Leo J. “Scoop” Leeburn was born in Pawtucket, Rhode Island, in 1921. In 1943, at the age of 22, Leo and his family moved to Boise. Leo immediately fell in love with Boise’s downtown and embraced the area as his personal territory, where he was often seen walking with his camera day or night. When he first arrived in Boise, he enjoyed riding on patrol with officers from the Boise and Ada County police forces. As a result, he was typically the first person to photograph the scenes of accidents and fires, earning him the friendly nickname of “Scoop.” He worked for the Ada County Sheriff’s Department for several years. Scoop’s freelance photography included city nightlife, weddings, parades, sporting events, local buildings and city views. His pictures were frequently printed in the local newspapers. Even though Scoop was a shy man, he quickly became very popular. Many Boiseans enjoyed chatting with him as he strolled the streets, and were thrilled when he wanted to take their picture. In 1999, Scoop’s photos that captured the changes in Boise from the 1940s to the 1980s were
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displayed at the Idaho Historical Museum. Scoop continued his freelance work until he passed away in 2002 at the age of 81. The photos in this chapter depict not only the “lost city” of Boise’s downtown, but also display the insight Scoop possessed in capturing images of the area.

“Scoop’s” pictures demonstrate the rich history of Boise’s downtown, and depict the vibrant city of the past, the “lost city.” Some of the buildings have been preserved, but many that were reusable were regrettably razed. Boise is trying to learn from its past mistakes and the irreversible damages of tearing down historic buildings by placing a focus on urban, mixed-use, sustainable development.

Mary Harbst is a graduate of Highland High School in Pocatello. A freshman studying nursing, she will graduate in 2013 and then plans to work as a nurse in the Boise area.

What are the most important aspects of a “livable” city?

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The Southwells corner of Eighth and Bannock, 1949. Bobby-soxers played jukebox music at the corner soda fountain.
Retail once thrived in the 1902 Gem-Noble Building. Today the building houses restaurants and luxury condominiums.

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