CHAPTER 1

THE LEGACY OF THE GRID

DAY ONE: THE GRID

On a summer day in July of 1863, Boise City's first city planners gathered together in Tom and Frank Davis's cabin on Tom's homestead claim north of the Boise River. The news of the week was encouraging: The U.S. Army was going to build a military garrison at the edge of the foothills near the rugged trail leading to Idaho City and other gold diggings. The Davis brothers and others had left Idaho City in February, considering their prospects better for raising and selling food to the miners than for hunting gold themselves. In the busy months since, they had been building cabins, leveling ground, diverting Boise River water for irrigation, and planting crops. Now the army fort would be another source of demand for food--and much else besides. It was very clear that this place in the Boise River valley would need a town.

Most of the men had come from east of the Mississippi River to follow gold excitements in the west; and many had participated in the platting of mining towns near other gold fields. Therefore, they knew what to do and how to do it. If one of them didn't happen to have a survey chain, the Army certainly did. Their experience was that towns were arranged in rectangular grids.

The men leaned over their table and drew the first plat for Boise City. Main Street was born that day. The path bringing west-bound Oregon Trail traffic into the valley came this way, so the specific location for the street was not hard to decide. It lay on the wagon road more or less parallel to the Boise River and north of the Davis claim. The street was flanked by five blocks on each side. Each block was divided by an alley sixteen feet wide, and had six lots on each side of the alley. The lots were 50 feet wide and 122 feet deep. Depth was important because everyone needed space for the house or cabin or tent, a business, horses, stock, chicken sheds, wagons, storehouses, supplies, and the like. Planners a hundred years later would have identified the land-use as very much "mixed." Between blocks, streets were sixty feet wide, enough space for two-way wagon traffic and the yoked animals pulling them. The group wrote the names of twenty pioneers--many of them in the cabin that day--on the platted lots.

The organizers' plan was to encourage Oregon Trail travelers to settle in Boise instead of continuing westward. The general idea was that the people whose names were on the lots would reserve alternate halves of each lot, 25 feet of frontage, to give to newcomers. All the newcomers had to do was improve the lot; no gold dust required. A house or building qualified as an improvement.

Boise City's first plan and its plat were a huge success. Within weeks, the loosely organized townsite group had to enlarge it to accommodate the newcomers. They could simply extend the existing pattern of lots, blocks, and alleys, in straight lines east, west, and north. Tom Davis's homestead barred the south--already planted with berries, melons, onions, cabbages, corn, potatoes--and then the river. People kept coming, and the plat had plenty of horizon to expand in all the other directions.

By 1867, the territorial government had organized counties. Ada County was named after the newborn daughter of merchant Henry C. Riggs, one

1863 PLAT OF BOISE

of the incorporators and also the one who had proposed the name Boise City for the town. The county grew also, with settlers quickly claiming 160-acre homesteads all the way to the Snake River.

The original grid of ten blocks grew to 140 blocks. The northern edge reached the boundary of the Army's parade ground, and the road next to it became known as Fort Street. The north-south streets were numbered First to Sixteenth. The townsite group, alert to the growing complexity of the town, elaborated on the plan. Optimistic as usual, they reserved blocks for future public buildings--a Territorial Capital, for one, and a courthouse for Ada County.

TREES

The settlers were immediately interested in trees, both for commercial orchards and for shade and ornamentation of homes. Thousands of fruit trees soon ringed the town plat in the orchards of John Krall, Tom Davis, E.O. Miller, and others. Tom Davis personally traveled to Portland with a sack of gold dust and returned with 7,000 apple trees, which he planted early in 1864. Other orchardists imported trees from Illinois; and many settlers had seeds and saplings they brought with them on the Oregon Trail.[1] Nothing spelled permanence, comfort, and a good-looking town like shade trees. The image of the homes and towns the settlers had left in the east and midwest included trees. Black cottonwood trees were plentiful along Boise River and easy enough to grow, so these were among the first planted. Other varieties were not long in coming. One of the early advertisers in the *Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman* newspaper, which published its first issue on July 26, 1864, was Philip Ritz, a nursery owner from Oregon. A month later, the paper carried his ad saying that "123,000 trees and plants grown in Columbia Valley Nursery near Walla Walla, W. T., will be delivered to Boise Valley in November. Send in your orders early." He kept up with his ads and Boise customers for the next ten years.[2] Boise soon had local commercial nurseries as well.

The prevailing tree-planting style for residential streets was a straight line of trees parallel to the road and a sidewalk. A photograph taken about 1893 along Grove Street illustrates the precise pattern repeated thereafter on hundreds of residential streets that became "additions" to Boise when the population grew large enough.

First you have a straight public street and a curb, then a "planting strip" of generous width for trees expected to grow to large sizes, then a sidewalk, then the private front lawn, then the house. One planted trees at a suitable distance from one another in a neat row. This expression of a residential streetscape was a *de facto* prototype for the developers of future north, east, and west side subdivisions that came along in the

1 Susan M. Stacy, *Tom and Julia Davis, "Some Good Place,"* Boise, Idaho. (Boise: T&J Publishing) p. 1-2.

2 *Idaho Tri-weekly Statesman*, (hereafter IDS), "123,000 trees and plants," August 30, 1864, p. 2.

Idaho State Historical Society, Photo no. 72-2.8

GROVE STREET, EARLY 1890s

1890s. As real estate interests filed their plats of blocks and lots, their preparations for the sale of property included the planting of the trees and assuring irrigation water for them. In this particular photograph, it appears that young trees have been interplanted between the earlier plantings of cottonwoods, which were losing their popularity in favor of maples, elms, oaks, poplar, ash, sweet gum, black walnut, hickory, and others–the trees of memory from back East.[3]

3 An image of Washington School from 1911 also shows this streetscape pattern. See Idaho State Historical Society Photo No. 63-50.2. In William M. Thayer, *Marvels of the New West* (Henry Hill Publishing: Norwich, CT, 1887) p. 681, Boise pioneer I.N. Coston felt that elms, black walnut, and maples were among the best shade trees.

THE BOISE CITY ORIGINAL TOWNSITE

With the end of the Civil War, the federal government got around to surveying Idaho Territory, starting in western Ada County at a volcano crater called Initial Point. The survey teams proceeded toward the urban settlement and its plat full of residents and businesses. Technically, all of those folks were squatters on government land. Although the lots and blocks had been surveyed and were providing an environment for progress, lot owners would never have clear title to their land unless and until a government authority filed the plat with the Government Land Office in Boise and received a patent. The settlers did this creatively. Few wanted to have a permanent tax-consuming city government, particularly since Ada County already had a sheriff for law and order. So the voters in 1866 elected people who promised to file the plat with the government and then resign immediately. That plat is called Boise City Original Townsite, the BCOT. (However, a permanent mayor, city council, and taxes were inevitable.) The territorial legislature enacted a law in 1866 designating Boise as a "charter city" and set out its powers and obligations.

Boise Valley was something of a paradise for planners with growth in mind. All the building materials were close to hand: wood from the forest, stone from Table Rock. Or, you could make bricks. Feed for horses. Grazing land for sheep and cattle. Water from the river and streams from the foothills. Wage laborers to work. Enterprising investors. Mines over the hill still producing gold. The military fort a reliable customer twelve months of the year, providing security at the same time. Lovely, healthy climate. Overland trails (the valley road, the emigrant overland road, the foothills road, the Boise Basin road, the warm springs road) in all directions bringing settlers, pack trains, and talent every day. Farmers down-river needing the city's commercial and business services. Optimism.

