Peaches, Plums and People

– Collister Station Then and Now

Figure 1: Collister stop along the interurban on State Street. Present day location of Terry's State Street Saloon. Taken circa 1902. Idaho State Historical Society.

William Blackadar
Boise History and Politics
Nestled against (and into) the northwest Boise foothills, the greater Collister area was once a distant trolley stop in an agriculturally centered community, three miles out of the hustle of Boise City. It’s a place deep with community roots, stemming early from generosity and maturing into the neighborhood that today residents have molded into a community in a biologically and geographically diverse segment of the Treasure Valley. Bordered by State Street on it’s southwestern edge, Pierce Park lane to the west, Cartwright and Hill Roads to the north, and Taft and 36th streets to the south and east, the Collister area comfortably exists between the economic centers of downtown and the more becoming residential expansions towards Eagle. But due to its location, the Collister area, like most neighborhoods, is beginning to face the challenges set forth by urban sprawl.

Figure 2: Collister neighborhood, from the neighborhood association at www.collistercna.org
The Collister neighborhood derives its name posthumously after Dr. George Collister, a ‘Pioneer’ according to the front page of *The Idaho Daily Statesman* for Saturday, October 19, 1935. Upon graduating from Heron Medical College in Cleveland in 1880, Dr. Collister, an Ohio native, was ‘persuaded’ by his sister Julia, whom had already moved to Idaho, to pack up and move west. Being the wife of Judge Joseph Huston of the Idaho Supreme Court, apparently she must have been a convincing woman; Dr. Collister opened an office on Main Street in downtown Boise in June of 1881.
Collister’s deathbed, in thanks for his generous donations to the area residents over 54 years of community service.  

An avid writer and horticulturalist, Dr. Collister became the owner of one of the valley’s first peach orchards. Shaded by nearly 11,000 peach, prune [sic] and various other fruit trees, Dr. Collister built a 20-bedroom mansion, overlooking the developing orchard on some, “245 combined acres of his and his sister’s land a few mile’s west of the city limits on Valley Road, (now State Street).” Though many of the original trees within the orchard have since died or been cut down, numerous are still bearing fruit to this day.

Collister’s mansion, built by the reputable architectural firm Tourtellotte and Hummel, was located near the junction of present day Sycamore and Taft Streets. The house, converted into the Elks Rehab Medical Care Center after Dr. Collister’s death, served patients even after Dr. Collister could not. The house has since been torn down and “The original home site is now occupied by the Boise City Fire Station No.9.”

Of the 245 or so acres that Dr. Collister owned, about 150 acres were donated for a new school to be built upon, leaving ample open space for children to play. First opened to students in the fall of 1911, Collister Elementary on present day Catalpa Drive is currently Boise’s smallest elementary school, serving 185 students of the Collister neighborhood. According to Principle Christina Olson, Collister Elementary signified, “A small neighborhood school with a long-established history and reputation… The feel of the neighborhood, the historic setting, it’s a wonderful little school.”
The remaining other hundred or so acres were apparently mismanaged and sold to RH and Elton Davidson. In 1944, they subdivided the newly acquired land, forming the microcosm of what is now called the Sycamore Neighborhood, squarely nestled between Taft and Sycamore Street, and Catalpa Drive to the north. The Sycamore neighborhood is easily identified by its 101 acres of similarly designed and oriented lots. The acreage was divided into 98 different, 7/8 acre parcels that allowed one horse, one cow and one hundred and fifty chickens each, believing the that each lot could be self supporting with room for a large garden. To this day, the special neighborhood covenants of the
Sycamore neighborhood make it the only neighborhood within the city of Boise that still formally allows agricultural stock per each lot.  

Figure 3: Outline of Sycamore Neighborhood within the greater Collister area. Note large, rectangular lots with little development. GoogleEarth - Europa Technologies.

Officially existing outside of the Boise City limits until the mid 1970’s, the Collister area has evolved to be a peaceful, homely neighborhood on the edge of a becoming city. Connected to the bustling city by rail at the dawn of the twentieth century, “They [Boise Interurban Railway Company] constructed a main stop and shelter at Collister [Intersection with Valley Road (State St.)] and Collister Station was born.”  

Terry’s State Street Saloon currently occupies the site of the old Collister Station - Boise Interurban stop.

With the completion of the Collister Mercantile Company in 1910 at the same intersection, the Collister area had the beginnings of a small, quiet, agricultural community. Mixed use in nature, the wood framed building operated as a grocery and general store through the 1940’s with a variety of managers over the years including George Krieg, W.H, Smeade, Emil J. Henke, J.S. Babcock, and A. Longnecker, to name a few. According to the Polk directory of 1956, the building had since changed ownership and had become a local bar, called the Collister Club. As legend and story would have
it, on the west face of Terry’s State Street Saloon, care has been taken over the years when repainting to leave the “Collister Mercantile Co.” sign in its original condition.\textsuperscript{14}

If seeing is believing I suppose I had to see it for myself, but upon a pint down and a walk around to the newly remodeled back “patio,” one can only find horseshoe pits and high spirits, as apparently the thief called time has even claimed this little juicy, tangible piece of history. Inquiring to the bartender if she knew about possible remodeling or the disappearance of the logo, she could only look back at me with a blank stare, confirming the fact she was being asked about a painted logo that was a hundred years old, and outdated her by 80.

