

At 22, his stagecoach cleaved great grass seas in the valley of the Yellowstone. Elk herds quietly parted, then closed again over his team's traces.

At 31, he rode the great Siberian railroads, part of an intense, international military team ferrying military supplies away from the Bolshevik revolution, out Russia's tundra-wide back door to the Pacific.

At 48, he was settled and secure, a solid Boise businessman in the little town of 12-thousand residents.

But for Ed Baird, stagecoach driver turned community dry cleaner, a lifetime project that would wed him firmly to Boise history was now to begin. It was the deep depression year, 1933.

Recalling it now, the slender 89-year old founder of Baird's Cleaners reels off key dates and turning points with the relish and "gee whiz" ebullience of those long-gone years

The Leader At The Start

More than most men now alive, Ed Baird can claim he was leader of the drive that salvaged Boise's charity-based private college from depression death; politicked Idaho's junior college law to life; then brought both together on the abandoned Boise city airport as the birthplace of Boise State University.

Retired since 1961, Baird's grasp of his own impressive history, since he graduated from Grinnel College, Iowa and headed west as the nineteenth century died, is remarkably dear.

It becomes encyclopedic in detail, when he comes to the early thirties. He was then the new owner of this city's pioneer laundry firm being asked by fellow Boise businessmen (over coffee at Tillotsen's Sport shop) to run for Boise's state senator post.

Those coffee sessions had been talking, with increasing frequency and heat, about the problem of keeping the city's only post-high school classes going at St. Margaret's church.

Asked to help, members of the Boise Chamber of Commerce, with Baird the annual campaign organizer, had taken charity collections for the school's cost, one business door at a time.

It didn't always work out to a full coffer. Baird remembers one wind-blown March when a month of preparations for a gala mid-city circus, proceeds to the college, drew a dozen people when a cruel wind chilled the circus site (where Hendren's Furniture store now operates).

"So there was only one thing to do . . . appoint another finance committee and go up and down Main Street asking for more help . . . that's all we could do to keep it going," he recalls.

businessman named Eugene Chaffee was hired on as "manager" of the private school operations. Yet another key figure came on the scene.

There was Oscar Worthwine, major attorney, who gave private funds and an educator's knowledge as a board member, to Boise's own college development needs.

There was Jim Brown, Idaho Daily Statesman editor, then publisher who continued the deep affection for BJC carried by his longtime colorful boss, Margaret Ailshie Cobb. He funneled his own money into the school's first major football-track facility (with an uncredited construction donation again from Harry Morrison).

"He (Morrison) and all of them were always very careful that they never made a show of things they did for us," says Baird, who then muses:

"I never again expect to see the kind of loyalty we had about that school, then."

Even news stories about the school and its needs carried a special quality in Baird's memory. They were all written, he recollects, by "Johnny Corlett . . . he was over at the school at first and was a great booster."

Baird credits Corlett, now the state's senior political journalist, with solid, helpful board meeting reports that kept the district patrons informed and positive about BJC operating decisions.

Baird's leadership of the college program here was recognized when he was elected chairman of the district junior college board, to replace charter

chairman Driscoll, in those wartime years.

Will The Enthusiasm Come Again?

After 23 years, at the edge of BJC's transition to a four-year college and then university in the state higher education system, Ed Baird retired from the junior college board to "travel around some and because that's a pretty long time to serve on one board."

Taking some time to piece it all together, in 1976, the man who carried Idaho's junior college bill—and then carried the potential to historic reality for 23 more years—looks back with pleasure, but an edge of pain.

"You may never get that enthusiasm back . . . the way merchants of this town would give jobs first to college boys and

girls . . . the way leaders helped on the bond issues."

"Even back when I carried that bill a lot of people talked about a four-year college here. I never did . . . I just said Boise was a natural place to give kids a little more education . . . the education they needed. And it is a natural place . . . we don't have big factories . . . we may not have a lot of this or that, but we built Boise Junior College and now we have Boise State University."

Though, for Ed Baird, there's pain in the way Yellowstone's valleys are choking with people, losing their wildlife; in the colder, formless sprawl of a tree-graced little village he settled in, there's that, after all.

There's Boise State University. HIS Boise State University.

They were the first of what is now 25 major education structures that fill that dollar's worth of land acquired in 1939.

In historic fact, the World War II dollar flow to Boise added muscle to that first bond's building stretch. Under President Roosevelt's National Recovery Act, major funds came in to build a bigger-than-planned music building. Some wartime impact funds triggered by Gowen Field's 40,000 airbase population allowed addition of the student union building as a nicety.

Business Booms, Jaycee Blooms

By now, Baird's Cleaners had become profitably aware of those 40,000 Air Force transients flowing endlessly through the city in thundering B-17 and B-29 SuperFortress squadrons.

Someone had to keep all those G.I. clothes clean. Under a government contract to do just that, Baird's blossomed at a new location where cleaning fumes wouldn't hazard the burgeoning business center.

But business success seemed only to sharpen Ed Baird's determination to pour extra energy into his junior college baby's healthy growth.

Working always as friend and counsellor to BJC President Eugene Chaffee, Baird sat on the first district-wide board with Oscar Chapman of The Mode Ltd.; banker Lynn Driscoll; Attorney Haga and Mrs. Hamer Budge (he, a Supreme Court Justice and later a Congressman).

Always, he recalls, "we were enrolling more kids, from farther and farther away . . . from Eastern Oregon, Owyhee county, Gem county.

"We began to think, Gee Whiz!, Boise's really got something here."

To give this expanding city pride point an extra fillip of publicity, Baird says they "decided to branch out a bit". So they hired a coach (Harry Jacoby) and put in some money for a football team.

"Not much of a team for a while . . . then we hired Lyle Smith . . . I have always been happy that I was one of the first to nominate Lyle for the job."