At the end of 1863, the population of Boise was 725. One year later, it had grown to 1,658 people: men, women, and 318 children. It looked like the town was going to be permanent.[4]

4 Merle Wells, *Boise, An Illustrated History*, (Boise: Greater Boise Chamber of Commerce, 1892) p. 22.

It all worked. The BCOT filled up steadily into the 1870s and 1880s. Valley settlers began accumulating wealth from resources of their own enterprise, not just the extraction of gold and timber from nearby mountains. The steadiness became more boom-like as the 1880s gave way to the dawn of 1890, the year Idaho became a state. It was a bursting-at-the-seams scenario, with valley agriculture expanding because of improved water delivery to lands farther and farther from the river. The number of people living in the city limits in the ten years after 1880 had just about doubled. The price of property within the BCOT was so high "that people of ordinary means" had to seek homes outside the townsite, and that was a problem. It was time for more planning.[5]

THE PIONEERS EXTEND THE GRID

It was up to the original city planners of 1863 to face the consequences of their successful town. They were the same cast of characters whose homestead claims now happened to be adjacent to BCOT: Tom Davis, George Ellis, E.O. Miller, John Krall, and others. Now they were called upon to surrender their fields, farms, ranches, orchards, sheep pastures, and dairies; pressed to transform them for the growing of houses. Again, there was a familiar and logical way to do it. They could simply extend the grid–the lots, blocks, streets and alleys--in whatever directions were reasonably flat and showed some horizon.

The pioneers stepped up, warmly regarded for their willingness to supply real estate. After all, the idea was to "build up the country," a pioneer goal that had not changed. A news reporter who observed Tom Davis removing his 25-year-old apple trees, said that Boise's cry for "more room and more houses has made the apple trees quake in their tap roots and prepare to give way for something more needed."[6]

North of the BCOT, a single "addition" had been platted in 1878, the first and only such city addition (in any direction) for the next decade. This project was an outlier in more ways than one. Dentist Dwight Arnold filed

5 IDS, August 23, 1891, "How the Capital City Was Laid Out," p. 7.

6 IDS, September 28, 1889, "More room; more houses," p. 3.

the plat, but his timing was not propitious for filling it up with homes, as demand was slow at the time and for the next several years. In fact, his plat featured blocks not yet divided into lots. In January of 1880, ads in the paper told the Arnold story: "A residence for sale in Boise City. George James offers his house and block of lands...the house has three rooms, a good well and pump at the door, and the whole block is fenced and approved." Another seller in 1881 advertised "Block 9 in Arnold's Addition, a 5-room house and other improvements. Fruits and berries in abundance."[7] Although Arnold platted streets, many, like 10th Street, remained on paper and had not been opened by 1890.[8]

Arnold's plat had created angled extensions of 8th though 13th streets, conforming its street orientations with the government's practice of surveying to the cardinal directions. In this respect, Dr. Arnold tilted the grid for every North End plat to follow. All along the westward course of Fort Street, which ended at Harrison Boulevard, the lots created at the seam joining old and new produced odd-shaped and odd-sized lots. One of them eventually became McCauley Park, a chunk of land where five streets met--16th, 17th, Harrison, Hays, and Resseguie. It wasn't the end of such seams. Subdivisions platted farther west dealt with northwest trending State Street and Hill Road in the same fashion.

In 1889, the Idaho Territorial Legislature held a convention in Boise to create Idaho's constitution, a requirement for joining the United States. The prospect of pending statehood attracted the attention of "outside" people and investors interested in all kinds of new ideas for making money in Boise. In addition to Boise's growth within the city limits, growth in Ada County also was robust, having nearly doubled from 1880 to 1890. Naturally, rural settlers required attorneys, engineers, lumber, house builders, household goods, churches, shoes, high schools and teachers, musical instruments, transporting of produce to markets, farm equipment, hospitals, doctors, nurses, warehousing, and food staples. Rural growth stimulated urban growth. And now, statehood!

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7 IDS, December 1, 1881, "Special Notices," p. 3..

8 IDS, April 5, 1890, "City Council," p. 3.

Among the new ideas and investments, two were particularly pertinent to the north side's progress. One innovation had been underway at the eastern edge of Boise since 1881: the use of geothermal water to heat homes. Then in 1887 a hydroelectric power plant sent the first electricity to Boise street lights in the early morning hours of July Fourth. Electrical power for street cars soon became an attractive possibility. Boise and other investors behind both of these ventures were well aware of the potential for additional profit if coordinated with real estate development and marketing. They created two entertainment centers at opposite ends of Boise, the Natatorium and Pierce Park, the former exploiting hot water; the latter, creating traffic to the west along the valley road (State Street). These provided appealing reasons to buy trolley tickets; and the vast supply of land between the two nodes could supply housing and trolley riders for years to come. Boise's north and west ends were in a direct path towards Pierce Park and just right for trolley service. The street grid meshed well with the goal of short walking distances between houses and trolley stops.

One of the main investors, banker C.W. Moore, built a splendid mansion "to be heated by Artesian" on the warm springs road as a highly visible gesture of faith in his own investments, hastening the moment it would become Warm Springs Avenue in capital letters.[9] Other homes followed. Soon Warm Springs displaced Grove Street as the street of choice for fashionable wealth. At least, for a while.

THE GRID IN THE NORTH END

Landowners created the additions north of Boise (and elsewhere) beginning in 1889 and steadily into the new century. They sold lots and blocks both to the "working classes" and to those who could afford architects designing for elegance. Along with trees and planting strips as enticements, they dedicated easements in the streets for trolley tracks. Families of all income brackets could see an end to the daily care and feeding of livestock for transportation. For very short walks to a streetcar line and a nickel, people could easily go downtown, to school, to the Natatorium, to Pierce Park, and eventually all the way to Caldwell and back.

9 IDS, July 31, 1891, "Something About Buildings," p. 8.

At the end of 1891, the *Statesman*, which relished reporting highly detailed news of "real estate" (and carried its ads), summarized Boise's progress. On December 12, its headline read, "The Brilliant Prospect that the Future Has in Store for Boise." The author listed the twenty city additions that had accumulated around the BCOT. On the north side he counted Arnold's, Resseguie, Andola, Thatcher, Hyde Park, and Brumback.

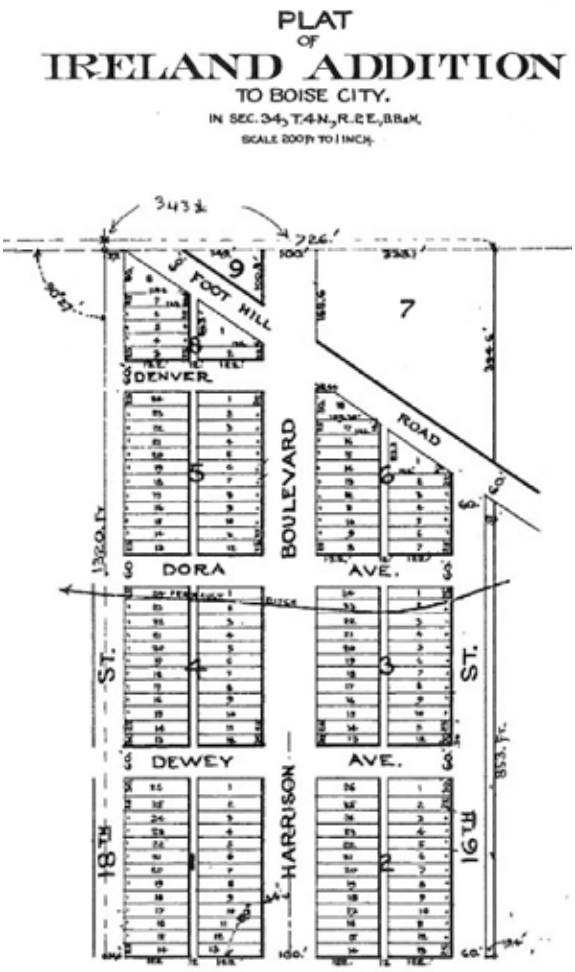
All the plats extended the 1863 plat model. The template of lots, blocks, and alleys persisted. Street widths of 60 feet persisted. Utility alleys persisted. The dividing of block frontage into ten or twelve 25-foot wide lots, persisted (30 feet wide for corner lots). The parallel arrangement of street, then curb, then tree-planting strip, then sidewalk, then front property line persisted. Developers planted the rows of trees as a selling point. Besides shade trees and streetcar stops, the ads pitched the availability of water, flat or gently sloping ground, and soil good for lawns and gardens. Agents were happy to sell whole blocks, partial blocks, or however many lots one wanted. "Easy terms," of course, always helped.