Boiseans believe that State Street’s width can be attributed to the streetcar. Rather than building new tracks or roads over already existing rail bed, it was not uncommon for planners and engineers (as they are not stupid people) to synergistically incorporate rails alongside, or within, roads. As streetcars and rails became paradoxical, eventually the automobile gained rapid and sweeping allure, confirming E.B. White’s belief when he wrote, “Everything in life is somewhere else – and you get there in a car.” What now, in good (or bad) traffic takes commuters a few songs on their CD player to play, once was an adventure into the countryside.\textsuperscript{15}

Now all but a memory, Boise’s bustling trolley system has had it’s rippled effects through time. Without the advent of the trolley at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Treasure Valley would arguably look much different than it does today. With investments and investors in the trolley line, many neighborhoods and far off
countryside’s became destinations. According to Arthur Hart, one could ride the rails from downtown Boise to Collister Station for a mere five cents.\textsuperscript{16}

Notable destinations along the trolley line included the Natatorium and Pierce and Curtis Parks, in present day Pierce Park neighborhood and Caldwell, respectively. Arthur Hart continues, “The planners of the new Boise and Interurban line realized from the beginning that the new electric trolley cars could generate extra revenue if they created special destinations for pleasure seekers. School kids on field trips, and church groups and families on Sunday outings began riding the cars for a picnic, a holiday or birthday party, or just to see the sights along the way.”\textsuperscript{17}

A successful and entrepreneurial businessman named Walter E. Pierce promoted one of the first “destinations” planned along the trolley line. Pierce, a Kansas transplant, “Saw opportunity writ large.” A major developer, quite possibly the ‘largest’, in the broadest sense of the word, the state of Idaho has ever seen, Pierce undoubtedly understood business. Being the sole real estate broker in the new North End and Resseguie developments closer to the city, Pierce turned his attention further north along the rail line that he had invested in, which sparked the development of what is now known as Pierce Park.\textsuperscript{18}
Figure 4: An afternoon on the lake, Pierce Park. Taken circa 1910. Idaho State Historical Society.

With the new interurban access down State Street, and throughout the valley namely, once inaccessible, far off land in the country became accessible. In a matter of a few years (after numerous ‘Grand Openings’), Pierce Park “Provided a grand recreation spot for the modern electric world when it opened in 1908. A mere three miles from Collister Station, the park featured an electric-lighted entrance archway, ticket booths, picnic areas, a baseball diamond and a dance pavilion among other things.” 19

Today
The greater Collister area is a place that holds a story that somewhat resembles an orange; the rind being the city of Boise, the orange slices the individual communities within the city, and the pips that are the inhabitants. The Collister neighborhood is a large, potentially blossoming fruit that is not whole without its parts. Without the rind of Boise for support, nor the fruit of various communities, nor the seeds of its residents, the Collister area would not be the hospitable and habitual piece of valley floor that the area has developed into and more simply, become. Without community there is no community.

Yet challenged by all the demons of booming city growth, the Collister neighborhood has large and sometimes unforeseeable obstacles to overcome.

In search of eloquence, people have referred to the Collister neighborhood, as many other communities in the Treasure Valley as, “A community that has lost its sense of place.” More over, the Collister community, they say, ‘Is a neighborhood that has lost
its identity.’ Threatened by infill, sprawl, habitat/species preservation, crime, noise, and suffocating traffic, to name a few, residents, as well as the rest of the city, feel a sense of change may be needed on the horizon.

Rurally and socially intertwined between the bustling economic centers of downtown, the ‘New North End’ and the now more becoming subdivisions towards what is now Eagle, the Collister neighborhood may be the small plum tree within the peach orchard; a place that has the potential to only get better with time. Though like all perishable fruits and thus neighborhoods, it has looming potential for possible blight as well.

As continued development creeps further up the small drainages of the foothills as well as out towards Eagle, local residents are beginning to see, hear, feel and even smell it’s effects within their neighborhood. Thought by some as being a secret route to downtown, Hill Road, which creates the northerly boarder to the Collister neighborhood, sees it’s fair share of use, to put it lightly. At the heart of this quandary is the ill functioning, gridlock forming intersection that adjoins Catalpa, 36th street and Hill Road.

As a simple example of a byproduct of unprecedented growth within and out the valley namely, existing infrastructure as well as community roots, can potentially be suffocated. Yet, armed with a communal, agreed upon neighborhood plan, local residents are in the beginnings of addressing the blossoming problem that is traffic, as well as others. In short, residents are proposing a specifically engineered traffic dawdling roundabout at the aforementioned intersection.
Rather than simply widening Hill Road, which arguably would be ACHD’s vote, residents see the roundabout as the solution to a problem rather than ACHD’s simple, potentially wrong and costly answer. If completed, the roundabout would be the first of it’s kind within the valley as well the entire state. To become one of the first neighborhoods to address such a problem and recommend and construct such a measure to solve the problem would needless to say be extremely progressive and forward thinking. The neighborhood’s potential success in addressing such a problem, caused in part by sprawl, could and should be used by others marking a positive burgeoning point in neighborhood reconstruction.

Notes


3 *Statesman*, 19 October 1935. pg. 1.

5 *Statesman*, 19 October 1935. pg. 1.

6 Ibid.

7 Collister Neighborhood Plan. Chapter 3, Background Report. pg. 3-7 – 3-20. Full Drafts available at [http://www.collistercna.org](http://www.collistercna.org). As of this writing, the plan has not adopted by Boise City Council.


10 Sycamore Neighborhood Plan. pg. 1-2.


14 Ibid.


16 “Interurban electric trains catered to pleasure, business,” *The Idaho Statesman*, 9 January 2007, sec. IV, p. 3. Written by Arthur Hart, freelance writer/contributor. [life@idahostatesman.com](mailto:life@idahostatesman.com)

17 Ibid.

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“Collister residents hone plan.” The Idaho Statesman. 28 February 2006. sec. IV, pg. 5.

“Collister residents have nearly finished neighborhood plan.” The Idaho Statesman. 21 June 2006. sec. II – B, pg. 4.


“Interurban electric trains catered to pleasure, business.” The Idaho Statesman. 9 January 2007. sec. Life, pg. 3.