Part One: 1932-1940
1. Higher Education in Idaho

The Gem State's university and nine colleges were subsisting under depression-pinched budgets when Stanford University's Walter C. Eells published his Survey's of American Higher Education. This 1937 study examined post-secondary curricula in most states except Idaho. However, Eells identified the various types of institutions in all forty-eight found in the Educational Directory of the United States Office of Education. Uncrowded Idaho's ten schools were the university, three colleges offering a four-year curriculum, two normal schools and four junior colleges.

The baccalaureate institutions besides the University of Idaho (1892) in Moscow were the College of Idaho (1891) at Caldwell, Northwest Nazarene College (1913) in Nampa and the Methodist college founded in 1911 at Gooding. The teacher training normal schools established by the Legislature in 1893 were at Lewiston, below Moscow in the Panhandle, and Albion, south of Burley between Boise and Pocatello. The other two-year schools were Ricks College (1888) at Rexburg, a branch of the University of Idaho in Pocatello (1927), Boise Junior College (1932) and North Idaho College (1933) at Coeur d'Alene.¹

Decreed a Territory of the Union in 1863 by the Lincoln administration during the Civil War, sparsely settled Idaho's higher education experience was similar to that of the six contiguous states, Oregon, Washington, Montana, Wyoming, Utah and Nevada. Territories for some years before statehood was granted by Congress, Idaho and all of her neighbors eventually took advantage of the 1862 Morrill Act and established a landgrant university which included, by law, an agricultural school, or as in the case of Oregon, Utah, Montana, and Washington, two separate institutions, a university and an agricultural college, such as those in Logan, Utah, and Corvallis, Oregon.

Senior among the seven universities was the one which traced its Salt Lake City roots back to 1850, but the name by which it was to be known, University of Utah, was not adopted until 1892, four years before statehood. The separate agricultural school at Logan opened in the 1880s. Oregon's agricultural college, established by the Southern Methodists as Corvallis College in 1858, became a state school in 1868, while the university at Eugene opened its doors in 1876. Nevada's university, placed in Elko in 1875, was moved to Reno in 1886. Washington's university at Seattle was founded "on paper" in the 1860s. The college at Bozeman and the university at Missoula, Montana, began accepting students during the depression of the early 1890s. Wyoming's university at Laramie began functioning a few years earlier, in 1887.
CHURCH SCHOOLS

As was true in Idaho, small high school level academies and private colleges were founded by religious bodies in all of the contiguous states. Mormons, Methodists, Presbyterians, Nazarenes and Episcopals funded colleges in Idaho. Montana's initial private colleges were Catholic, Methodist and Presbyterian. Episcopal Bishop C.W. Whitaker's Diocesan School for Girls, opened at Reno in 1873, closed shortly before the university was moved there from Elko in 1886. Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, "The oldest institution of higher learning in the Far West," was originally Jason Lee's Methodist Mission School. Congregational, Baptist, Presbyterian, Quaker and Catholic educators operated other Oregon schools, and there were Methodist, Episcopal, Presbyterian and Catholic colleges in Utah, besides those established by the Mormons. Gonzaga University in Spokane, originally a boys' school opened by the Jesuits in 1887, became a college in 1894, while Seventh Day Adventists, Lutherans, Presbyterians and Methodists also had colleges in Washington. The original religious schools in Wyoming were Congregational and Episcopal.²

St. Margaret's Hall, Boise, 1930s. Idaho Historical Society

Quite obviously, Episcopalian higher education in Boise, Idaho, in 1932 was not without precedent, since they had been planting academies and colleges across America for more than a century before Boise Junior College was founded. Church leaders were aware that educators and civic organizations had been discussing for many years the need for an institution which would enable high school graduates to remain at home. Only a handful of youths seeking higher education could afford to attend distant universities or colleges. At the same time, other matters besides economic ones stemming from the agricultural depression of 1921, and the Great Crash of 1929, aroused local sentiment for a junior college prior to the Episcopal Bishop's decision to convert his girls' preparatory school into a two-year college.
Politically and demographically the state was sectionally discordant. Democrats in the north and Republicans in the south were generally partisan toward local institutions, interests and issues whereas the Mormons in their southeastern communities, disfranchised for a number of years after anti-polygamy legislation was adopted during the 1880s, established their own college at Rexburg. Most Ricks College graduates who continued their education attended the colleges in Provo and Logan, Utah.