With streetcars in mind, some plats varied the grid pattern. The plan for 18th Street, a main route, was 80 feet wide. Harrison Boulevard was made 100 feet wide partly as a tribute to the president who had signed Idaho's statehouse bill, and partly because land developers were "sensing the need for newer fashionable housing" in Boise–which would require a grander-than-average street.[10] An astute pedestrian of today can detect other variations, too. Some blocks did not come with alleys, for example.

Still, a consistency in the particular rhythms of the grid pattern defined the "scale" of the built environment enabled by that pattern. People building homes very rarely (if at all) purchased only one 25-foot lot. The practice was to buy at least two, the understood minimum for a house. The landowners who filed plats with "partial" blocks were completely confident of the continuity that would follow with an adjacent addition. A century and a half later, our pedestrian can look up or down a street and still see sidewalks and alleys marching through three or four

10 Shallat, Todd, and David Kennedy, eds., *Harrison Boulevard, Preserving the Past in Boise's North End* (Boise: Centennial of Statehood Commission and Boise State University School of Social Sciences and Public Affairs, 1989) p. 5.

Ada County Assessor's Office



IRELAND ADDITION, 1904

subdivisions, their edges matching the same width until they converge at the horizon–just one legacy of the grid.[11]

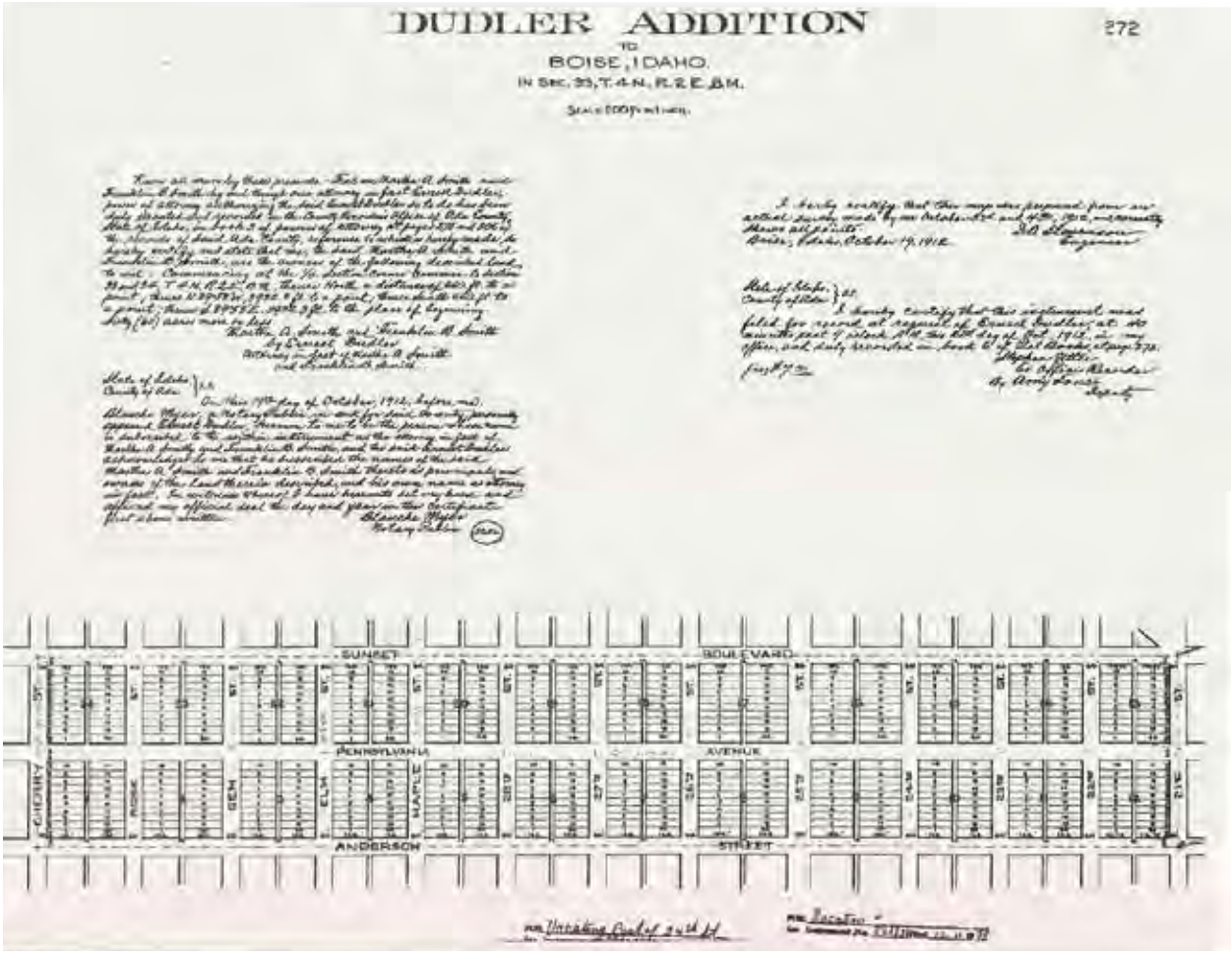
Fueled by investments in irrigated agriculture in Ada and Canyon counties, the number of farms and people grew substantially. Commerce was brisk. The paper reported on arriving rail freight one day to make the point: four cars lumber, three of shingles, two of merchandise, one of lime, one of furniture, one of beer."[12]

As the 1890s leaned toward the new century, northside subdivisions included Locust Grove (1892), Lemp (1893), North Locust Grove (1895), and Vaughan (1898.) The next decade brought Ireland (1904), Highland Park (1906), Ellis (1906), Packenham (1907), Elm Grove (1911), Dudler (1912). Ireland, notably, brought Harrison Boulevard to a terminus at Hill Road and matched its existing width. The others did likewise for 17th, 18th, 19th, and 20th streets. Dudler's Addition, a project of the Franklin B. Smith Senior Estate, was platted with the assumption that its streets and alleys would eventually connect with those to the south.

The grid persisted as these plats continued the pattern of streets and blocks as before. The progress of their filling in with houses–or perhaps of not filling in all at once--resembled that of earlier subdivisions. It depended on the

11 In 1896, Boise City passed Ordinance No. 173, which required all sidewalks built in the city to be no less than six feet wide and to conform to other specifications. See IDS, "Ordinance No. 173," March 11, 1896, p. 3.

12 IDS, June 14, 1891, "Local Brevities," p. 1.



Ada County Assessor's Office

DUDLER ADDITION, 1912

purpose of the buyers, who might buy to build a house, invest in a partial block, or both. The diversity of housing styles changed with changing tastes as the years went by. Queen Anne's, Colonial and Classic Revivals could be expressed at many price points. When bungalows arrived, a prosperous economy was inviting new construction, so there are many bungalows in Boise. At a high point in 1911, the newspaper called it a "craze."[13] In any given stretch of street, houses might provide a sample of many styles right next door to each other.

13 IDS, April 9, 1911, "Banner Year in Buildings of All Kinds," p. 2.

The project to make Harrison Boulevard the new Knob Hill of Boise succeeded. Like the other posh streets in town, the street was not so posh as to banish cottages from co-existing with the mansions. The grid, its scale and rhythm, and the democratic willingness of trees to grow at the same rate for everyone in public planting strips, account in part for that. Throughout the plats, other land uses soon complemented family life. Churches, schools, corner grocery stores, and a two-block long commercial center on 13th Street (Hyde Park) provided various conveniences to avoid a trip to town. At some point, the north end became the North End.

COMMUNITY ADVOCACY

Once people began to populate the additions, they became neighbors and often found reasons to organize requests or share concerns they had in common. They would meet with the appropriate authority–city council, school board, Ada County commissioners, water companies–and present their case.

