Boise's West End

Western Suburban Development in the Progressive Era

by Tully Gerlach

1. Early Suburban Growth

Although relatively new, the boom cities of the American West experienced such swift growth that by the early 20th century they already exhibited patterns of suburban development.[1] Despite being the smallest and most isolated city of the rising urban West, Boise was no exception. Founded in 1863, Boise's location in the southwestern region of the Idaho Territory positioned it as the commercial, financial and political hub of the surrounding mining and agriculture economy. When the city experienced a growth boom from 1890-1910, the surge in population created a demand for homes and land that drove the development of the city's first suburban expansion. The additions on Boise's western end in the early 20th century started a new, progressive suburban form of development that brought the city a new shape and a mature self-concept.

The earliest additions to Boise followed a typical 19th-century "walking city" development pattern in which mass transit was not yet established and neighborhoods needed to remain close enough to the downtown core for citizens to commute to work by foot.[2] The establishment of a streetcar system in 1891 allowed for residential development further out from the center. The first suburban additions of the 1890s appeared to the north and east of downtown, following the early streetcar lines that served Warm Springs Avenue to the east, the address of choice for the city's wealthy, and 13th Street to the north, serving properties owned by Franklin Pierce, the city's largest developer. Despite the open space around the new North and East End additions, they maintained the standard 25-foot-wide lot pattern of the original townsite, itself a copy of

the standard eastern city lot allocation method.[3] This older pattern allowed for a great deal of flexibility and density in rapidly growing American cities, giving owners and speculators more units of sale per block and offering the chance to maximize profits. Small lots benefited individual land buyers too, for they could purchase as many lots as they needed for the business or home they intended to build.[4]

Just after the turn of the century, Boise's West End — the area south of State Street and north of Fairview Avenue that includes 21st through 32nd streets — began to take shape. The additions of the new century took on a new, more recognizably suburban appearance, with lots platted at fifty-foot width. Comparable in price to the 25-foot lots to the north and east, these larger lots opened a new opportunity for a broad range of classes to enjoy a suburban lifestyle. The creation and expansion of streetcar lines increased this opportunity as they enabled growth in the West End. From their 1891 origin into the early decades of the twentieth century, the streetcar service freed workers and laborers from having to live within walking distance of their jobs. Affordable and efficient transit both drove and served growth, and made suburban living accessible and convenient for nearly all classes of citizens.[5]

2. Fairview and West Side Additions

Initial development in the West End began with the platting of the Fairview Addition in 1903 and to its immediate west, the West Side Addition in 1905. Both additions sat in a broad portion of the Boise River floodplain called the Broadway Terrace, which extends from the current Ann Morrison Park to Glenwood Street. Originally the site of the local fairgrounds in the late 19th century, the West End portion

of the Broadway Terrace slopes gradually away from the western edge of downtown toward the Boise River, a unique geography that made for a prime suburban location. Unlike the North and East Ends, whose proximity to the foothills made for marshy, uneven land prone to flash floods, the West End sat in a large expanse of flat plain. Despite their location within the Broadway Terrace floodplain, Fairview and West Side were not at risk for regular flooding, and the vast gravel deposits left behind by the geological processes that carved out the terraces of the Boise River made for particularly fertile soil. [6] Just to the north of each addition, early settlers Frank and Hester Davis kept a large farm on which they grew fruit orchards, cultivated hay and raised sheep.[7] With the Davis acreages offering a pastoral foreground to the foothills further north, and the city center still close enough to be convenient by means of the streetcar, the first developers of the West End could market their land as the perfect suburban combination of rural peace and urban access, available to all. Fairview Addition lots, platted at 50 x 122 feet, went for a standard price of $150 per lot, a price comparable to and often cheaper than the prices of the 25 x 115 feet lots in the older additions.[8]

