first farmers to invest in the Franklin bench area. William Rankin moved to Boise in 1881 after working nearly twenty years freighting goods for miners in California and Nevada. Rankin homesteaded the land south of Cassia Street, between Roosevelt and Orchard streets. He tapped into the Ridenbaugh canal, which bordered the northern edge of his property.⁶ In 1904 or 1905 Rankin allowed the Boise City Irrigation & Land Company to dig a ditch, or lateral, off the



{Stacking Hay}

Ridenbaugh Canal and through his farm to irrigate other properties on the bench. Rankin was promised the new Farmers Lateral would irrigate 132 acres of his land, but he claimed it fell far short by only covering 10 acres. He took the irrigation company to court, requesting they increase his farm's allotment by building a water wheel to lift more water out of the canal. Rankin won the case in 1904.

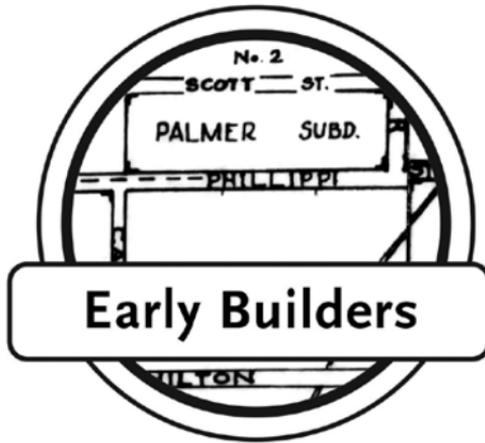
The Rankin case was not the first time water rights in the central bench landed two parties in court. When W.M. Ridenbaugh sold most of his property to Benjamin Scott, he transferred the canal rights to George V. Foreman leaving Scott without water rights. In 1899, Scott sued Foreman over a water use arrangement they agreed to years earlier. Scott argued that Foreman charged too much for water. Their 1887 contract stated that Foreman was to deliver water, based on acreage, to Scott in exchange for the cost of maintaining the canal. In 1887 the cost was 30 cents an acre; by 1899 the price jumped to \$1.15 an acre. The judge set forth a compromise with Scott paying 65 cents an acre.⁷ This court battle demonstrated the ongoing conflicts regarding water rights, prices, and access—all critical issues that affected bench development and agricultural endeavors.

Most early development on the bench centered on land proximal to irrigation ditches. Along Farmers Lateral, Asa Clark built a home near the current Randolph-Robertson subdivision. To the west of Scott's 900-acre ranch, which included most land north of Cassia Avenue, west of Roosevelt Street, south of Fairview Road, and east of Curtis Road, the Eby family homesteaded a farm along Curtis and Franklin roads around 1886.⁸ Leota Eby was credited for naming several roads along their property, including Pond, Vine and Hilton. Eby Street was later renamed Curtis Road, after brothers Henry and Frank Curtis bought 40 acres from the Ebys around 1890.⁹

Before the Oregon Short Line stub line defined the northern boundary of the central bench (1887), road signs indicated the change from "North" to "South." East-west roads north of Franklin (Old County Road) were named 1st Street North (Alpine), 2nd Street North (Bethel), etc., and roads south of Franklin were given the suffix "South." Over time, property owners gave the numbered streets more unique names.



{Fruit Spraying}



PHILLIPPI

Wesley M. Phillippi started his business on Vine Street located just below the base of the second bench (the bluff that starts at Overland Road and Phillippi Street) close to Sites Drive today. Phillippi was born in Illinois in 1870. He was a teacher by training but went into the dairy business when he moved to Boise in 1907. Workers milked over 100 cows at his dairy located on the bench.



{Wesley M. Phillippi, 1954}

Phillippi became a highly active community member along with his brothers and sisters who also settled in the valley. The Phillippi family partially paid for and donated labor to the construction of Wright Church.

In 1917, W.M. Phillippi moved to Custer County, Idaho to expand his dairy business. He became equally as well-known in Eastern Idaho as he was in the western part of the state. In 1932 he was nominated for state senator for Custer County but was unsuccessful in his campaign. Wesley Phillippi only lived on the bench for ten years but his industrious efforts were well noted. By the 1940s, Vine Street was renamed Phillippi Street.

BIG MIKE SIMUNICH

Another early family, Mike and Mary Simunich, got their start on the corner of Garden and Franklin streets. Mike immigrated to America from Croatia/Yugoslavia after the First World War and landed a position at Boise Payette Lumber Company building railroad bridges in the Idaho forests.¹⁰ His large frame earned him the nickname “Big Mike.”

After the birth of their first daughter in a hotel in Cascade, Mary insisted that the family settle in Boise where the children could go to school. A few years later they moved to the bench. Mike continued to work for Boise Payette; Mary raised eight children and tended dairy cows.

Mike Simunich witnessed signs of growth on the bench and seized upon the new opportunities presented. He purchased several tracts of land as well as a plot near Cole Road. Mike’s brother, Marko, bought land near Roosevelt Street on which he lived in a converted train car, most likely repurposed from business use at Boise Payette Lumber. It wasn’t the only converted train car used as a dwelling on the bench. Many bench residents remember the Trolley, a train car converted into a business, first as an ice cream parlor then as a bar, which operated on the bench from 1934 to 2006.¹¹

Most early bench residents considered themselves part of a distinct community outside Boise City limits. In 1892 this community, known as Franklin, built a one-room wooden schoolhouse on property donated by Benjamin Scott at the corner of Franklin and Orchard streets. They called it Scott School, or District 45. The community hired Ms. Ivy Wilson (age 19) as the first and only teacher. Ms. Wilson's career later included public office when she became Ada County's superintendent of schools in 1904 and served in that role until 1917. She continued teaching at Boise schools for another three decades—totaling 52 years of teaching in Boise.

In 1905 the district built a beautiful new two-story sandstone building that became the center point of the Franklin community. After some debate residents renamed it Franklin School. The original wood building that housed Scott School, at just a decade old, was sold at auction. By 1908 the community grew large enough to include high school courses. The first high school student to graduate from Franklin School was Marion Richardson in 1911.¹²



{Mary Latimore}

Franklin School was the quintessential rural schoolhouse, located in the middle of farms and orchards. Children could hear the school bells from a distance. Some lucky enough to live close by, like Mary Latimore who lived kitty-corner on Franklin and Orchard, would listen for the school bells at home and then dash off to class arriving just before they stopped ringing.