It didn't take them long. With the north end population arriving and growing in 1891, "parties wishing to join the fire company in the north end of town... will meet tonight..."[14]

In May 1905, the city council was deliberating on boundaries for a new "curbing district," for which property owners would be assessed a share of the costs for installing the curbs and drains. A group of residents informed the council that they could in no way afford such assessments. The contractor likely to be the one to build the curbs testified that this part of the north end was peopled by "the working classes, for whom the assessment would be a great hardship." The city council took note and removed those areas north of Fort Street from the proposed curbing district.[15]

Under the headline, "Park Proposal is Laid Before the Council," the newspaper in May 1914 reported that 57 property owners had asked the

14 IDS, Oct. 30, 1891, "Local Brevities," p. 8.

15 IDS, May 26, 1905, "Council Reduces Curbing District," p. 4.

city council “to secure for a park a two-block tract of land” situated in Elm Grove addition. They pointed out that three-fourths of the property “is covered with elm trees at the present time.” A year before, the city had rejected an offer to buy the park for $10,000, but since then land sales and prices had been falling, so now might be a better time. Walter Pierce, whose syndicate had platted the subdivision, evidently intended these two blocks for a park, as he had provided toilets, swings, benches, and fencing–and planted the trees. The city council put the matter away to study, but the price must not have been sweet enough. Nevertheless, a few weeks later, a social note in the paper said that the Ladies Aid of Emmanuel Methodist church were having their picnic “in Elm Grove” on Wednesday afternoon.[16] It was a park. Another women’s group, the Women’s Relief Corps of the GAR, formally opened the park with a picnic in July 1915 .[17] The city purchased the land in 1920 and then annexed the two blocks into the city limits in 1922. It is a good place for picnics.

And so it went. A tradition of neighbors acting together was by no means restricted to the city’s north additions, and the practice of organizing neighbors to get something accomplished persisted into the next two centuries.

DEFENDING THE GRID IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the mid-1970s, a time of rapid city growth, the grid itself and the assets it had fostered--shady streets, sidewalks, street connectivity in every direction, diverse families, churches, intact houses of historical significance, the one-of-a-kind Harrison Boulevard, a huge inventory of one-of-a-kind houses, versatile alleys, schools to which children could walk, commercial services nearby, voting precincts within walking distance–came under threat.

The threat presented itself from the foothills north of the neighborhood. Landowners holding thousands of acres were proposing to build

16 IDS, May 20, 1914, “Park Proposal...”, p. 10; July 12, 1914, “Announcements,” p. 2.

17 IDS, July 2, 1915, “W.R.C. To Open Elm Grove,” p. 7.

thousands of homes that would pour high volumes of traffic down 8th Street, and later, Harrison Boulevard, 15th, and 9th streets. No other path of egress apparently existed. But the projected traffic volumes were likely to require altering the streets. Highway authorities contemplated such ideas as buying right-of-way on the west side of 8th Street to "clear the way" for the eventual construction of a street similar to Harrison Boulevard. Houses would disappear along with the trees and the neighbors across the street, not to mention safety and quiet.[18]

Another issue connected to Boise's 1970s growth-boom conditions was the potential displacement of historic and other houses with apartment buildings, which was technically allowed by the R-2 zoning classification over most the neighborhood. The zone had at one time been seen as an incentive for developers to remove run-down houses as a type of urban renewal and provide the city with higher values. But the neighborhood was rather convincingly restoring and reinvesting in homes. It seemed that R-2 zoning was now an out-of-date solution likely to be more destructive than constructive.[19]

Nobody said, "We must protect the grid." Rather, neighborhood residents felt that the valuable assets it had fostered had to be protected and preserved. Responding to a constellation of issues -- proposed street-altering volumes of traffic, the zoning problem, the disturbance to "connectivity" -- they organized. They created the North End Neighborhood Association. To deal with the zoning issue, the neighborhood generated 47 groups of contiguous neighbors, each of which paid a filing fee asking the city council to rezone their properties from R-2 to R-1C. In addition, they presented petitions from other neighbors. They argued that the changes would "bring zoning in line with existing land use" and that the existing land use should remain single

18 IDS, December 7, 1976, Rod Gramer, "Gulch Poses Land Use Dilemma," p. 1A; and Gramer, "Ada County Seeks Talk on Foothills," Oct. 21, 1976, p. 9. Another proposal by Albertson's Corporation to close 17th Street in order to create a larger shopping mall along with its new store/remodel, also aroused neighborhood protests over reducing the connectivity of the street system.

19 A map made part of the hearing materials for RZ-21-78 showed the extent of home remodels, which had been encourage by a city low-interest loan program. See Boise City, RZ-21-78.

family homes. When it came time for public hearings, they filled the city council chamber and quietly made their case. And won their case.[20]

The successes of the new association–and the idea that accommodating new growth could be a matter of compromise in order to protect existing neighborhoods–was expressed in its mission to "preserve the living qualities of the North End."[21] Other Boise neighborhoods sharing the same 1863 legacy of the grid also organized and persist many decades later. Their combined interests helped produce Boise's Historic Preservation ordinance in 1979, which established standards for preservation and a Historic Preservation Commission with a staff to evaluate proposed changes. Today, Policy NE-C in the city's general plan *Blueprint Boise* says: "Street Classifications: Avoid upgrading local streets and collectors in the North/East End to higher classifications to accommodate development in the foothills." The neighborhood persisted.

THE GREAT PAUSE OF 1920 TO 1945

The territory embraced by the North End Neighborhood Association (and this planning study) includes its "northwest corner," lying roughly between Irene Street and Hill Road, and between 20th and 28th streets. Here, because of the sweep of national and global events and a slow-down of irrigated agriculture expansion in Southwest Idaho, the once-steady additions to the city limits simply stopped for more than twenty years–a very long pause. Areas adjacent to city limits remained agricultural or a variant of suburban agricultural.[22]

At the end of World War I, Idaho faced a depression because of severely reduced agricultural commodity prices. In the ten years after 1920, Boise added exactly 152 people to its census. Ada County did some better,

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20 Boise City file RZ-21-78. The city council approved the rezone on October 10, 1978. A complex case, the rezone requests also included changes of zone from R-3 to R-2 and R-3 to R-1C, requested by additional groups of neighbors.

21 See inside cover of this document for a description of recent North End Neighborhood Association activities. See also its website northendboise.org.

22 See Jim Duran, *Central Bench History* (Boise: Central Bench Neighborhood Association sponsored by City of Boise Neighborhood Reinvestment Grant Program, 2016) for a general history of its suburban and agricultural evolution.