The owners of the West Side Addition platted the land for a mix of uses. W. H. Ridenbaugh and G.H. Gess, successful entrepreneurs involved in the development of the early city, co-owned the property along with their wives Mary and Catherine. The location of the West Side Addition, with the river at its western edge and the Oregon Short Line spur railway running through its southern portion, made ideal sites for industrial uses. Freight lines adjacent to or even within industrial property facilitated easy delivery and transport of heavy goods, and the river suited industries that required a convenient and reliable waste-removal system. Ridenbaugh and Gess may have originally

intended to establish some sort of commercial or industrial interest on the site, Ridenbaugh already owning a successful lumber yard and Gess maintaining a controlling interest in a large-scale meat packing and retail business. The two men, however, could not agree on how to suitably divide the land for commercial development and in light of the city's persistent growth, opted instead to plat most of it for residential use.[9] The Ridenbaughs and Gesses platted their new addition in 50-foot lots and priced them as low as $50 per lot. Within a month of the initial platting, real estate broker D.H. Moseley reported selling at least six lots to "parties of comparatively small means, whose purpose is to build homes in the near future." [10] Along with the large, low-priced lots available in Fairview Addition, West Side opened a new opportunity to people of "small means" to live on large lots in a suburban neighborhood.

Despite the West End's rural aspect and easily developed land, the presence of the railroad and river undermined its suburban character. The North and East Ends may have been irregular in grade and flood-prone, but they were well-removed from major commercial and industrial activity. Having the Boise River on its western border and the main railroad spur line to its south opened the West End to industry at its edges. Just north of the railway ran Fairview Avenue, a major east-west route between Boise and the communities further west and the only river crossing connecting downtown to the western Bench plateau. The proximity of two major transit routes suited commercial development, which filled in the southern stretches of the West End from shortly after their initial platting to the present day. Recognizing this potential, the Ridenbaughs and Gesses platted the lots that encompassed the railroad right-of-way in large, irregular shapes suitable for industrial uses. [11] In 1906, the Coast Lumber Company established a

finished carpentry mill reputed to be one of the largest in the Pacific Northwest on a large lot south of Fairview and east of the riverbank, where they operated until the 1920s.[12] When Idaho embarked on a concerted program of highway construction beginning in 1914 and continuing on into the 1930s, it designated Fairview as a state and later national highway.[13] In 1926, the Transportation Department established equipment storage and materials testing laboratories on the former site of the Coast Mill. During the same period, at least six oil companies built tank sites in the river bottoms south of Fairview. The Goodman Oil Company, the facilities of which still stand today just east of the Fairview Bridge, planted no fewer than fourteen gasoline storage tanks on the river bank.[14]

The Boise River at its western edge posed another threat to the West End's suburban character. Even after the annexation of Fairview and West Side Additions into the city around 1912, the riverbanks remained outside the city limits, as they would up until the 1960s. Being outside the limits freed riverside industries from what few industrial restrictions there were in Boise in the early 20th century, the chief of which was the banning of slaughterhouses within city limits. From Boise's founding until well into the late 20th century, the Boise River, far from being considered the civic and environmental amenity it is today, was viewed as unfit for residential development and best suited as an industrial waste and sewage-removal system. [15] Slaughterhouses, like the later oil tank farms, generated a great amount of effluent and used the river as a dumping ground. By 1912, two slaughterhouses operated on the riverbank at the western edge of the West Side Addition, one an extensive outfit with stock pens and a sausage factory.[16] By the 1930s, the Quinn-Robbins company purchased the riverside land and

closed the slaughterhouses to begin excavation of the rich gravel stores of the Broadway Terrace. Until the late 1980s, gravel quarries and a later cement plant, and the attendant noise, pollution and traffic, operated on the West End's western flank. From the beginning, the steady presence of heavy industry effectively stalled residential development in the area. Although by 1912 several modest homes had been built on West Side's eastern edge, just adjacent to the 27th Street streetcar line and Fairview Addition, the bulk of early West End development happened centrally, in Fairview and the Pleasanton Addition of 1908.[17]

3. Pleasanton Addition

With the development of Pleasanton Addition, the West End lost its rural aspect, but grew into a new role as a Progressive Era suburb. When streetcar building in Boise began, Hester Davis granted a right-of-way through her rural property in order to connect the Valley Road—State Street today—to Fairview Avenue by means of what became 27th Street. By 1908, with the streetcar lines complete, Davis, 17 years a widow and approaching 70 years of age, finally shut down her farming operations and subdivided her land into the Pleasanton Addition.[18] Though adjacent to Fairview Addition and maintaining its 50-foot lot pattern, Pleasanton at first aligned closer to the Ellis Addition platted in 1906 in standard 25-foot lots just across the Valley Road in the North End. With Boise still in the midst of its 20-year boom of 1890-1910, Pleasanton and Ellis became the additions of choice for Boise's growing middle-class and their preferred style of home, the bungalow. Of all residential architectural styles appearing in the city during the 1910s, the popular bungalow exemplified the aesthetics and aspirations of the new