Many other children walked farther to get to school. Their path could become a challenge when the canals were full of water. Such was the case for Vicki Linderborn. She recollected how she needed extra time making her way to a bridge that crossed the Ridenbaugh canal to reach South Junior High. Some enterprising kids placed boards across the full laterals and shimmied across the canal for a quick shortcut to school. In the winter, students could easily walk through the empty canal in many different locations.



{1935-36 Franklin School 4th Grade, Earlene Pinneo
in second row, second child from the left}

Franklin School served all twelve grades until 1948. Vicki Linderborn's oldest brother was in the last graduating high school class. Vicki was in elementary grades during World War II, and she remembered very crowded classrooms. During and after the war, many people around the country were moving out of urban cores and into suburbs. Places like the bench became packed with new families. Vicki remembered having class in an old barracks building from Gowen Field at Franklin School. She spent second grade in one of those rooms. In sixth grade, she was bused to Cole School where "we could only have the classroom for half a day. And then the other half of a day, lunch room was a study hall and another group got the classroom for classes."¹³



{1945 Franklin School seniors school play "Minus a Million,"
Earlene Pinneo was a member of the cast.}

Student John Simunich was not thrilled about school. His mother Mary would escort him to school and by the time she returned home on Garden and Franklin, John would have sprinted ahead of her to greet her in the kitchen. Eventually the teacher, Miss Robertson, allowed John's older sister to sit with and keep an eye on him during class.



{Mrs. Isabel (Elizabeth) Petrie}

Dorothy and David Petrie attended Franklin School in the 1890s; their mother Isabel Petrie helped to start a Sunday school that would eventually form a congregation for the Wright Congregational Church just down the street. Mrs. Petrie opened her home for Sunday school classes and Minnie Jessie Miner Dickenson, an ordained minister known for preaching in mining camps throughout Idaho, led the children's class.

During the 1897 commencement program for Franklin School, Mrs. Petrie asked the school board to use classroom space for Sunday school services, which had outgrown the space available in her home. The board agreed. The next year a volunteer group held religious services on Sundays at the school ministered by Dickenson. This little gathering eventually gained popularity. Reverend Reuben B. Wright of the First Congregational Church in downtown Boise often took the trolley up to the bench to minister to the group every Sunday. On October 4, 1908 a six-member committee voted to organize the



{Minnie J. Dickinson}

Second Congregational Church of Boise. As a token of gratitude to Reverend Wright's leadership, the congregation voted in 1910 to rename their church Wright Congregational Church.¹⁴

Minnie Dickenson was appointed the first minister of the church in 1910. With support and encouragement from Reverend Wright, Dickenson began looking for a permanent location for their fledgling church. She found support from the Kerr family on Franklin who sold the church a half-acre of their property for \$500. The church purchased an additional plot from Mr. Fisher for \$20. Building construction started right away but was completed in phases due to limited finances. In 1912 the basement was finished with plans to complete the structure when funds became available. Services were held in the basement for three years until the main level of the church was finished in 1915.



{Wright Church phase one, 1912}

Some early leaders include W.M. Phillippi, Sunday school superintendent, and Mr. Fisher and Ben Allen, elected deacons. They held their first service in the newly completed church on May 16, 1915. The 124 members included the Allen, Adams, Chambers, Estabrook, Gill, Kerr, Miller, Phillippi, Pierce, Ross, Rankin, Schnell, and Weaver families.



{1912-1914 Wright Congregational Church}

Some Boiseans were attracted to the Wright Congregational Church for its efforts to consolidate Protestant faiths. The Capital City newspaper reported in 1926 that Boise's churches had a history of competition between denominations for limited resources; the Wright Congregational Church offered a variety of services and choices for various Protestant denominations to attract a broader congregation. In later years people of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the Catholic Church also built churches on the bench.



{Wright Church, page two, circa 1915}



As early as the 1880s Boiseans recognized that mainline service on the Union Pacific Railroad would benefit Boise's commerce and accessibility. Progress was slow and took a major detour when the Union Pacific Railroad decided the mainline would bypass Boise partially due to the bench's steep slope that made it difficult for locomotives to drop down into the city. The initial mainline stop in the region was in Kuna, requiring a 15-mile stagecoach ride into Boise. In 1887 James A. McGee and J.F. Curtis connected the mainline with a "stub" line east from Nampa right up to the rim of the bench southeast of Vista Avenue and Rose Hill.¹⁵

Although this stub line connected Boise to the transcontinental railroad, it frustrated many Boiseans; most locomotive traffic simply passed by the Boise spur and the small wooden depot atop the bench, outside the city limits, was considered unworthy of Boise's stature. By the early 1890s developers sought a way to move the depot downtown.

Union Pacific and Boise leaders decided the new depot would be built on Front Street and trains would head west along what is now the path of Interstate I-184. Once on the bench, the tracks would cut southwest until it met up with the old stub line near what is now Curtis and Franklin roads.

One of the Union Pacific's challenging—and most colorful—acquisitions in creating the new stub route was obtaining the right-

of-way through Mr. Eby's ranch near Curtis and Franklin roads. In 1893 the railroad's engineer sent 75 graders to level a path for tracks through the Eby property. Mr. Eby and his son reportedly drew a rifle and pistol and threatened the men. The graders left but returned with the engineer who brandished a rifle himself; the crew proceeded to demolish a barn, chicken coop and pig pen on Eby's property. The police arrived and arrested the Union Pacific men for displaying a deadly weapon and trespassing but the damage was done and tracks were eventually laid.¹⁶ With unrelenting determination, the railroad company and Boise's commerce drivers pushed forward not flinching for the stubborn farmers. The train tracks cut through the bench and down near Garden Street and Fairview Avenue to downtown.