Boise City and Urban Area Population, 1863 - 1980

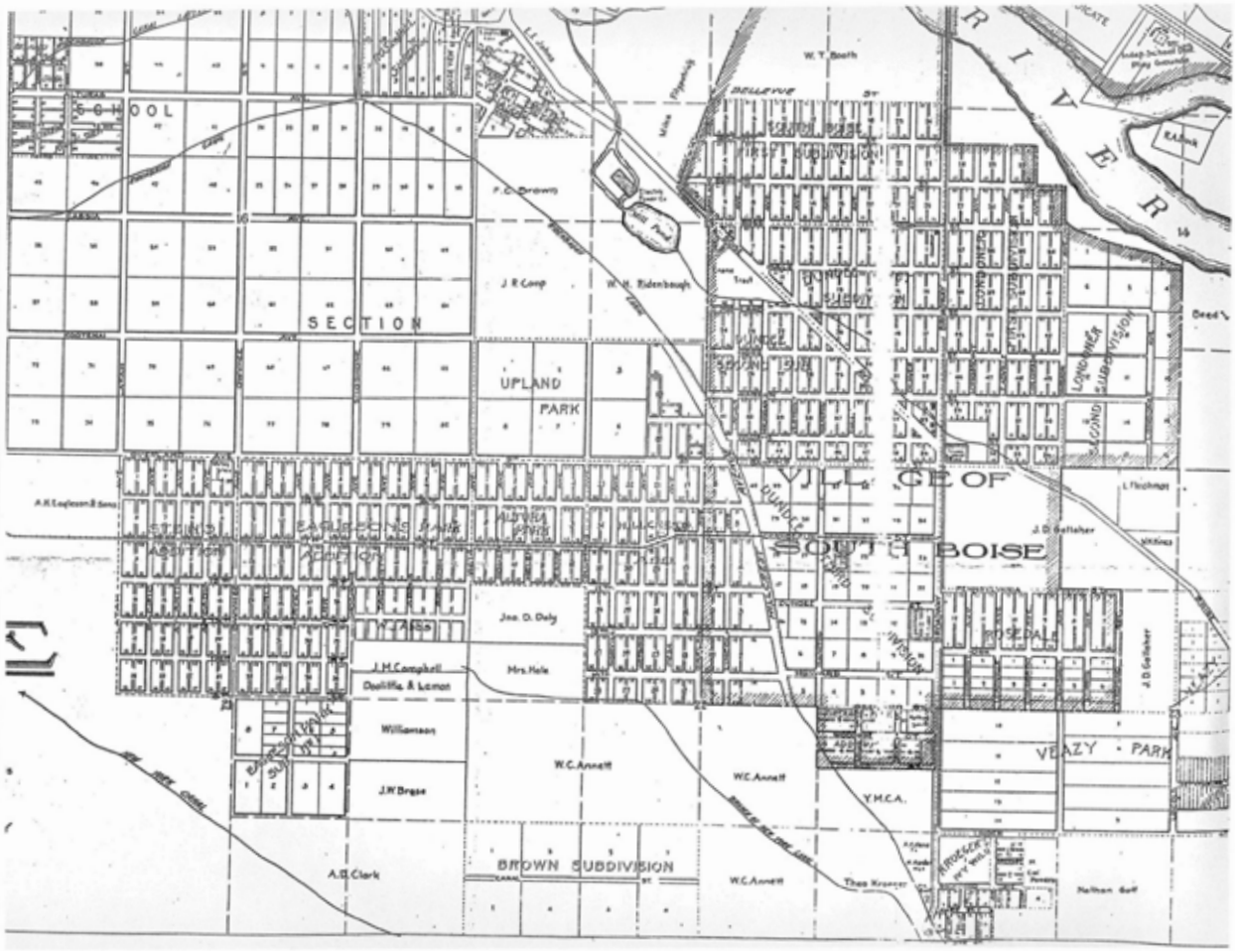
	CITY LIMITS	INCLUDING ADJACENT URBAN AREA	BOISE URBAN	ADA COUNTY
1863 (September 23)	725			
1864 (September 10)	1,658			
1870 (June 1)	995			2,675
1880 (June 1)	1,899			4,674
1890 (June 1)	2,311	3,391		8,368
1890 (September 19)	4,026			
1900 (June 1)	5,957	7,207		11,599
1910 (April 15)	17,358	21,365		29,088
1920 (January 1)	21,393	23,887		35,213
1930 (April 1)	21,544	27,236		37,925
1940 (April 1)	26,130	38,595		50,401
1950 (April 1)	34,393	56,487	50,443	70,649
1960 (April 1)	34,481		70,414	93,460
1970 (April 1)	74,990	97,752	85,187	112,230
1980 (April 1)	102,160	154,735	134,848	173,036

Merle Wells, Boise: An Illustrated History, p.207

CENSUS FIGURES ILLUSTRATE A PAUSE IN THE GROWTH RATE IN BOISE CITY FROM 1920 TO 1940

adding 2,712. With the 1930s, the nation contended with the Great Depression. For Boise, it was another decade of stagnant growth and severe difficulties for many families. Without significant demand, land prices collapsed. In the 1912 Dudler Addition, where its east-most blocks had annexed in 1922, one couple acquired a pair of lots in 1931 for a consideration of ten dollars.[23] Things were so desperate that those living in the annexed blocks asked to be de-annexed from the city in 1932. They

23 IDS, February 21, 1931, "Real Estate Transfers," p. 7.



1917 MAP, BOISE BENCH AREA

Merle Wells, Boise: An Illustrated History, p.207

knew that Consumer's Water Company would be charged "an excessive tax as a public utility" serving inside the city limits, and they hoped to avoid having the company pass the tax onto them, the in-city users.[24]

Hard times did not inspire would-be developers or homeowners to seek annexation to the city; there seemed little point to it. Boise was still a "charter city," created by the Idaho Territorial Legislature in 1866.

24 IDS, November 23, 1932, "Routine Business Holds Attention of City Council," p. 4. The residents failed, partly because the city's status as a charter city gave such power to the legislature, not to the city. See IDS, January 11, 1933, "Seek Release," p. 4.

Annexation procedures required that property owners request it via petition or by a special election.[25] No such requests seem to have materialized in the North End.

Recovery in the late 1930s brought improved conditions, but house-building stalled when the United States entered World War II. During the war, the federal government controlled lumber and other construction materials, diverting them to the military war effort. Some people managed to build homes but they were few; and the creation of new plats (or re-plats of existing ones) on the north side was negligible.

THE NORTHWEST CORNER GOES ONE ACRE

Northside landowners looking for buyers in the down-trending 1920s could not have forecast how long the Pause was going to last. Rather, they adapted new strategies to deal with the 1920s slowdown, one they hoped would be temporary.

Two Boise maps set the scene. A 1917 map shows the city limits and the plats that existed both in and outside of the city. Note that the Bench landowners south of the city had platted a wide swath of orchard and garden lots ranging in sizes up to twenty acres.[26] The Annexation History map shows that after Elm Grove Park and the Dudler's small annexations, the city boundaries in the North End remained static until 1950. The pastureland in the northwest corner was under the jurisdiction of Ada County for the duration of the Great Pause.[27]

The two largest landowners in this corner were Packenham and F.B.

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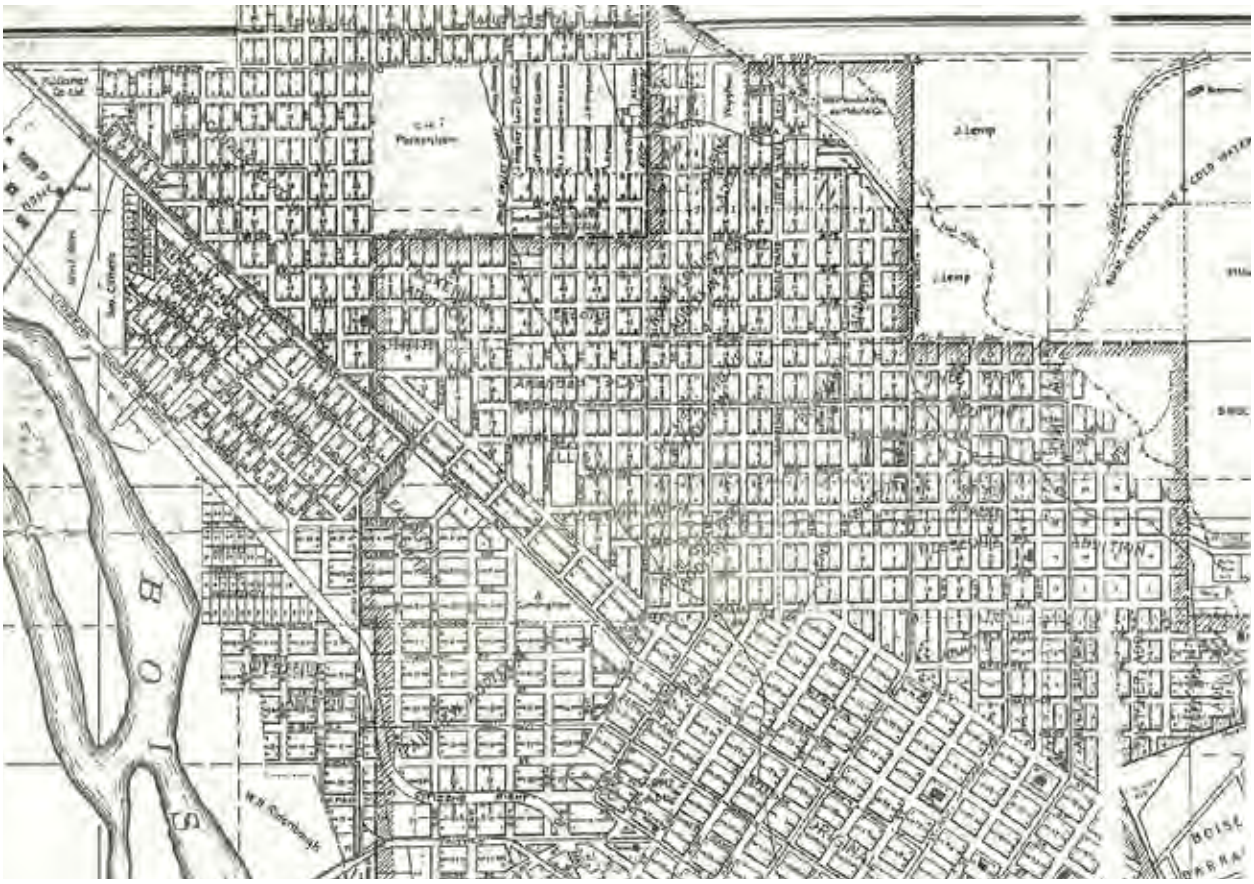
25 Section 3, "Annexation of Territory Procedure," *Charter of Boise City, Idaho, as amended by the Idaho Legislature including amendments by the 31st Regular Session of 1951.* Compiled and edited by C. Stanley Skiles and Randall Wallis, published by authority of the Mayor and Common Council (Boise: 1951) p. 5-6.