**BOISE**

Moscow, the home of the university over four hundred miles north of Boise, was a trade center for smaller farming and sawmill towns that either grew slowly or diminished in size. On the other hand, southwestern communities experienced gradual growth, with Boise eventually becoming the largest city between Portland, Oregon, and Ogden, Utah. The Civil War was raging when the town was platted in 1863, near the government’s recently established Fort Boise; placed close to the Oregon Trail to protect the hundreds of miners and overland travelers from justly outraged Indians. Sprouting up along the river south of the Fort, the frontier community provided various services for the Army, nugget seekers around Idaho City forty-five miles to the north, and miners in Silver City seventy-five miles south of Boise. Without a railroad until the 1880s, covered wagon homesteaders brought water onto the land in fertile parts of the valley, and agricultural endeavors dominated the economy for many years.
Boise was a city with about 15,000 people when the National Irrigation Congress met there in 1906, the year the federal Reclamation Service began a local development project. A decade later Arrow Rock Dam was placed upstream across the Boise River twenty road-miles east of the city, and farming expanded. The Oregon Short Line Railroad had already brought Nampa and Caldwell into existence in the western side of the valley, and these towns, surrounded by smaller communities, prospered along with Boise, which finally received a Union Pacific main line connection in 1925. Airmail service arrived the following year at the field that would become the Boise Junior College campus fourteen years later.

The largest city in the state, with 1,500 high school students by June, 1932, Boise was without a college, whereas Pocatello, 250 miles to the east, had a branch of the state university for those among its 1,300 students who were college-bound. Much smaller, Moscow taught about four-hundred high school students that year, and Nampa, with the third largest school enrolled nearly a thousand secondary students; Twin Falls had about nine hundred, while Idaho Fall’s high school was somewhat smaller. Lewiston had nearly seven-hundred secondary pupils, while Albion between Boise and Pocatello in the south, had just fifty high school students. Coeur d’Alene, where a junior college was opened in 1933, had seven hundred secondary students. 3

SEARS REPORT

After farm prices dropped following World War I, Idahoans were unwilling if not unable to augment the growth and expansion of higher education. The economy improved somewhat following the 1921 depression, nevertheless most families were still unable to send their high school graduates to college at distant places. “Hard times, it is true,” the State Board of Education observed in 1924, “have prompted many south Idaho students to seek cheaper education nearer home,” and some of them attended the post-secondary classes brought to Boise by the public colleges.

The Normal Schools at Albion and Lewiston conducted summer sessions, partially funded by the Chamber of Commerce, and the University of Idaho also sponsored June through August classes during the decade. While a number of young high school graduates and studious teachers benefited, a local higher learning school remained the goal of circumspect citizens, bankers and merchants aware of the commercial value of a college, as well as partisans who believed the Groves of Academe would improve the town’s image. Spokesmen for all these factions approved when attorney Oliver O. Haga, president of the Boise Independent School District, invited Stanford professor J.B. Sears to direct an evaluation of the city’s educational needs.

Sears, William Proctor of Stanford and Harold Williams from the State School for Delinquents in Whittier, California, concluded in their nearly three hundred page The Boise Survey: A Concrete Study of the Administration of a City School System, the twenty thousand people in the city and the other fifteen thousand in Ada County needed a junior college. Sears and his colleagues noted that ninety-seven percent of Boise’s residents were white with more Orientals than blacks among the three percent minority. Their children received a traditional public education at the several elementary schools, grades one through eight, and the high school. This had been the case since 1884, when the high school graduated its first class of two students. There had been close to a hundred graduates annually since 1915, enough to justify the establishment of a junior college the California educators advised. 4
The Sears report was not the first nor the last of several surveys that pointed up the need for higher education in Boise. Eugene Chaffee mentioned in his history of Boise College that a 1913 study submitted by three educators, Edward Elliot of the University of Wisconsin, Charles Judd of the University of Chicago and George Strayer of New York City's Teachers College, concluded that a junior college capable of serving all of Ada County should be founded. Expanding upon their conclusion, E.O. Sisson, Idaho Commissioner of Education (1913-1917) and his successor Ethel Redfield, urged the establishment of junior college districts throughout the state. Boise was to be responsible for the first school. In agreement by the end of the prohibition decade were Catholic Bishop Daniel Mary Gorman and Superintendent of Schools Charles Dienst.

In 1930, Leonard V. Koos of the University of Chicago, author of The Junior College Movement (1925), was employed by the Board headed by electric power executive J.W. Crowe. In submitting a lengthy defense of the proposed junior college, Koos convinced Crowe and other prominent citizens of the need. However, two years passed and the college was opened by a private sponsor rather than the Public School Board.5

JUNIOR COLLEGE MOVEMENT

Considerable interest in the junior college, expressed locally prior to and after World War I, was found in many sizeable communities across the nation, especially in the West. Cities similar to Boise and some that were smaller wanted inexpensive and convenient education beyond high school and the junior college seemed to be the answer. This phenomenon of the 20th century (although the idea was expressed earlier), begun at Joliet, Illinois in 1902, expanded to nineteen public two-year colleges in the United States by 1915. Thereafter, post-high school educational institutions grew rapidly, increasingly so after the doughboys returned from the trenches in France.