In 1920, Boise Chamber of Commerce officials settled on a deal to put Boise on the railroad mainline. But by 1920 downtown Boise was well established and many property owners still did not want tracks going through their land. The old stub line along Alpine Street in the Franklin bench area suited both the chamber and the Union Pacific as the best route for the tracks because of the existing right-of-way and did not require trains to drop down off the bench.¹⁷

On April 16, 1925 the first train arrived in the newly built Boise Train Depot on the bench. *The Idaho Statesman* declared "Today Idaho's capital city ceases to be the terminus on an insignificant branch line and takes its place on the transcontinental artery of the Union Pacific Railroad (UPRR) system."¹⁸ Rail service initiated a new era for the bench. The depot served as a community icon and gathering place while it connected the bench to downtown and other areas of Boise.



{UPRR tracks near Alpine and Garden}



The Union Pacific Railroad was not the only group to lay tracks in the central bench. By the 1890s smaller cities across the country were taking advantage of electricity to power streetcars, also called trolleys, and Boise kept pace. The first streetcars in Boise moved people through downtown, east to west hitting main attractions like the Natatorium and the Idanha Hotel. By 1904 Boiseans could take day trips west to Caldwell on a streetcar line that included a stop at the fairgrounds, just north of the central bench at Orchard Street and Fairview Avenue.

To alleviate the burdensome wagon ride up the bench to Morris Hill Cemetery, the Boise Valley Railroad Company built a junction at the fairgrounds to connect the cemetery to downtown. A few years later the company laid tracks down Roosevelt Street to Overland Road that connected to South Boise.¹⁹ The “Hillcrest Loop” as it was called, remained a transportation staple until 1928 when buses replaced the streetcars. Construction crews eventually ripped out the streetcar tracks, or simply paved over them.



Farm life on the bench was similar to other areas in the rural West. Frost or insects often plagued farmers and inclement weather sometimes cut growing seasons short. The most profitable crop for many farmers was hay or alfalfa because numerous local dairies required feed. When the Great Depression hit the U.S. in 1929, farmers hunkered down and stuck with those most economically effective crops.

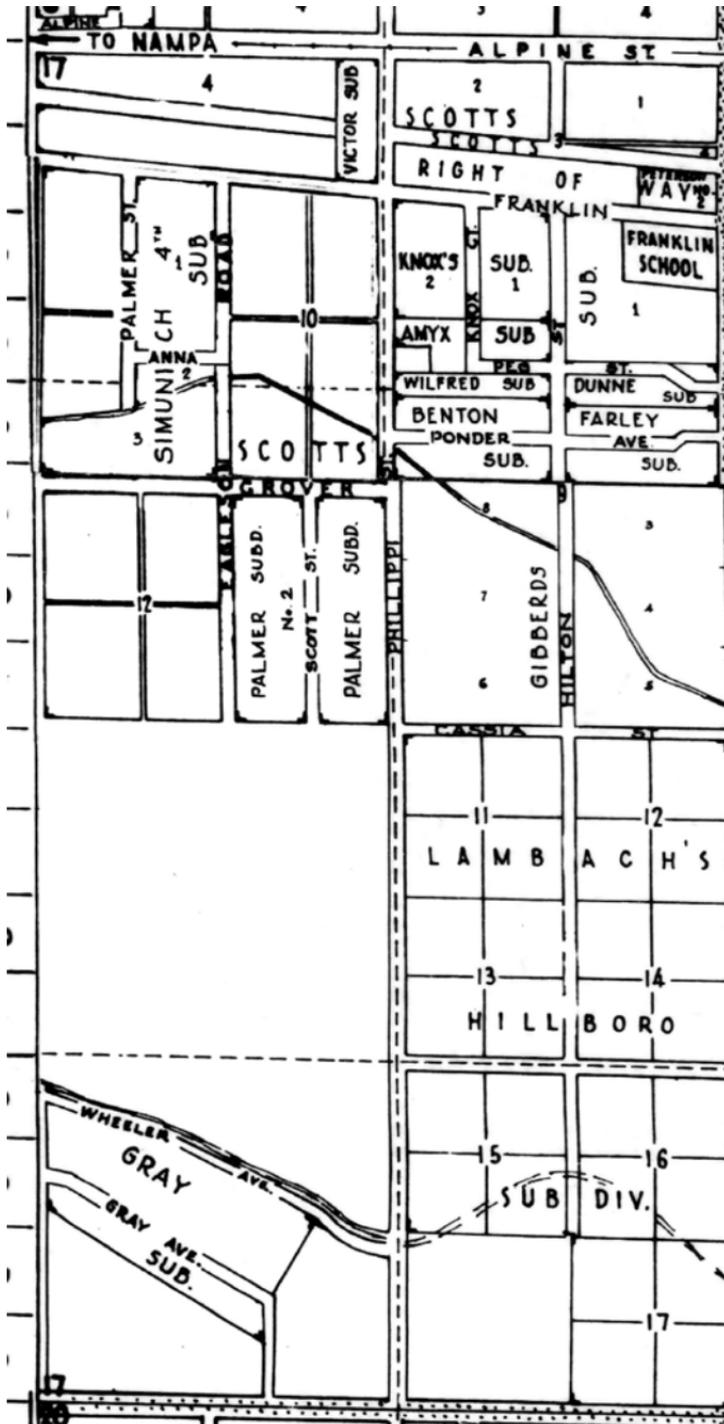
The Great Depression also brought vagabonds passing through Boise on the trains. Those riding the rails often jumped off the cars between Orchard and Roosevelt, shortly before reaching the train depot. Here the transients could avoid detection by disembarking near farms and orchards and also seek temporary work. The vagabonds used nationally known symbols and codes carved on telephone poles to identify farmers who might pay for work or were known to be kind to strangers.

The farmers and orchardists persevered through a sluggish economy and sold goods to local markets and regional vendors through railroad shipments. Refrigerated train cars proved critical in transporting fresh fruit throughout the Northwest.