26 The map also exhibits the connection between the Village of South Boise's historic grid and the route of westbound trolley lines.

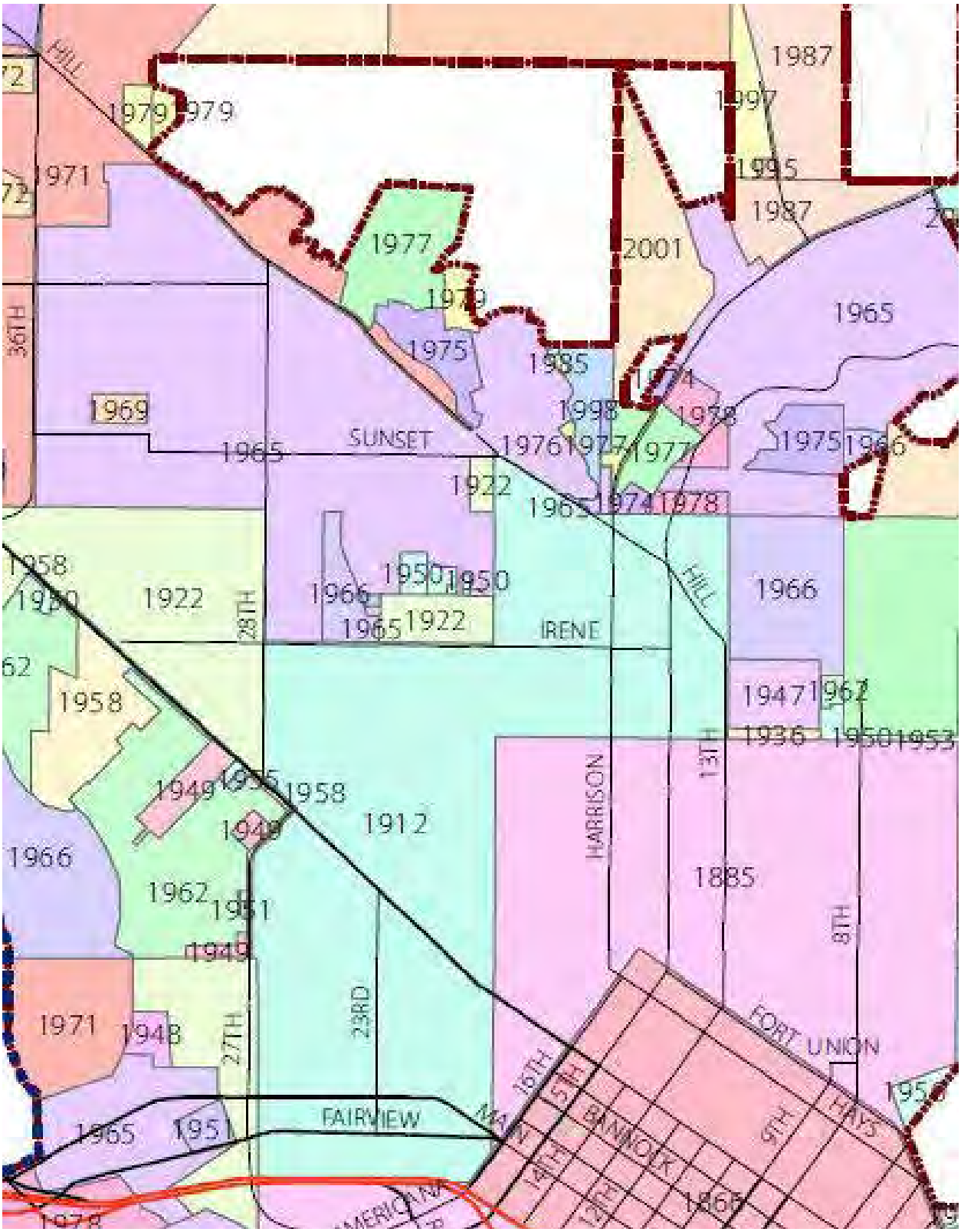
27 Map "Boise City Annexation History," created by the Comprehensive Planning Division of City of Boise Planning and Development Services, April 27, 2011; and "Map of Boise, Ada County, Idaho" compiled by L. Savidge, published by Inter-mountain Map Company, 1917.



1917 MAP, NORTH BOISE

Smith Senior Estate. Each decided that buyers might respond to small-acreage lots, as they were close to the city. Also, the general view at the time held that families on farms and orchards could "persevere through a sluggish economy."[28] Complementing this strategy, the Boise City Canal was a major asset, its main ditch and many laterals already

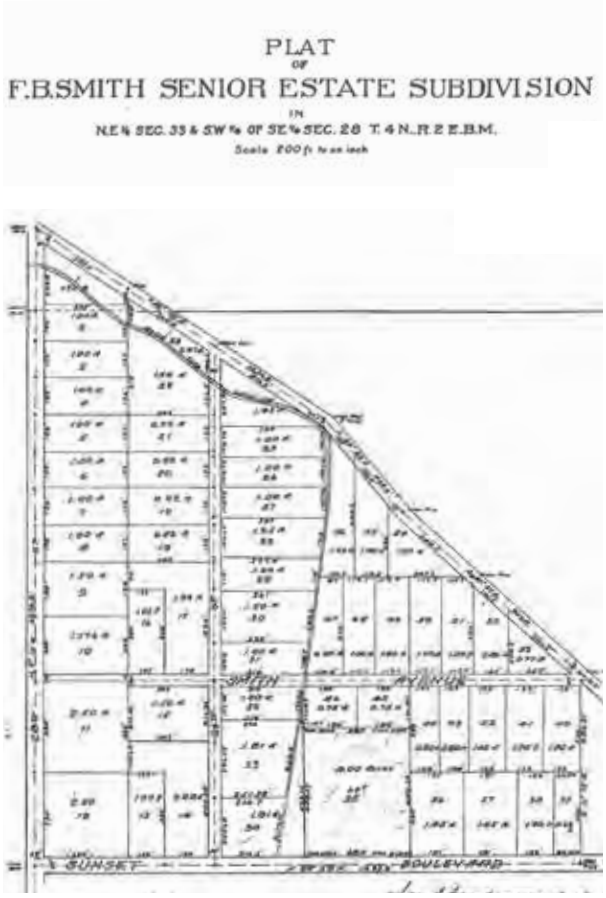
28 Jim Duran, *Central Bench History*, (Central Bench Neighborhood Association, sponsored by a City of Boise Neighborhood Reinvestment Grant, 2016) p. 20.



City of Boise, 2011

ANNEXATION HISTORY, NORTH BOISE

Ada County Assessor's Office



F.B. SMITH SENIOR ESTATE PLAT, 1923

bringing irrigation water to their lands. Packenham created Fair Acres in 1922, and Smith Senior Estate created the plat bearing its name the next year. Each enterprise settled on one-acre lots.

With its March 1922 launch, Packenham's marketing spoke precisely to the times: "Enjoy advantages of city life while living in the country. Keep chickens–cow–pig. Raise fruit and garden truck."[29] The Smith outfit seems to have done less newspaper advertising, but began to sell lots in its new plat and in Dudler, which still had vacant land. Sales might not have been brisk, but sales there were.