middle class of the West. Originally designed to serve as attractive and efficient housing for the working class, the style and versatility of the bungalow, with its open floor plan, built-in cabinets and bookcases, broad porches and balanced structure, appealed to Americans in the prosperous early years of a new century.[19] In October, 1909, the *Statesman* ran a story on the "unprecedented growth" in building of the previous year. "Structures Are Modern And Very Substantial," proclaimed the sub-headline. An entire section covered "Bungalow Construction," noting that these "homes are scattered all over the city from Pleasanton addition on the west to Eden Home and the East Side additions to the east."[20] Many of these bungalows still stand today throughout Pleasanton and Fairview Additions, contributing to a varied streetscape of intact homes representing some of the best of early-to-mid 20th century residential architecture.

As Pleasanton developed, its residents brought a new civic consciousness to bear on the suburban ideal. By 1911, they formed a Pleasanton Club dedicated to the promotion and improvement of their neighborhood.[21] In 1912, the residents of Pleasanton joined with those of Ellis to petition for annexation into the city. Until the 1960s, Boise's City Charter prohibited the city from forcibly annexing contiguous neighborhoods. Additions wishing to be part of the city were required to petition the city for entry and then to hold a vote among residents. Many additions, such as Fairview and West Side, went through the process with little fanfare, but Pleasanton and Ellis made a public affair of it, with formal presentations to the City Council, vigorous lobbying within the neighborhoods, and a concerted get-out-the-vote effort on election day, all of which received extensive coverage in the *Idaho Statesman*.[22] The annexation passed and the city made immediate plans to extend municipal services into the neighborhoods. Although a

desire for amenities such as sidewalks, electricity and sewers motivated the citizens of Pleasanton and Ellis, a Progressive civics also animated their drive for inclusion in the greater city. For all its newness and remoteness, Boise still participated in the new Progressive reform era of the United States in the first decades of the 20th century. Boise lacked many of the urban ills that drove reformers in the east, yet Boise's citizens embraced the ideas of civic engagement and responsibility that grew out of the movement. During this period, Boise began concerted efforts to pave roads, build sidewalks and sewers and extend electricity and water lines into its neighborhoods, and the majority of the citizens willingly paid the taxes necessary to make it all happen. Boise also embarked upon its ambitious tree-planting project, driven largely by private citizens and service clubs, the success of which led to the desert city's later appellation as the "City of Trees." Civic participation, beautification and improvement inspired the growing population of Boise, who believed that they could build a city the cultural and aesthetic equal of any in the west, and even the country at large.[23] Although still a suburb, Pleasanton, and its neighbors to the north and south, no longer idealized a rustic, rural, mode of living. Urban and urbane, Pleasanton began the process of bringing the suburbs into the city.

4. Consolidation and Challenges

After 1910, Boise's explosive growth began to taper off, ending the first phase of suburban growth. In 1910, Hester Davis platted the remaining portion of her lands into the Frank Davis Addition, just west of Pleasanton across 27th. In the same year, real estate developers platted the former farmlands west of Davis' holdings into the Hubbell

Home Addition.[24] As growth dropped off, so did sales of rural lots, and each addition remained unimproved and outside of the city limits until later in the century. With Boise's population interested in proper neighborhoods with standard amenities, Frank Davis and Hubbell Home could not compete with the established additions closer in. Despite a few sales and homes built, each addition remained largely empty until later in the century, when Frank Davis, like western West Side, filled in primarily with low-income housing and apartment complexes.[25] A few homes were built on Hubbell Home's eastern edge of Rose Street, but the addition remained entirely vacant until the State of Idaho purchased it in the mid-1960s to build the new Transportation Department headquarters.