National public works projects helped stimulate the local economy during the era of the Great Depression. In 1936 Works Progress Administration (WPA) workers built a gymnasium for Franklin School and sidewalks in the vicinity to improve walking routes. The central bench also benefitted from private investment during these difficult times. Mike Simunich recognized potential for repurposed housing during the economic slump. In 1936 his employer, Boise Payette Lumber Company, closed down the Barber Mill due to a lack of stumpage in the surrounding forests. The town of Barber was abandoned. The Simunich brothers sold several salvaged homes from Barber after relocating them on their subdivided bench property on Garden and Roosevelt streets.²⁰

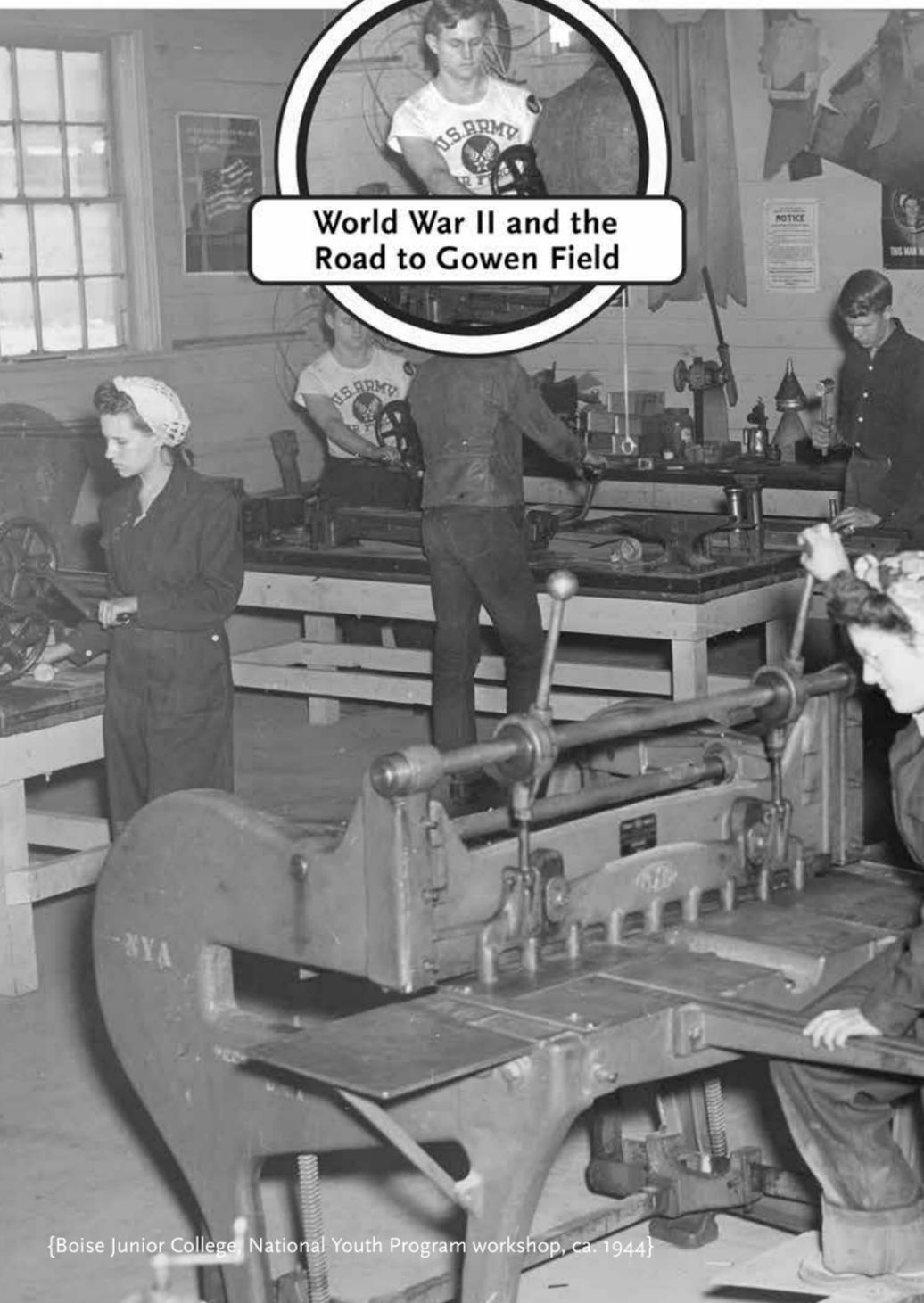


{Franklin Gymnasium, 1952}



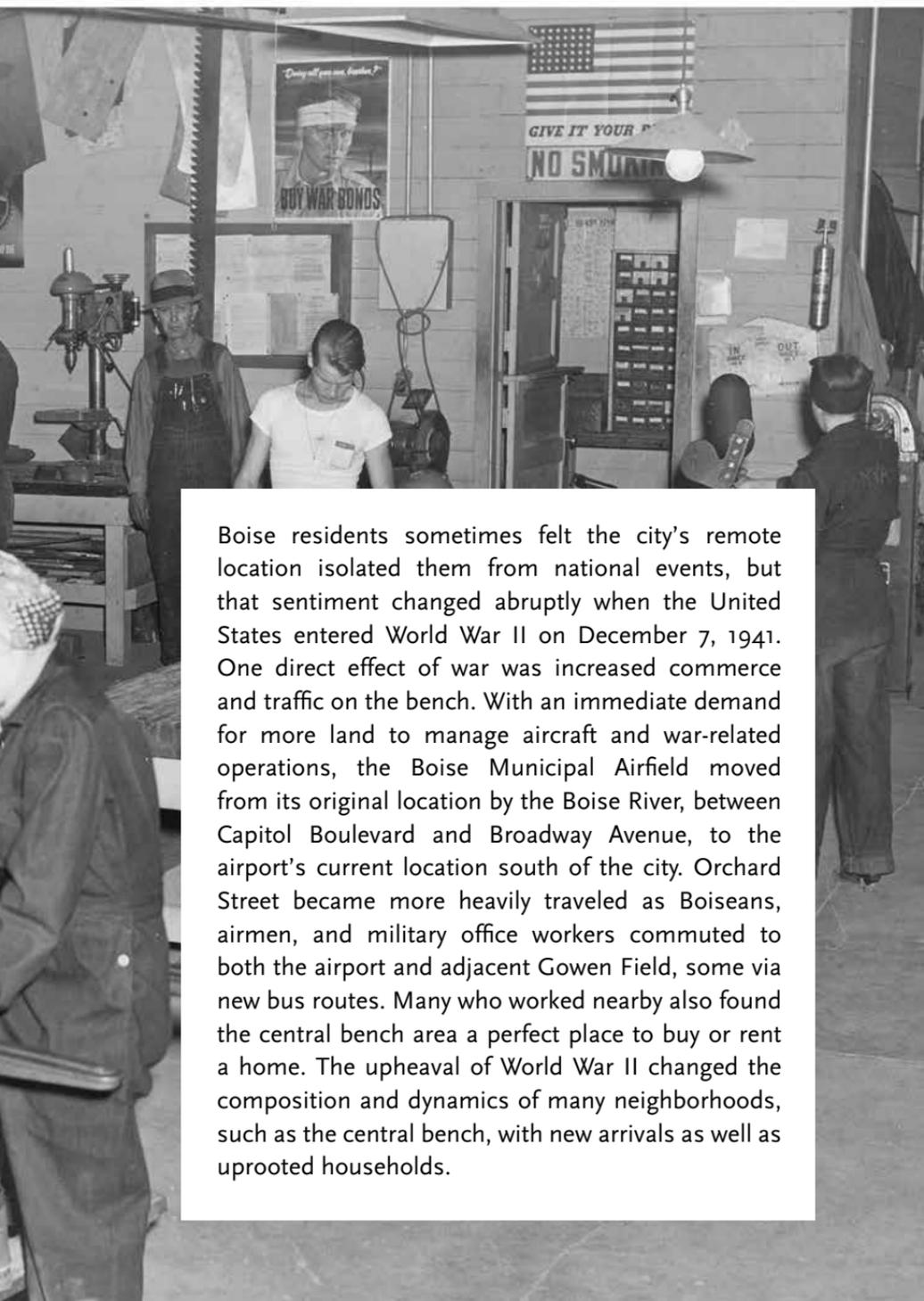


{Road map, 1948}



**World War II and the
Road to Gowen Field**

{Boise Junior College, National Youth Program workshop, ca. 1944}



Boise residents sometimes felt the city's remote location isolated them from national events, but that sentiment changed abruptly when the United States entered World War II on December 7, 1941. One direct effect of war was increased commerce and traffic on the bench. With an immediate demand for more land to manage aircraft and war-related operations, the Boise Municipal Airfield moved from its original location by the Boise River, between Capitol Boulevard and Broadway Avenue, to the airport's current location south of the city. Orchard Street became more heavily traveled as Boiseans, airmen, and military office workers commuted to both the airport and adjacent Gowen Field, some via new bus routes. Many who worked nearby also found the central bench area a perfect place to buy or rent a home. The upheaval of World War II changed the composition and dynamics of many neighborhoods, such as the central bench, with new arrivals as well as uprooted households.



World War II exacerbated the bench's gradual transition over the decades from a mostly agricultural community to a residential neighborhood. More people sought office and skilled labor positions in downtown Boise at the same time agriculture production moved increasingly to rural areas such as West Boise, Meridian, and Nampa. Over time, many property owners began subdividing farmland into residential acreage and lots—some very sizeable—that proved suitable for growing families. The proximity to transportation routes and downtown also made the area a convenient location for those seeking easy access to work and shopping. As the population increased, the bench also started supporting more businesses and services near its new residential hubs.

Many family histories illustrate these trends. In 1930 George “Earl” and Ella Pinneo moved to Albion Street, between Orchard and Roosevelt streets. Like many people of his generation, Earl worked near the population center in and around Boise. He was a union plumber involved with many WPA building projects during the Great Depression. The Pinneos lived in Boise's North End but yearned for room to spread out and grow their own food, so they bought five acres on Albion Street. The Pinneo home was perfect for raising a family within convenient driving distance to work. The Pinneos two daughters, Earlene and Marilyn, attended Franklin School.

