Boise State University:
SEARCHING FOR EXCELLENCE,
1932 - 1984
Glen Barrett
Boise State University: Searching for Excellence, 1932-1984

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With an Epilogue
by
John H. Keiser

Boise State University
Dedicated to:
All those who, during the past half century, encouraged the growth and development of Idaho's urban university.
When I arrived on the Boise College campus in June, 1968, President Emeritus Eugene B. Chaffee was writing a history of the school which was published in 1970. His An Idea Grows remains the elemental account of the dedicated energy his faculty and student leaders expended as they brought the struggling junior college forward to four-year status. Nearly a decade later the committee planning Boise State University’s 50th Anniversary called for the writing of another history which would dwell upon the institution’s dramatic enrollment and physical growth following the Chaffee years. The group of historians given the task assigned the research and writing to one of their number.

It was generally assumed that the higher education experience in Boise, if not unique, was extraordinary. However, the transformation of the junior college, designated a university in 1974, was characteristic of national trends. The sudden growth spurred by the GI Bill following World War II was repeated in the late 1960s and early 1970s as the “baby boom” generation completed high school. Thousands of young people, frustrated by their government’s involvement in Vietnam, flocked to campus as colleges worked to develop a university-level curriculum.

Over half of the narrative that follows chronicles the growth of higher education throughout Idaho and beyond after Boise’s junior college became a four-year school in 1965. Students and faculty who studied or taught during the Barnes’ years (1967-1977) will find in Part Three reminders of the ever-changing face of the campus while curricula expanded each semester. Chapters twelve through fourteen examine the institution during the administration of John Keiser, who assumed the presidency in 1978. Writing these chapters, following months of sifting and organizing documents housed in the University Archives, was expedited by numerous individuals.

Prominent among the educators who assisted the author (granted half-time teaching) was archivist Donald Haacke and several of his colleagues in the Library. Offering suggestions and reading drafts were professors John Caylor, John Keiser, Patricia Ourada, Robert Sims, Robert Sylvester and Warren Vinz. Thereafter, the manuscript was reviewed by Idaho State Historian Merle Wells and the University of Utah’s Everett Cooley. Cited in the endnotes are the numerous individuals representing the State Board of Education, faculty, students, and alumni who contributed their reminiscences.

If the narrative that follows has merit, credit belongs to the people mentioned above. Outstanding was the work of graphics designer Kathy Carpenter, and typist Faith Brigham. Updating the manuscript for over two years, Faith was also largely responsible for the index. Thus, many people contributed to the writing of this history. Errors that remain are the misdoing of the author, who regrets that so many participants prominent among those to whom the institution is indebted, do not appear in the appropriate chapters. For this reason the dedication is an expression of appreciation for all of the trustees, educators and students who over the years made a personal investment in the institution’s development.

Glen Barrett
Boise State University
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