THE GRID AND ADA COUNTY

Ada County had a fairly relaxed regulatory view of suburban development and the construction of houses. Until 1975, it had no building code.[30] Until then, home builders asked for electricity directly from the power company, which did not have to see a building permit from Ada County. Many homes had no indoor plumbing. Household septic systems prevailed outside of city limits, although neighbors could organize sewage collection districts and assess themselves for the cost, sometimes an urgent matter when septic systems contaminated fresh water wells.

29 IDS, April 4, 1922, "Fair Acres," p. 10

30 Ada County Development Services. See adacounty.id.gov/development-services/building-division, "About Us."

Ada County Assessor's Office

FAIR ACRES, 1922

In our northwest corner, Ada County took little notice if new streets continued the grid or not, even when earlier plats had dedicated them to the public. Electric street cars were long gone after 1928, and any thoughts of engineering streets to take them into account had evaporated. The county was not in the sidewalk, curb (drainage), park, or sewer business, which never had been agricultural necessities. Streets now existed chiefly for automobiles.

As a result of one-acre lot geometry under a rural authority, a land owner or new lot owner could no longer rely on neighboring owners to abide by any systematic arrangement for continuity in the streetscape, a grid plan or otherwise. The 1863 grid pattern began to lose its potency all around the city. This was caused not so much by the automobile but the absence of street cars or a substitute for them. To this day, nothing has filled that absence.[31]

The Smith and Packenham plats had created over ninety one-acre lots in addition to several other larger and odd-shaped smaller lots.[32]

31 The important grid in Ada County consists of the section-line roads it had approved over the decades to give farmers access to their markets. In time, the system expanded to support the auto transportation network across the county. "Local" streets take traffic from neighborhoods; "collector" streets accumulate traffic and carry it to "arterial" streets, typically historic section-line roads.

32 Olive Packenham filed amended plats in 1924, 1930, and 1944. They declare that "I, Olive Packenham, am the sole and separate owner," of the property, and "my husband C.H. Packenham joins me only as my husband" in filing the plats.

Both managed to extend 26th and 28th streets through from Irene Street to Hill Road. Between 26th and 20th, however, prior development blocked north-south streets from going "through." The first such barrier was Elm Grove Park, which interrupted 23rd Street. In 1944, Olive Packenham extended 25th Street north of Irene but "bent" it at Dewey Street because that was what was possible. The Smith project managed to extend the grid's east-west streets of Breneman, Sunset and Smith to connect 28th Street and Hill Road.

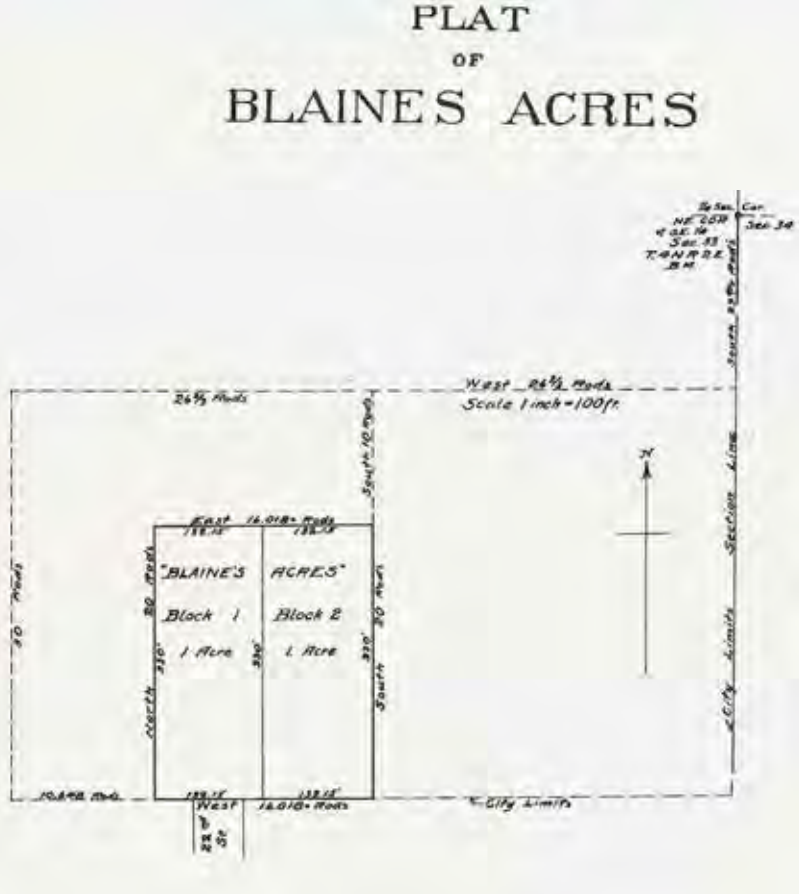
Large lots and deviations from the grid resulted in a wide and idiosyncratic range of streetscapes. Pedestrians today will find houses happily facing north-south as well as east-west. If curbs appear, they may be straight or rolled. Sidewalks are not the rule, and if they appear, they are unlikely to be six feet wide. The tradition of straight rows of public trees in planting strips faded, although many deep front yards are devoted to gardens and exhibit grand trees. The absence of alleys required trash and auto management to be a front-yard thing, although long driveways can take cars to the back yard. Homeowners sometimes asked that existing alleys be vacated.

Each one-acre lot, and what became of it after the Great Pause ended, generates its own unique story of opportunity, problem solving, and engineering. Like the rest of the North End, the area exhibits diversity and variety of many kinds, good access to the many attractions of Boise City, and an enjoyment of its particular urban/suburban setting.

The conversion of one-acre lots to urban densities commenced around 1950 and continues to this day. Each such project is unique to itself, adapting as it must to the decisions made by earlier landowners nearby. One story is presented here to represent the many more that could be told, emblematic of how the northwest corner progressed, and how it still is progressing.

BLAINE'S ACRES

Some time before 1921, Samuel and Ruth Blaine acquired two acres adjacent to the city limits at the stub end of 22nd Street, which by then had reached Dewey Street. The W.E. Pierce Suburban Syndicate, developer of the Elm Grove plat, had



