

EPILOGUE

As I read Professor Barrett's manuscript, four recurring themes appeared which made Boise State University what it is at the date of this book's publication and which will be important to its next fifty years. This epilogue is meant to highlight those themes for readers who may agree or disagree, but who might find the exercise useful in better understanding the University.

The first constant factor in analyzing the history of Boise State University is its location, far removed from other state institutions of higher education in an expanding population center, that happens to be the state capital. That fortunate location provided protection, sustenance, and inspiration. The impossible expense faced by thousands of aspiring students on leaving home to achieve a higher education is why the institution was founded and why enrollment has grown over the years. As a bonus, staying home did not force students to give up hunting, fishing, and other elements of outdoor life that are close to Boise, and that are so important to many Idahoans. More recently, older students "place bound" by jobs and families but in need of increased education, continued the demand.

Location also helps explain how Boise State University developed a constituency made up of alumni of other universities who united in its support. The University has provided cultural opportunities not readily accessible elsewhere to countless area residents. They may have attended the University of Tennessee, but Boise was their home and an accessible institution of higher education was important. Existing in the capital city has given the institution identity, as it has taken advantage of the resources available through all areas of state government, culminating in the recent creation of a School of Social Sciences and Public Affairs within the College of Arts and Sciences.

Location also helps explain the suspicion often directed against the University from other areas of the state. Boise State University has been the frequent victim of the facile misconception, that Boise clout, political muscle, or influence by association, has been exercised by or on behalf of the University in undue quantities. It is difficult to imagine, however, that a new institution of higher education could have been started anywhere else in Idaho fifty years ago, and survived, let alone, prospered, over a half century.

The second critical factor in the history of Boise State University has been the positive relationship with the surrounding community. The institution was created and sustained by the community in the early, crucial years and buttressed by the acceptance of bond issues when necessary. It was those local individuals and groups who felt that the presence of a college or a university enhanced their lives, who brought progress by their acts of will and generosity. Harry Morrison, for example, served as a Boise Junior College Trustee and purchased uniforms for the marching band, among other things, decades before his widow built the magnificent Morrison Center for the Performing Arts in his name.

Fund drives, special project support, attendance in record numbers at football games, service on advisory committees, pride in achievement, and criticism, when important, characterized the positive relationship between town and gown. The community has often pooled resources with the institution in order to accomplish a goal beyond the reach of either acting alone, a dramatic example being the construction of the Multi-purpose Pavilion. It is not too much to say that when the community has been preoccupied, by war for example, or either displeased or aloof for whatever reason, development on the campus has slowed.

Once the institution became part of the state system and its "community" became statewide, an already familiar pattern, which began with suspicion, proceeded to cautious approval, and reached general acceptance, equal treatment, and increasing support, repeated itself. The State Board of Education, with occasional reluctance adopted Boise State University and created an increasingly distinctive place for it within the state system. In 1973, the mission statement foresaw an institution "similar to Idaho State University," but a decade later, statewide, and regional responsibilities were assigned in the words, "urban university," "research," "technology," and "primary emphasis" in "business and economics," "performing arts," "public affairs," "interdisciplinary studies," and other signboards pointing the way into the second half century. Community support was recognized as critical by the founders and their successors and, overall, was well earned.

The third factor has been the constant search for funding and support. Born in the midst of severe depression, the institution was never able to escape the need for careful, often tightfisted, management and for accountability. These terms, popular throughout the nation in the 1970s and 80s, were nothing new to Boise State University, for there had rarely been room for frills or for unproductive activity.

Building while others consolidated, aggressive because survival often seemed at stake, depressions were overcome, tax initiatives survived, budget holdbacks and shortfalls routinized, and increasingly equitable funding gradually achieved. The pressure of insufficient funding led to innovative solutions, combined public/private enterprises, and acceptance of approaches to management and teaching that were considered highly imaginative in higher education. As cutbacks caused severe trauma on other campuses in recent years because living with financial ambiguity was a new thing, Boise State University managed to absorb them into the pattern already familiar in the warp and woof of its history.

The fourth factor of ongoing importance to Boise State University has been the sense of the mission of the College or the University, widely shared by those who operated it, and their selfless and dignified approach to achieving it. The fact that it began under the sponsorship of the Episcopal Church and was led by a Bishop, provided a special focus and a sense of dedication lacking in most institutions. It combined an awareness of quality and service in a liberal arts base. Faculty were not only grateful for jobs in education, but believed strongly in their profession and in the importance of liberal education. Administrators built laboratories and janitors became indispensable friends and advisors to students. The sense of collegiate understanding was fostered by size at first, but even after dramatic spurts of growth distended the community, few University employees limited their world to the path between their parking places, their offices, and their classrooms. Institution-wide priorities were set and met by everyone, working at whatever level necessary, due to insufficient funding for "specialists" and genuinely broad perspectives.

Heroes emerged. They included an eloquent Bishop, a dedicated president, who returned from the war as an officer to continue a task he had never forgotten, teachers whose students regularly won prizes and recognition after graduation, a football coach who seemed invincible, a vice president, whose concern for students and the institution, led him to heroic efforts on behalf of all, and countless others, whose pride in the institution created a record almost unnoticed at the time, because of the pace of development.

Nothing is preordained if one believes in free will. Results depend on leadership, on individual effort, and on dedication. These people made it happen and are too

often overlooked by those who would name the University "Inevitable State." They remained and persisted, in part by reason of the quality of life in Idaho, the compelling presence of nature on their doorstep, but also, because of their dedication to the institution and to one another. It did not have to happen, to stick and grow, but it did because the purpose was clear and worth the struggle in the minds of an unusually large number of fine people. It was their sense of unflagging optimism in overcoming the criticism and resistance, which accompanied each advance and every expansion, their "can do" attitude, which characterized Boise State University.

What will the next fifty years be like? Overall, they will be good ones, for Boise State University has ended its half-century strong and vital, ready to make a statement about its future, and it will be one of those institutions of higher education that survives and prospers in the coming decades. Undoubtedly, it will assume a leadership role in many special areas in the state and the region. While the relationship with the community will be critical, the University will become much more active rather than reactive in helping solve community problems through research and public service.

Increasing portions of its work will be done electronically, through distance education, and the computer will become a critical educational tool. It will grow as the area grows, but its clientele will become more cosmopolitan as the benefits of life in Idaho, combined with achieving a quality education, become more widely understood. In spite of sophisticated educational gadgetry, collegueship and associations will remain important to learning. The campus will expand to the south, perhaps doubling in size, and University Drive will become a walkway through center campus.

All of this will occur effectively as long as the four historical themes are kept in mind, strengthened and embellished, as the University carves out its future. Its history is strong, based on people seeking to provide opportunities for others to improve their lives, and it must be often recalled and frequently emphasized. These themes, expanded and understood, are its strengths, and I hope Bishop Barnwell will find room for me on his cloud, to watch a good University become great.

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