The Briggs family settled and lived along Franklin Road. William Wesley Briggs had owned the Cole Ranch, near Cole School since 1902.²¹ William Wesley's son Raymond J. Briggs, was a mining engineer who in 1921 started his own engineering consulting business in downtown Boise's Noble Building on Tenth and Main streets. In 1934 Raymond and his wife Weltha Wiona Wilkie Briggs moved from the Cole community to a five-acre tract on the south side of Franklin near Eagleson roads. Their two young boys, Carlyle and Bill, transferred to Franklin School. Carlyle attended Franklin from sixth through twelfth grade, then enrolled in Boise Junior College followed by the University of Idaho where he studied engineering. While at the University of Idaho he met his future wife, Maxine Roberts from Caldwell.



{Maxine Briggs and her converted barracks home on Eagleson, 1940s.}

During World War II Carlyle and Maxine lived in Florida where Carlyle worked for an aviation company. The Briggs moved back to Boise after the war so Carlyle could join his father Raymond's engineering firm. Raymond gifted some of the property from his five-acre tract to his sons Carlyle and Bill. Raymond subdivided the remaining property for residential development.

Carlyle built a home on his lot from 1948 to 1950 using surplus military barracks from Gowen Field. Bill sold his piece of land to developers Smith and Ed Bews who later built an apartment complex on the corner of Franklin and Eagleson roads. Around this time in the late 1940s, the Briggs and Associates engineering firm moved to 619 Grove Street on what is now called the Basque Block. Their building is still in use today as a Basque Pelota court. A sign on the back of the building with the Briggs company name is still visible from the alley.

Jack and Lozene Lawson moved into their home on Eagleson across the street from the Briggs in 1952. Jack repaired typewriters and adding machines for the Burroughs Company. After the war he found work in Boise's bustling downtown and a safe quiet neighborhood nearby on the bench to live. Eagleson was a typical residential area in the 1950s with gravel streets and plenty of space for children to play baseball or hide and seek in the open fields. Those small residential streets quickly filled in by the late 1950s and early 1960s. A typical home of the era in the central bench featured two bedrooms, one bathroom, a garage, an oil or coal furnace, a septic tank, and a relatively big backyard. Many properties inherited water rights from Farmers Lateral or other irrigation ditches that meandered through the suburbs. Mike Simunich along with Jay and Bill Amyx subdivided and built quite a few of these homes. The Briggs engineering firm team surveyed and platted many of the subdivisions including water, sewer, streets, and other utilities.

Many young men starting families on the bench were veterans. Through their military service during World War II they were eligible for assistance from the Servicemen's Readjustment Act of 1944. Also known as the G.I. Bill, provisions included mortgage rate caps for home and business loans and funding for education and job training. A direct effect of the G.I. Bill was a jump in enrollment at Boise Junior College corroborating national studies that indicate the G.I. Bill successfully helped integrate veterans into the American workforce through helping them learn new professional skills. For the bench, the G.I. Bill shifted much of the workforce from agriculture to specialized positions based in an office.