Ada County Assessor's Office

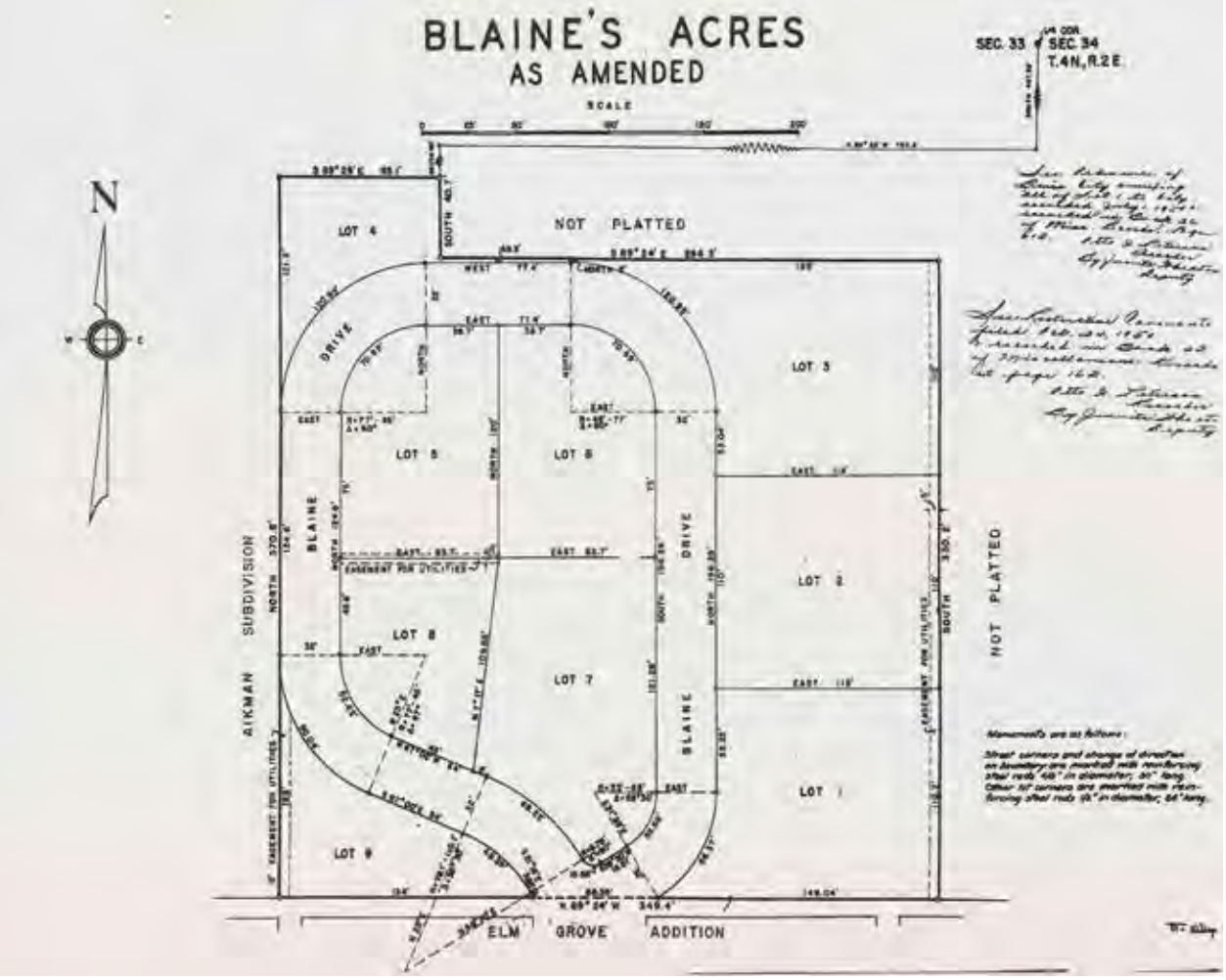
BLAINE'S ACRES, 1923

expected that 22nd would continue north, traverse as-yet unplatted land, and connect eventually to the 1912 Dudler Addition's plat for 22nd Street.

The Blaines, who were leaving a smaller house on 19th Street, could see little actual development to the north, mostly pasture land. The plat they filed in 1923 dedicated no right-of-way for 22nd Street. They built their two-story Colonial Revival house directly facing the 22nd Street stub, forever blocking any future potential for 22nd Street to continue north.

Time passed. Mrs. Blaine raised chickens and dairy cows, selling

Ada County Assessor's Office



BLAINE'S ACRES AS AMENDED, 1950

eggs and milk to the neighbors. The four Blaine children grew up.[33] In May 1950, the Blaines re-platted their two acres to create nine lots arranged around a loop road now called Blaine Way. It has no alleys, curbs, or sidewalks. The center island created by the loop had four lots; the outer lots, five. The Blaine's 1923 house was on Lot 7, and it still faces 22nd Street head on. They filed restrictive

33 Barbara Perry Bauer, "The Samuel and Ruth Blaine House," in pamphlet *Elm Grove Park Historic Neighborhood," 14th Annual Heritage Homes Tour*, sponsored by Preservation Idaho, October 2, 2016.

covenants with the plat, creating a design committee (themselves) to approve the architectural plans for the future homes. They also banned cows and chickens from any of the lots. At the request of the Blaines, the city annexed the re-plat of Blaine's Acres in 1950.

Between 1950 and 2002, buyers acquired the lots and built houses. While the plat shows nine lots, ten houses occupy the land, the result of private sales creating a lot with parts of two adjacent ones. Six were built in the 1950s, one in the 1960s, one in the 1970s, and the last in 2002. Their styles include ranch, "mid-century modern," and a Mediterranean villa with green roof tiles. Most of the lots are sufficiently wide that driveways and garages are at the side of the house, allowing for street views of the houses themselves.

Post-war subdivision creators all around the country offered their customers loops, cul-de-sacs, circles, "places," and short streets. The real estate business evolved after the war into a more complex industry. One made money not only by selling lots but also on the buyer's willingness to choose from one or two housing styles and finance the house and lot together. Sidewalks, which depended for their utility partly by what they connected, became an optional feature depending on any given developer or property owner.[34] Homeowners outside the city limits after 1917 who might have wanted sidewalks did not have the benefit of curbing and sidewalk "districts," which the city organized (and paid part of the cost), but which the county did not. Other stories for former one-acre lots will follow a similar basic plot: *Early plat, early-style house. Re-plat, newer-style houses. Complete infill, then stop.*

THE NORTHWEST CORNER JOINS BOISE CITY

The chickens-cow-pig scene could not last. Nor could the "advantages of city life while living in the country." Boise City voted in August 1961 to abandon its charter city status with the State of Idaho. It became a

34 Author's note: While preparing this history, I noticed a block on upper 19th Street where no houses on either side of the street have sidewalks except for one. The story on the block is that it was once owned by a grandmother who wanted a place for her grandchild to learn to ride his tricycle off the street. So she built it.

"city of the first class" for which different rules applied to its power of annexation.[35] Boise could now annex property contiguous to existing city limits by petition or by a vote of the city council after a public hearing.[36]

The city had been in a difficult spot. The "fringe" areas around the city, such as Fair Acres and FB Smith Senior Estates, attracted people who were not inclined to initiate petitions for annexation. Within Boise was a large inventory of parks, schools, and public and religious buildings that also paid no property taxes. Yet the cost of providing city services and capital improvements continued to rise. Those outside city limits enjoyed Boise's parks, roads, swimming pools, in-town police and fire protection for city-center businesses and hospitals, and the library, paying no taxes to support them. So, the city made plans to end the Great Pause and resume its urban progress.[37]

The city evaluated how best to extend its services and commenced an annexation program. In 1962 it absorbed sections of the Bench. By 1965, it was time for the Highlands and the lands east of 36th Street, including our northwest corner. Although the annexation program had considerable support, some property owners made vocal protests at public hearings."[38] The city council persisted. The city's population in 1960 was 34,481. By 1970, partly because of annexations, it had more than doubled.

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35 At the time, the Idaho statutes classified municipal organizations as cities or villages depending upon their population.

36 Idaho rules for annexation have since been significantly revised to include findings and other requirements, although the basic authority of Idaho cities to annex after petitions or public hearings continues. See Idaho Statutes: Title 50, Chapter 2, Section 222, "Annexation by Cities."

37 Gordon Bowen, *Boise's Parks: A Cause and a Trust* (Boise: Gordon Bowen) p. 52-53, discussed the complex issues leading to Boise voters abandoning the charter. He was director of Boise's Park Department at the time.

38 IDS, December 22, 1965, J. Schifferdecker, "Council Deliberates Late Pondering Annexations in Collister, Highlands," p. 4D; and Bowen, p. 53. One reason some favored annexation was the danger of flooding from Crane Creek to lands below. They felt that the city was better equipped to prevent and manage such potential floods.

CONCLUSION

Aside from the equal distribution of urban assets to all who live on its streets, one legacy of the grid is its simple persistence. The assets associated with it are valuable, still relevant, still enjoyed on a human scale, and still worth protection.

The story of the northwest corner is still evolving, its heritage including both an “interrupted” historic urban grid and a “small acreages” interlude to make it through hard times. Reconciling the standards and values of each is its likely theme in the 21st Century.

The history of the grid illuminates a link between distant global events and the quotidian act of filing plats in city neighborhoods. It also shines an unexpected light on the ideals of Boise’s pioneers, their determination to bring familiar eastern forms and standards to the West, their spirit of collaboration, their interest in being a “modern” city with city conveniences, and their optimistic adaptations when a change in plan was required. The developers of the Fair Acres and Smith Estate plats were the children of the very families who had uprooted their orchards and surrendered their ranches so that the city could grow. This second generation had created plats that extended their parents’ work in the Packenham and Dudler additions. They also had the grit to adapt when the 1920s cooled the whole city-building project.

The North End Neighborhood has inherited not only the grid and its assets but also a connection to the remarkable community of pioneers who organized and built it together.

Susan M. Stacy
Boise, Idaho, 2021