The slower rate of growth brought about a consolidation of the established West End neighborhoods. With civic improvements installed and many lots available, the West End, like later additions in the North and East Ends, filled in steadily from the 1910s through the 1930s. Once established, the three additions that constituted the core West End—Fairview, West Side and Pleasanton—filled in with homes and urban amenities. Even as overall growth in Boise slowed over the next twenty years, population and home building increased in the West End. This growth brought further development and consolidation as viable urban residential neighborhoods. By the beginning of the Second World War, the West End enjoyed full sewer, electricity and water utilities, paved streets and, east of 27th Street, sidewalks. Two neighborhood schools served the area, as did a neighborhood store on 27th. Growth spread out over time resulted in an attractive mix of residential and commercial architecture. [26] In Pleasanton addition, street names were changed to reflect the distinct geography of the West End, even as the city adjusted the

street numbering system in order to standardize the neighborhoods with the greater city. [27]Though industrial and heavy commercial uses persisted on the south and western edges, development of the core West End from 1910 through the mid-century created an urban residential neighborhood equal to yet unique from the North and East Ends.

Boise's post-World War II patterns of transit and suburban development shaped the fate of the West End in the latter half of the 20th century. Even as the residential center grew and stabilized from the 1910s to the 1940s, State Street to the north and Fairview to the south became major highways. As car traffic increased after the closure of the streetcars in 1929, 27th Street became a major traffic corridor itself, connecting the two thoroughfares. Main Street, just north of Fairview, evolved into the westbound half of a couplet with Fairview, which moved traffic east. Main and Fairview, and State west of 23rd Street shifted further to commercial development, particularly that which oriented toward automobile traffic. Gas and service stations, hotels and motels, drive-through restaurants and banks and car dealerships sprang up along all three roads. These streets, with freight trains still running on the tracks to the south and the ongoing quarrying interests working to the west, hemmed in the West End with traffic, commerce and industry, and effaced its intact historical identity, even as the residential center maintained its integrity.

Today, the West End is not officially classified as a historic neighborhood, but it occupies a unique and important place in the city's past. When the suburbs that are now known as the "30th Street Area," among other names, were first platted, Boise was growing out of its origins as a rough frontier town into a city whose citizens believed themselves capable of building a modern civic community the equal of other great cities

in the West. The West End reflected that ambition. Regardless of its current status, the area of the city that constitutes its historic first western suburbs remains a neighborhood whose development played a significant role in Boise's maturing civic growth of the early 20th century. As a new suburban form accessible to a range of classes and as an indicator of the increasingly sophisticated self-image of Boiseans and their aspirations, the West End shaped and reflected the growth of the city during a crucial era of its history.

