

# 1916 Partnership Started Modestly, Grew Into Large Baird Business

By DALE STEWART

Reelection of Woodrow Wilson on the platform "he kept us out of war" . . . the Black Tom munitions explosion in New Jersey . . . the death of the mad monk Rasputin in Russia . . . the World War I battles of Jutland, Ypres, and at the Somme.

Those were some of the major events of 1916, the year Ed Baird and L. C. Cotter opened a small cleaning shop in the eighth block on West Bannock Street.

From that modest beginning, the business started by Baird and Cotter has evolved into one of the largest firms of its type in Boise. Currently, Baird's Dry Cleaners operates through the main office and plant at Eighth and Fort Streets and branches in downtown Boise and on the Bench.

Baird's partnership with Cotter marked his second effort at the cleaning business in the Gem State capital. The first came a year or so earlier when he purchased the Donovan Cleaning shop but went broke.

After coming to Boise in 1912 from Idaho Falls, where he had worked a short time, Baird worked for the insurance firm of Pettengill, Perrault and Rossi. His acquaintance with a partner in the Donovan shop led to his employment there as driver of a horse-drawn delivery wagon. Baird also learned the cleaning trade working for Donovan.

## Bicycles Used at First

Baird and Cotter—who was a tailor—opened their shop in a building at 804 Bannock Street which formerly housed the Donovan enterprise.

"We delivered clothes on a bicycle. We did not even have a horse and wagon," Baird recalls. "It wasn't too bad except when it was raining."

In the spring of 1918, Baird joined the Army and following training at Camp Fremont, Calif., was sent to the Far East as a member of the American expedition to Siberia. He didn't return home until in 1919, following service in China and the Philippine Islands. During his term of service, Cotter ran the business in Boise.

Gradual growth of the firm continued through the early 1920's, and required purchase of new equipment. In 1924, Baird bought Cotter's share of the business and changed the name to Baird Dry Cleaner, under which title the firm has operated since.

## Hotel Plans Disclosed

Several years later, W. E. Pierce, who owned the property on which Baird's cleaning shop was located advised him he planned to build a hotel on the corner of Eighth and Bannock.

Baird began investigating properties to find a good location and in 1929 decided the northeast corner of Eighth and

Arrangements were made to purchase the property from the Pat Quirk estate through J. J. McCue. Baird also completed a deal with Pierce to purchase the structure at 804 Bannock, which was razed by Frank Rathman and the materials used in constructing an addition on the north side of the small, multi-sided building which was the cleaning company's new home.

The new quarters of the company were occupied in March, 1930.

About that time, three other members of the Baird family became associated in the cleaning business. They were Lloyd Baird and John Baird, who joined their brother in 1929, and Mrs. Fay Baird Kincaid, who entered the business in 1928. All are still active.

## Corporation Formed in 1949

Although operations during the depression years were "a little rough," as Baird describes it, the business continued to grow. He operated the dry cleaning firm as an individual owner until 1949, when a closed corporation within the family was formed.

The present structure of the firm dates from 1959, when Ed Baird retired from active management and became chairman of the board of directors. Lloyd Baird was named president, John Baird became vice-president, and Mrs. Kincaid secretary-treasurer.

The latter three officers are carrying on most of the work of running the business, but Ed Baird still maintains a deep interest in the firm. "I can't get away from it," he comments.

Not only has Baird Dry Cleaners solidly established itself in the Boise business scene, it has acquired a stable list of customers over the years.

"We're rather fortunate in having many of our customers for a long time, Baird observes. "One is Harry Morrison, who has been a customer ever since we've been in business, and there are many others. We enjoy a fine clientele of customers."

Baird Dry Cleaners' plant has grown markedly since offices were first established at Eighth and Fort in a building which earlier housed a bakery. Among the changes prompted by growth have been purchase of a 50-foot strip on the east from the C. B. Little estate for an addition, and construction of a fur storage vault in 1942.

## Has Large Capacity

Built like a bank vault, the storage facility has a capacity of 3700 fur coats and space to hold other valuables. Baird terms the vault "the largest in this part of the intermountain country."

Most recent change in the plant was this past November and December, when it was modernized to provide better

ishing clothing, a shirt laundry week, dyeing—a phase of the business which is not large any more—and cleaning upholstery, draperies, and rugs.

The branch at 809 Bannock was opened after operating for several years in the lobby of Hotel Boise, and a second branch at 1504 Vista Avenue was put in operation in 1949.

Including personnel at branch offices, the firm employs 28 persons, of whom Mrs. Gladys Bushfield, a floor woman, has the longest term of service at 37 years. Other longterm employees include Mary Benedict, 32 years, and Dot Howard, 25 years.

## 'Good Promoter Given Credit'

Regarding the cleaning firm's growth, Baird observes respects should be paid to Joe Imhoff, who served as advertising manager for years and was "a good promoter for us."

During his half century in the cleaning business, Baird has seen techniques change considerably to keep up with the many advances in fabrics.

"In the early days, cotton, wool and silk were all we had to handle," Baird states. With the advent of rayon, nylon and other synthetic and modern fabrics for clothing, cleaning and finishing techniques have changed materially.

Efforts are constantly being made to find better ways to clean and finish various fabrics, he adds.

Information about caring for many of the new fabrics is provided through bulletins received from a laboratory in Washington, D.C., operated by the National Institute of Dry Cleaning, where studies are made in cooperation with manufacturers of goods.

"The goal of all good cleaners is to return to the customer a garment as nearly like new as possible," Baird points out.

A sign in the office of the cleaning plant expresses succinctly the company's approach to business. It says: "When you are satisfied, we are."

## A Textbook Case

As Baird recalls the painstaking promotion work put behind the "Baird Bill", it puts further evidence to historical perspective: the junior college law was a textbook case of lawmaking Idaho style.

First, Baird was the open advocate nudging his bill out of committee. Senator-by-Senator, pleading for needs of Southern Idaho youth unable to make the long, expensive trek to the state's only university, in Moscow, snuggling down support from Northern Idaho legislators with Coeur d'Alene junior college dreams of their own.

Then, a little help from his friends. Boise businessmen gave a series of dinners to "explain more fully" the importance of the bill to hesitant lawmakers.

By the time Baird delivered his maiden floor speech, pleading for the state's depression-hit youth; their need for higher education in hard economic times, he remembers "I was sure . . . I could feel I had gained a little ground" against strong opposition from northern and eastern Idaho Senators.

Thus it was time for a key Baird maneuver, one well suited to a man who knew Eastern Idahoans from his Yellowstone park stagecoach days.

What he knew was that Eastern Idaho's most potent Senator was (a) an old friend and (b) in need of help for his own pet project.

The old friend was Floyd Neale. Neale's "pet" was the magnificent Perrine Memorial bridge, spanning the dazzling, deep plunge of Snake River gorge just four miles north of popular voter-rich Twin Falls.

Built by a private firm, the Perrine project was failing as a toll operation. The bridge company was anxious to see the albatross off to the State of Idaho for a public transportation benefit.

What happened in private conversations is summed up by Baird:

"Of course it goes on in all legislatures, all the time . . . kind of a trade-off."

That trade did it. Twin Falls got its fine, famous toll-free bridge and, with followup work in the House of Representatives by Dave Tate and Hamer Budge, Boise got its junior college district as part of state statute.