After World War II people moved and traveled much more frequently. Automobile travel became easier when new highways were funded, largely by the federal government, under the Federal Highway Act of 1956. President Dwight D. Eisenhower championed the highway bill. This interstate freeway system, which came to Boise in 1963, helped transport goods between cities and into the rural West. Orchard Street proved once again its importance as a corridor for commerce; its highway onramp was constructed in 1969. The Central Bench evolved into a convenient location for businesses to operate yet remain close to the urban core. With this new dynamic, local businesses catered to the car commuter with drive-thru restaurants and homes with garages.



{Franklin and Orchard, 1976}



As Boise's downtown transformed into a commercial nucleus people began looking outside of it for housing. Road improvements and inexpensive fuel made driving to work affordable. From 1949 to 1973 the average price for a gallon of gasoline went from \$2.00/gallon in 1949 to \$1.50/gallon in 1973 (adjusted for inflation).²² The bench boomed and sprouted new neighborhood subdivisions in every direction. Sleepy Franklin and Orchard streets bustled with traffic. By 1957 the community urged the city to install street signals at the intersection.²³



{Franklin and Orchard new traffic signal, 1971}

The bench served as a suburb to downtown Boise, but investors recognized opportunities for local commerce and developed shopping centers at some of the major intersections. Fred Koll was one such investor. In 1947 he built a small hardware store at the back of a lot on the corner of Franklin Road and Orchard Street near the railroad tracks. Koll envisioned a cluster of buildings serving as a commerce hub for the neighborhood. Two years later the Albertson's grocery chain built a small store on the same lot, the current location of the Mandarin Palace restaurant. In 1953 Koll built another structure that housed a Whitehead drug store for many years. That same year, Albertson's expanded close to where Fred Meyer sits today.



{Franklin Shopping Center, circa 1950}



By the late 1950s the Franklin Shopping Center bustled with business, including Albertson's Market, The Merc, M.H. King Co., Sew More Sewing Center, and Whitehead Drugs. Pediatrician Dr. Carl M. Johnston along with a few other doctors and other professionals also established their businesses in the Franklin center.

{Franklin Shopping Advertisement}



IDAHO LEATHER COMPANY



{Royal Eubanks, 1953}

In addition to shopping centers numerous small businesses operated out of basements, garages and small additions to family homes. One example is Royal Eubanks' leather shop business across the street from the Franklin Shopping Center. Royal Eubanks moved to the bench from Washington State. He married Mary Latimore and they built a home around the corner from Mary's parents along Orchard Street.

Before World War II, Royal opened a leather shop, Eubanks Leather, out of the basement of their home. He made holsters, belts, and scabbards primarily for police officers, hunters and cowboys. After several years of expansion he sold the business to Pioneer Tent and Awning. Missing the leather business, he reopened a new shop known as Idaho Leather Company. Royal sold that business in 1955 to Bud Wetzel, a longtime neighbor and employee of the Eubanks family.

Bud ran the shop for many years, employing his son Ben after school throughout high school. He paid Ben fifty cents a holster and three

dollars for each belt. After spending a few of his young adult years in California Ben returned to Boise and bought Idaho Leather from his father in 1969. You can still find Ben in his Idaho Leather shop on Orchard Street.



{Idaho Leather, 2013}

COMMERCIAL HOME FURNISHINGS

Tony and Marguerite Kurpiewski began selling televisions in 1955. Their storefront was on the old Latimore property at the corner of Franklin and Orchard streets, right next to Wetzel's leather shop. Tony and Marguerite started with coin-operated television sets for hotels and offices when owning a television was a rarity. Their inventory for home television sets gradually grew. Early on customers suggested that the Kurpiewskis sell appliances along with televisions, so they did. Their

store was known as Commercial TV and Appliance for thirty-six years until they expanded to furniture and renamed their store Commercial Home Furnishings (CHF). CHF is still in business today on the same street corner where it remains a cornerstone of the Central Bench neighborhood.



{Commercial Home Furnishings}

HILLCREST SHOPPING CENTER



{Hickory Farms at Hillcrest, 1968}

Several general stores, diners, and various businesses operated along Overland Road before the Hillcrest Shopping Center was built in the early to mid-1960s. Early stores at the center included Welle's, Hollywood Beauty College, Woolworths, and Hickory Farms Meats. Many bench baby-boomers recall first seeing *Star Wars* at the Plaza Twin movie theatre in the center.



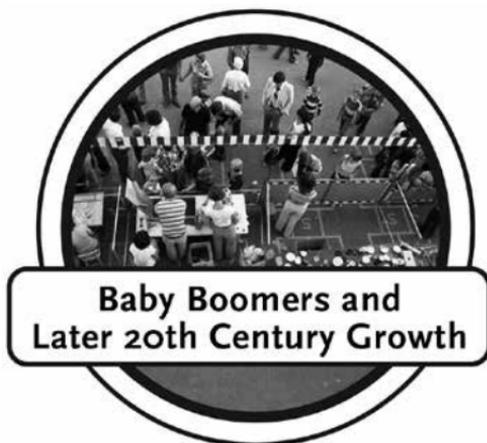
{Outside the Plaza Twin movie theater, 1969}

RANDOLPH-ROBERTSON SUBDIVISION

The Hillcrest Shopping Center sits just below a large hill that leads to the second bench where the Randolph-Robertson Subdivision is located. Like the Hillcrest Shopping Center, the Randolph-Robertson homes came a little later to the central bench community. These homes sprung up in the mid-1950s and tended to be a little larger than most of the older houses in the area. Developments in this area embraced the ranch style architecture and curved roads with only a few subdivision entrances and exits. Barbara Miller remembers moving to the neighborhood in 1966 when she was a child. Barbara frequented the Hillcrest Shopping Center; she especially loved to head down to the Woolworth's lunch counter or coin-operated photo booth.