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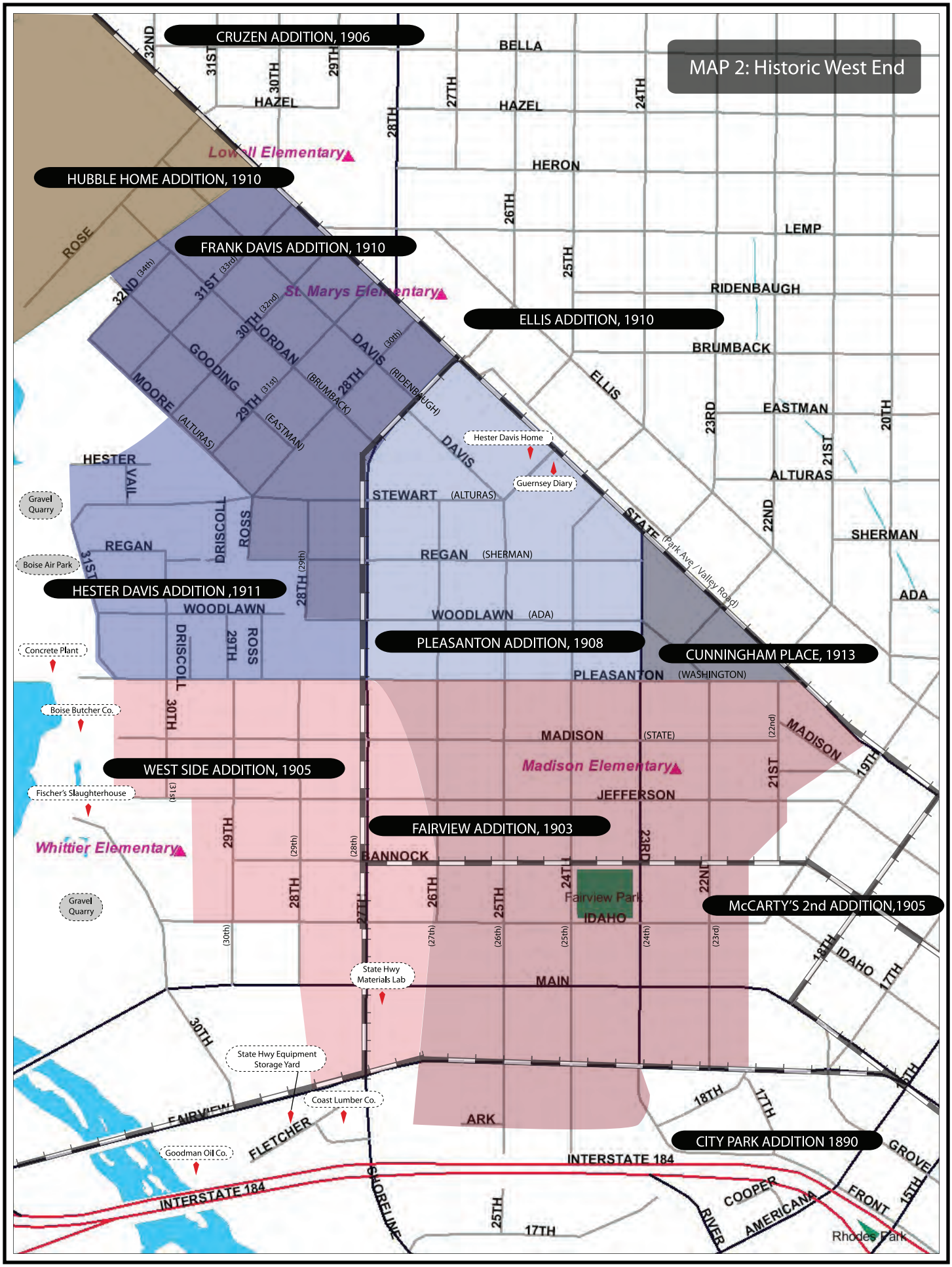
[1] For an account of the explosive growth of western boom cities, see Gunther Barth, *Instant Cities: Urbanization and the Rise of San Francisco and Denver* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1988).
[2] Todd Shallat, ed., *Harrison Boulevard: Preserving the Past in Boise's North End* (Boise: Boise State University School of Social Sciences and Public Affairs, 1989), 2-7.
[3] John W. Reps, *Cities of the American West: A History of Frontier Urban Planning* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), ix-xii. Boise's founding and early layout is recounted on page 494.
[4] Sam Bass Warner, Jr., *Streetcar Suburbs: The Process of Growth in Boston 1870-1900* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962), 132-141.
[5] Nick Casner and Valeri Kiesig, *Trolley: Boise Valley's Electric Road 1891-1928* (Boise: Black Canyon Communications, 2002).
[6] Richards Carothers Associates, *Veterans Memorial State Park* (Boise: Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation, 1974), 12-14.
[7] Susan Stacy, Tom and Julia Davis: "Some Good Place," Boise, Idaho (Boise: T & J Publishers, 2007), 43.
[8] "A Long Pursed Man," advertisement, *Idaho Daily Statesman*, November 15, 1903, 8. "Proclamation," advertisement, *Idaho Daily Statesman*, November 29, 1903, 3. Ada County Assessor's Office, *Fairview Addition to Boise City, Idaho* (Boise, 1903), Book 2, page 73.
[9] Ada County Assessor's Office, *Plat of West Side Addition to Boise*, (Boise, 1905), Book 2, page 86. "The West Side Addition," advertisement, *Idaho Daily Statesman*, April 23, 1905, 7.
[10] "Activity In The West End," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, May 23, 1905, 3.
[11] Ada County Assessor's Office, *Fairview Addition to Boise City, Idaho* (Boise, 1903), Book 2, page 73. *Plat of West Side Addition to Boise*, (Boise, 1905), Book 2, page 86.
[12] "Planing Mill Running" under "Brief Local News," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, January 20, 1906, 5, column 4.
[13] *Idaho's Highway History 1863-1975*, (Boise: Idaho Transportation Department, 1985), 36-38, 89.
[14] Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps, Boise, Idaho*, 1949, sheet 79; 1956, sheet 74.
[15] Carol Lynn MacGregor, *Boise, Idaho 1882-1910: Prosperity in Isolation* (Missoula, MT: Mountain Press, 2006), 64-66. J. Meredith Neil, "City Limits: The Emergence of Metropolitan Boise 1945-2006" (unpublished draft, 2006), 27-28.
[16] *Insurance Maps, Boise, Idaho* (New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1912), sheet 23.