There were almost two hundred junior colleges serving about 45,000 freshmen and sophomores by 1930, and nearly a hundred more with 450,000 students on the eve of World War II. Thus, the promulgation of the idea in Boise was not unusual; local college sentinels were enunciating sentiments articulated in many communities, based largely upon the philosophy of Henry Philip Tappan of the University of Michigan, William Rainey Harper of the University of Chicago, and Stanford's David Starr Jordan.6
California, the acknowledged leader in the movement, had fifty junior colleges by 1931, while Idaho and Montana had two, Oregon one, Utah five and Washington six. Nevada and Wyoming were without two-year colleges; however there was agitation in both for appropriate legislation. Every state should have such schools, Stanford president Ray Lyman Wilbur testified while he was Herbert Hoover’s Secretary of the Interior.

In his introduction to the first issue of The Junior College Journal (October, 1930), Wilbur concluded the growth of public and private junior colleges was a “long overdue renaissance in the stereotyped and debilitated collegiate structure.” Of like mind, Albert C. Olney, president of the college in Kentfield, California, pointed out in a volume edited by William Proctor of Stanford that schools such as his provided opportunities for thousands of youths who otherwise might be denied higher education because of the “academic shortage.”

Both private and public sponsorship were endorsed by several of the Journal’s contributors. Warren W. Way of St. Mary’s School and Junior College at Raleigh, North Carolina, observed that private colleges made two escapes possible at once: from a flood of students by limiting enrollment, and with numbers thus secured these schools gained the freedom to cultivate the best in quality education. Another educator, Frederick Eby of the University of Texas, said in 1931, that junior colleges were now needed even more than before because so many young people preferred the classroom over idleness and their deflated purses tended to shift enrollment to lower-cost schools. Therefore, legislatures, municipalities, and private institutions should not shy away from establishing colleges since the chances for success were

![The College of Idaho, Caldwell, 1930s.](image)

![Northwest Nazarene College, Nampa, 1930s.](image)
favorable despite the Depression. Post-secondary schools, wrote Eby, "founded upon careful reflection and out of genuine need even in times of severe financial distress" were more likely to become permanent than many of those which suddenly emerged during the "piping times of highest prosperity."  

In a section called "The Junior College World," the January, 1931, Journal featured Iowa's Creston Junior College where over three hundred graduates of eighteen high schools were enrolled although there was a four-year college sixty-five miles away. The Reformed Church in America had opened its first Iowa junior college, and Yakima (Washington) Junior College was considered a regional pacesetter. The California colleges with the largest enrollments were in Los Angeles (over four thousand), Long Beach, Pasadena, Sacramento and San Bernardino. The Depression had forced Sacramento legislators to decrease financial assistance; nevertheless attendance was increasing at most of the colleges. In Pocatello about seven hundred students filled classrooms at Southern Branch, University of Idaho during the fall 1932 semester, an increase of ten percent over the previous year. Like most institutions of higher learning, Pocatello's was in straitened circumstances when Boise Junior College opened in 1932.  

Both Cecil Dryden, author of the history of the Cheney, Washington college and Samuel Mohler, who documented the college experience at Ellensburg mentioned the sting of the Depression. Twenty-one percent salary cuts were imposed at Central Washington when the 1932 legislature appropriated only two-thirds of the money the trustees requested. Men on relief painted Cheney campus buildings, and the library was constructed with funds provided by the Public Works Administration. A few years later, the Works Progress Administration, rather than the PWA, provided financial assistance, when buildings were erected on what had been Boise's municipal airport, for the junior college opened eight years earlier.

Some observers assumed that Middleton S. Barnwell accomplished the impossible as Boise Junior College developed, recalling that the Bishop was optimistic despite the economy because he believed the city would rally behind a liberal arts school. In later years Barnwell, while serving as the Bishop of Georgia, interpreted his role as one who planted seed in fertile Boise soil.
For students unable to enroll at the university over 400 miles away, or at colleges in neighboring states while fathers were unemployed or working for reduced wages, Barnwell's college was a refuge. The Depression also had a positive impact upon some established junior colleges, where enrollments increased just as attendance at movie theaters grew as the economy faltered. Hollywood provided a two-hour escape from reality for a dime and the junior college made education available for a modest investment. Thus, the Bishop and his successors did not work miracles. However, their accomplishments achieved during trying times were quite remarkable, a noteworthy chapter in the history of higher education in the high mountain region of the American West.\(^{10}\)