{Barbara Miller holding fish and ice cream, 1969}



The post-World War II baby boom brought many families to the central bench. Immediately after the war, Carlyle Briggs and his firm of Briggs and Associates (later renamed B&A Engineers, Inc.) designed a new high school to replace Franklin School, near Curtis and Denton streets. Those plans fell through as the community's growth signaled the need for a much larger school than was originally scoped, so they turned Brigg's design into West Junior High School. In 1949 Franklin School was annexed into the Boise School District. As a result, the district discontinued high school classes on the bench and students transferred to Boise High in downtown Boise, to give the district time to plan for growth. The Boise School District initially envisioned a large school to be situated just below the bench, where Ann Morrison Park is now located. Those plans didn't materialize and in 1958 Borah High School, on Cassia Street, opened for students in the bench community. Marko "Butch" Simunich and Jerry Lawson were both members of Borah High School's first graduating class.

Children kept themselves busy during the summer months with a variety of outdoor sports and activities. In early days the community held apple box derbies down Orchard Street near the Overland intersection. Some youngsters—even as young as six or seven—took the bus downtown to see cartoons at the Rialto, Penny, or Ada (Egyptian today) theaters. The bench had two miniature golf courses: The Lazy M on Cassia and Latah (mid 1950s to late 1960s) and the Hillcrest miniature golf course on Roosevelt (1960s to 1990s).



{Kids and canal, 1977}

Summer fun culminated with the Western Idaho Fair, located north of Emerald near Fairview and Orchard roads. The fairground moved considerably further west and north in 1967, relocating at Chinden

Boulevard and Glenwood Street. Franklin Elementary, Wright Community Church, and the Boy and Girl Scouts also provided structured summer recreation for many children.



{Borah High All Night, 1961}

BENCH SEWER DISTRICT

By the 1950s the bench was a fully functioning suburb of Boise complete with its own newspaper, The Bench Mirror. Despite the



{Bench Sewer work 1959-60}



{Crews using custom-built machinery for the Bench Sewer job, 1959-60}

growing suburban feel, the community still retained remnants of its agricultural past. On the bench nearly all homes depended on individual septic tanks, and by the 1950s residents grew concerned about the potential contamination of well water from leaking tanks. The “Bench Boosters” group formed to sponsor and promote growth and improvements in the area. In 1957 the Boosters mailed letters and surveys to the residents and received enough support to create the Bench Sewer District. The newly established board immediately sought proposals to install 135 miles of new sewer lines. Boise’s Morrison-Knudsen Construction Company won the bid and went to work. Crews quickly realized drainage was going to be a problem. In some places the trench needed to be 24 feet deep. The Bench Sewer District managed this utility system for 50 years and transferred ownership over to the City of Boise in 2015.

WINCO

Growth on the bench reflected growth occurring on a national level. Before the arrival of supermarkets and grocery stores shoppers often went to corner markets for cereals, meats and dry goods. For those without a garden, chickens, or cows, corner markets offered dairy and produce goods as well. As more and more houses were constructed on



farmland and driving cars greater distances became more commonplace, people sought more resources for groceries, not only for convenience but also to replace what they weren't growing independently in their back yards. Supermarkets made shopping more efficient by saving time with just one stop. Most supermarkets on the bench were local or national chains, like Albertsons, Buttrey's or Food King. WinCo grocery store also got its start right here in the Central Bench.



{Walmart (WinCo) on Overland, 1972}

WinCo was founded in 1967 when Ralph Ward and Bud Williams opened a grocery store called Waremart on Overland Road. They later moved it down the street to 4550 Overland (where the Reel Movie Theatre is located today). The store was known for its low prices but it did not gain popularity until the late 1980s. In 1985 Waremart was sold to an employee stock ownership trust—making it an employee owned company. The eighteen stores made \$188 million in sales at that time and increased their business in the Northwest.²⁴ By the 1990s, the grocery chain needed to distinguish itself from Wal-Mart, a new competitor creeping into Waremart's market region. The Waremart Board of Directors sponsored an employee renaming competition, and the winner was WinCo, standing for "Winning Company." Today, WinCo's 15,000 employees own 95 stores in eight states: Washington, Idaho, California, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Arizona and Texas.



{Shopping at Waremart (WinCo) 1971}





In 1975 Idaho Governor Cecil D. Andrus established the Indochinese Refugee Assistance Program to help facilitate the influx of refugees fleeing overthrown governments in Southeast Asia.²⁵ The program later expanded to include Eastern Europe and continues today with refugees resettling from all over the world under the auspices of the Idaho Office for Refugees and other organizations. Many refugees find homes and jobs on the bench. For nearly 40 years, the bench has welcomed these newcomers. One great outcome is the array of ethnic markets and restaurants found in the central bench neighborhood. They represent a uniquely diverse culture that contributes to a positive quality of life on the bench.

Today the bench's roots as a working class community with close connections to downtown are still visible. On many streets original homeowners who settled in the 1940s and 1950s now live next to new neighbors from out of the region or even from other countries.

During the central bench's development, farmers subdivided their properties for single-family tracts. Now some of those properties are being further parceled into tracts for apartments or "skinny homes" on 25-foot lots. The bench offers numerous living options for families and individuals of all walks of life and remains a very accessible area of Boise.



{Franklin School language program, with a map of Laos on the wall, 1991}



This booklet incorporates research and personal recollections to commemorate the history of the neighborhood. This history relied upon information from interviews of thirteen individuals, all of which are included, as well as primary sources preserved by local libraries and archives. The author tried to be as inclusive as time and pages allowed, but undoubtedly omitted some key individuals, institutions, or organizations that are vital to this history of the central bench. Any omissions were unintentional, and simply reflect the lack of historical documentation surrounding the central bench. Readers can help close this gap by contacting author Jim Duran, 208-409-4650, or the Boise City Department of Arts & History and providing us your story. This booklet is by no means the capstone of our history; we all hope to continue delving into the past and finding connections to the rich history of the central bench.