[17] City of Boise Planning and Development Services, "Parcel Level Analysis: Residential and Commercial Structure Built," 2007.
[18] Ada County Assessor's Office, *Plat of Pleasanton Addition to Boise City, Idaho* (Boise, 1908), Book 4, page 162.
[19] Shallat, 29-30.
[20] "City's Buildings Attest Its Advance," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, October 11, 1909, 5.
[21] "Pleasanton Residents Out," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, July 23, 1911, 6.

[22] "Two Additions Want To Be In City," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, February 7, 1912, 3. "Three Additions May Come to Town Today," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, March 9, 1912, 2. "Big Majority Is For Entrance To City," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, March 10, 1912, 4. "Three Additions Now A Part Of Boise City," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, March 14, 1912, 6.
[23] MacGregor, 158-159. Merle Wells and Arthur A. Hart, *Boise: An Illustrated History* (Sun Valley, CA: American Historical Press, 2000), 81-82. For a broader account of the influence of the Progressive Movement in the American west, see Earl Pomeroy, *The Pacific Slope: A History of California, Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Utah, and Nevada* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1965), Chapter VIII.
[24] Ada County Assessor's Office, *Plat of Frank Davis Addition to Boise City, Idaho* (Boise, 1910), Book 5, page 231. Ada County Assessor's Office, *Hubbell Home Addition to Boise City, Idaho* (Boise, 1910), Book 5, page 210.
[25] Keyser Marston Associates, Inc., preparers, *30th Street Urban Renewal Area Eligibility Report Prepared for the Capital City Development Corporation* (September 1, 2008).
[26] TAG Historical Research and Consulting, "Survey Report: Sand Creek Proposed Cell Tower," (April, 2007), 4-11.
[27] "Much Business Transacted By Council," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, July 17, 1912, 10. Boise City Ordinance 1200, July, 1916, Sections 7 and 9. "City Councilmen Listen To Heavy Topics At Issue," *Idaho Daily Statesman*, July 20, 1921, 3.


MAP 2: Historic West End
CRUZEN ADDITION, 1906
HUBBLE HOME ADDITION, 1910
FRANK DAVIS ADDITION, 1910
ELLIS ADDITION, 1910
HESTER DAVIS ADDITION ,1911
PLEASANTON ADDITION, 1908
CUNNINGHAM PLACE, 1913
WEST SIDE ADDITION, 1905
FAIRVIEW ADDITION, 1903
McCARTY'S 2nd ADDITION,1905
CITY PARK ADDITION 1890
Low ll Elementary
St. Marys Elementary
Madison Elementary
Whittier Elementary
Hester Davis Home
Guernsey Diary
Gravel Quarry
Boise Air Park
Concrete Plant
Boise Butcher Co.
Fischer's Slaughterhouse
Gravel Quarry
State Hwy Materials Lab
State Hwy Equipment Storage Yard
Coast Lumber Co.
Goodman Oil Co.
Fairview Park
Rhodes Park
BELLA
HAZEL
HERON
LEMP
RIDENBAUGH
BRUMBACK
EASTMAN
ALTURAS
SHERMAN
ADA
STEWART (ALTURAS)
REGAN (SHERMAN)
WOODLAWN (ADA)
PLEASANTON (WASHINGTON)
MADISON (STATE)
JEFFERSON
BANNOCK
MAIN
IDAHO
ARK
FAIRVIEW
FLETCHER
INTERSTATE 184
ROSE
HESTER
VAIL
DRISCOLL
ROSS
JORDAN
GOODING
MOORE (ALTURAS)
DAVIS (RIDENBAUGH)
ELLIS
STATE (Park Ave / Valley Road)
SHORELINE
COOPER
AMERICANA
RIVER
FRONT
GROVE
32ND (34th)
31ST (33rd)
30TH (32nd)
29TH (31st)
28TH (30th)
27TH
26TH
25TH
24TH
23RD
22ND
21ST
20TH
19TH
18TH
17TH
15TH