

Once-Proud River Street Area Hosted Boise's Cultural, Sporting

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By DAVID ZARKIN
Statesman Staff Writer

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Baseball Played

Baseball was an important part of early Boise life. In fact, the Boise club won the league championship in 1904 and 1905 during the Fourth of July games.

The popular spectator sport was played in what was then the southern edge of the city and close to the business area. The area is now bounded by the river, Front Street and Capitol and Americana boulevards. It is sometimes described as the "River Street" or "Thirteenth Street" area, although it includes more than just those two streets.

One of the streets this area did include during earlier days was "Lover's Lane" — which provided access to River Street.

If "Lover's Lane" implies that the neighborhood was romantically inclined, then this distinction is justifiable. For this area was an entertainment and cultural center and a residential neighborhood of substantial integrity.

Assets Listed

Baseball was just one of its assets. Residents were drawn to Riverside Park's dance hall and outdoor theater. The neighborhood's families, who lived in cottage or two-story type houses, were only steps away from a musicale, vaudeville show, baseball game or Saturday night dance with live band.

The outdoor theater during the summer of 1906 offered Boiseans a cultural treat. The San Fran-

cisco Opera Company performed for three months at the theater after it lost its own opera house in the San Francisco earthquake and fire. Signs on Boise's street cars proudly proclaimed nightly performances that featured a cast of 50.

Riverside Park was south of Miller Street, between Pioneer and Ninth Streets. The baseball park seated about 1,000 persons in its partly-covered bleachers. The outdoor theater, which was also covered, would seat about 700 persons. The dance pavilion was adjacent to the theater and included a second floor refreshment area. This structure was built in 1905 and the land it occupied is now the site of a grocery warehouse.

Used by Schools

The ballpark was used for professional baseball and school activities until the schools could use Cody Park which came into existence in about 1908, according to F. C. (Fritz) Hummel, a Boise architect who was reared in the neighborhood.

In the area along the river was a mill pond which provided excellent skating during the winter. There was no swimming pool in the neighborhood, but during the summer the boys would swim in an area of the river near the millpond. About 60 boys could be seen swimming in the area on a warm summer's day, Hummel said. In fact, there were a great number of youngsters in the area and the evenings were fairly lively with the "kids playing 'run thief run' in the streets," Hummel reminisced. Nearby Thompson Orchard provided a good spot for an occasional apple fight, he added.

There were no schools in the immediate area south of the railroad tracks, but the youngsters walked to Central School where the west wing of the State House is now located until 1904 when Park School was built at Sixteenth between Grove and Main.

Cottages Built

The homes in the area, mostly cottage-type, were built between 1890 and 1905 with rustic sidings, Hummel said. There was little development of homes in the neighborhood after 1910, he added.

The single-story homes con-

tained about four rooms and the two-story homes had seven to eight rooms. The residents were from various walks of life — ranging from professional men to craftsmen and laborers.

Thirteenth Street included many of the better medium-priced homes in the neighborhood, Hummel said. Hummel's family, three attorneys and a banker, Judge B. F. Olden, lived on that street. Olden was the president of the Idaho Trust and Savings Bank, which was located at Ninth and Main, according to John T. Rummel, 1200 South Arcadia, who was reared in the neighborhood and later worked for the bank.

Subdivisions Platted

Idaho Trust and Savings Bank, Ltd., of Boise, filed a plat in May, 1911, for Riverside Park Addition in that area. The other subdivisions in that area were platted in December, 1890, and included City Park Subdivision, developed by C. W. Hartly and J. M. Dunningan, and Riverside Addition, developed by John McClellan, according to plats in the county assessor's office.

South of River Street was pasture land in the early 1900s and from Pioneer Street to River Street there was a large orchard. The area north of River Street to the railroad was residential, Hummel said.

Hummel was a member of the Planning and Zoning Commission that wrote the city's first zoning ordinance in 1928. He served on the panel until December 1965.

Zoning Cited

According to the 20-page 1932 Boise zoning ordinance, the River Street area was in an unrestricted "F" zone. This zone, according to the old ordinance, allowed all uses permitted in the city's other zones at that time. In addition, it allowed the storage, reloading and wholesale handling of flammable liquids.

By 1928, the southern areas of Eighth and Ninth streets contained warehouses and some industrial uses were appearing below the railroad tracks, Hummel said. The houses were old then and beginning to depreciate rapidly. Vacancies appeared in the residential neighborhood and the Planning and

Zoning Commission decided that this area would become industrial.

This area, according to the 1966 city zoning ordinance, is now zoned mostly M-1 limited industrial with a few patches of commercial districts. None of the area is zoned for residential uses.

Many of the homes built at the turn of the century are still standing, but most of the original owners or their descendants no longer live there, Hummel noted. When the youngsters grew up and decided to remain in Boise, they did not choose to buy or build homes in the River Street area, he said.

It became a neighborhood for older persons. The homes were sold to day laborers to a large extent, Hummel said. During World War II, Boise received a large influx of persons from the military installations in the area who desired low cost housing. They settled in the River Street area, he said.

The fact that the neighborhood has been surrounded by commercial and industrial structures for more than 40 years and the fact that many of the homes are built close together with little lawn space contributed to the decline of the area as a residential neighborhood, he said. But the 50-foot



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There were no schools in the immediate area south of the railroad tracks, but the youngsters walked to Central School where the west wing of the State House is now located until 1904 when Park School was built at Sixteenth between Grove and Main.

Cottages Built
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This area, according to the 1966 city zoning ordinance, is now zoned mostly M-1 limited industrial with a few patches of commercial districts. None of the area is zoned for residential uses.

Many of the homes built at the turn of the century are still standing, but most of the original owners or their descendants no longer live there, Hummel noted. When the youngsters grew up and decided to remain in Boise, they did not choose to buy or build homes in the River Street area, he said.

It became a neighborhood for older persons. The homes were sold to day laborers to a large extent, Hummel said. During World War II, Boise received a large influx of persons from the military installations in the area who desired low cost housing. They settled in the River Street area, he said. But the 50-foot

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THIS BOISE STREETCAR proudly proclaims the fact that the San Francisco Opera Co. was performing nightly at Riverside Park, near the Boise River. This area, now substantially dominated by commercial uses, was an entertainment hub during the early 1900s.



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(Next: A present-day look)

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