NOTES

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PHOTO CREDITS

- 0 Franklin School fair 24-Sep-76
Students lined up at a booth at a school fair celebrating the Nation's bicentennial.
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special Collections
and Archives

- 1 Orchards near Boise 1905
Orchards on the Bench around 1905. Boise, Idaho, "the city beautiful." 1905.
<http://digital.boisestate.edu/cdm/ref/collection/p15948coll4/id/198>

- 2 Birds Eye View of Boise 1890
Bird's eye view of Boise City, Ada County, the capital of Idaho.
Boise State University Library Special Collections and Archives:
<http://digital.boisestate.edu/cdm/ref/collection/archives/id/71>

- 3 Yates Packing Shed on Franklin road no date
The Yates fruit packing shed, loaded the Bench's produce to send it across the
Northwest. Idaho State Historical Society

- 4 Stacking Hay no date
Farmers stacking hay, possibly at Eagleson Ranch
Idaho State Historical Society

- 5 Central Bench in 1907, with Rankin's property outlined in the bottom right.
1907 Cropped from a 1907 road map of Boise. Map of Boise, Idaho / compiled from
official county and state records by F.W. Almond ; drawn by D.H. Blakelock.

- 6 Spraying fruit no date
Orchardists spraying fruit trees
Idaho State Historical Society

- 7 Portrait of W.M. Phillippi 1950s
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special Collections
and Archives

- 8 Scotts 4th Subdivision 1903
Map of the Central Bench subdivisions. The bottom right corner shows Silas
Tillotson's acreage. Ada County Platt Map

- 10 The original Scott School pre 1905
The original Scott school house, with school children.
Idaho Statesman August 10, 1962 page 10.

- 11 Mary Latimore 1920s
Portrait of Mary Latimore, who grew up near the corner of Franklin and Orchard.
Wright Congregational Community Church archive

- 12 Elementary class photo 1935-36
Earlene Pinneo's third grade class at Franklin School, 1935-36. Earlene is in the same row as the teacher, 2nd child from her.
Pinneo family personal collection
- 13 Minus A Million 1945
The cast of "Minus a Million" a play presented by the Franklin High School seniors. Cast members include: Barbara Broken, Edna Jones, Pete Call, Dick Caufield, Wilbert Owens, Raye Adele Tremewan, John Stoddard, Lorin Wardle, Ellen Spencer, Ruth Biesecker, Earlene Pinneo, Don Farnsworth.
Pinneo family personal collection
- 14 Mrs. Isabel (Elizabeth) Petrie 1910-1913
Isabel (Elizabeth) Petrie was instrumental to the founding of Wright Church.
Wright Congregational Community Church archive
- 15 Minnie J. Dickinson 1910-1913
Minnie J. Dickinson, the first minister of Wright Congregational Community Church
Wright Congregational Community Church archive
- 15 Wright Church phase one 1913
Newly built Wright Church basement, the first meeting place while funds were raised for a full church building.
Wright Congregational Community Church archive
- 16 Wright Church community 1913
Parishioners of Wright Church in 1913
Wright Congregational Community Church archive
- 16 Wright Church phase two 1915
Two years after the construction of the basement, the Wright Church community finished its building.
Wright Congregational Community Church archive
- 18 UPRR tracks near Alpine and Garden 2013
In 1925 these tracks went from a stub line to mainline stop of the Union Pacific Railroad.
Photo by Jim Duran
- 21 Franklin Gymnasium
Idaho Statesman, December 8, 1952.
- 22 1948 Map 1948
Map of Boise City and vicinity : showing additions and subdivisions.
Idaho Blueprint & Supply Company. 1948. Map of Boise City and vicinity: showing additions and subdivisions. Boise, Idaho: Idaho Blueprint & Supply.

- 24 Machine Shop 1940s
Boise Junior College students helping the war effort in a machine shop.
Boise State University Library Special Collections and Archives:
<http://digital.boisestate.edu/cdm/ref/collection/archives/id/71>
- 27 Maxine Briggs 1940s
Carlyle and Maxine Briggs repurposed a barracks building from Gowen Field for their home.
Carlyle and Maxine Briggs personal photo collection.
- 29 Franklin and Orchard 1976
Orchard street was an important access point for commerce coming from the interstate. Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special Collections and Archives
- 30 Franklin and Orchard 1971
Constuction crew installs street signals on Overland and Orchard
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special Collections and Archives
- 31 Franklin Shopping Center circa 1949
The Albertsons Food Center in the Franklin Shopping Center
Scoop Leeburn photo, Idaho State Historical Society
- 31 Franklin Shopping Advertisement 1957
“Shop at the Franklin Shopping Center” Bench Mirror. 8/15/57
- 32 Royal Eubanks 1950s
Royal Eubanks started Idaho Leather Company.
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special Collections and Archives
- 33 Idaho Leather 2013
Original equipment in Ben Wetzel's Idaho Leather shop
Photo by Jim Duran
- 34 Commercial Home Furnishings 1970s
The Commercial Home Furnishings storefront on Orchard street.
Chf Home Furnishings
- 34 Hickory Farms 1968
Hickory Farms was an early store in the Hillcrest Shopping Center
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special Collections and Archives
- 35 Plaza Twin 1969
The Plaza Twin was a popular hangout for teenagers on the Bench.
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special Collections and Archives

- 36 Barbara Miller 1969
Barbara Miller holding a fish and an ice cream cone on her family's driveway
in the Randolph Robertson Subdivision
Barbara Miller Johncox private collection
- 38 Kids and canal 1976
Two boys with their dogs on a canal gate
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special
Collections and Archives
- 39 Borah High All Night 1961
A Boise Bench Lions Club member serves food to Borah High students at an all
night event. Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library
Special Collections and Archives
- 40 Bench Sewer work 1959-1960
Crews dig trenches for a new sewer system on the Bench
Morrison-Knudsen "EmKayan" Newsletter
- 40 Bench Sewer work 1959-1960
Custom machinery speeds up the process of installing 135 miles of pipe
Morrison-Knudsen "EmKayan" Newsletter
- 41 Shopping at Waremart 1971
A woman loads a cart at Waremart.
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special
Collections and Archives
- 42 Welcome to Waremart 1972
Don Brady welcomes guests to Waremart
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special
Collections and Archives
- 45 Language Class 1991
A Franklin School teacher passes a globe around a circle in a Language class.
Idaho Statesman photo collection, Boise State University Library Special
Collections and Archives

— CENTRAL BENCH HISTORY —



History is best told in the lives of everyday people. In this history of the Central Bench you will hear the stories of these everyday people, their love of the neighborhood, and how it inspires us today to be good stewards for this community we love.

