



## Boise Cascade donation of Barber Pool lands leads to multiple assets adding value to our community

*This is the third in a series of 12 articles about the 50-year history of the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands.*

By Steve Stuebner

Over the 50-year history of the Idaho Foundation of Parks and Lands, the donation of 411 acres of pristine cottonwood riparian lands in the Barber Pool area from Boise Cascade Corporation to the Foundation in 1978 stands out as one of its most important conservation acquisitions whose importance would grow exponentially over time.

The initial donation of 411 acres of private land from the Boise Cascade Corporation would eventually become the Barber Pool Conservation Area, a 2.5-mile natural reach of the Boise River from below Diversion Dam and the Idaho 21 bridge to Barber Dam. The property is one of the Foundation's most valued assets to this day.

Foundation officials describe the Barber Pool Conservation Area as a "hidden treasure" teeming with more than 300 species of animals and birds, including bald eagles, our national bird. The Barber Pool Conservation Area has since grown to 700 acres on both sides of the Boise River.



*Historic photo of the Barber Mill in full operation along with Barber Dam and the lumber town of Barber. (Courtesy Idaho State Historical Society)*

The area has been selected as one of the state's 12 unique ecosystems and a Boise City Heritage Site, just 6 miles from downtown Boise and our state Capitol.

"Ever since Boise Cascade Corporation was created in 1950, company leaders always had a sense that corporate responsibility was important," says Alice Hennessey, who worked for BCC for over three decades, retiring as a Vice President of Human Resources and Corporate Relations. "The Barber Pool area would have been a prime area for development, but it was a great legacy for the company to give the property to the Foundation and the Boise community."



*Log train typical of the era in the early 20th Century.  
(Courtesy Idaho State Historical Society)*

The Foundation continues to work on adding more valuable private property to the Barber Pool Conservation Area (stay tuned for more information later this year).

But to understand how the Barber Pool Conservation Area came to fruition, we must go back in time and learn a bit of history about the Barber sawmill, early logging by rail, the town of Barber, the creation of Diversion Dam and the New York Canal.

“Back in the day, Barber Pool served as the confluence and cross-roads of our early mining, lumber, hydropower and irrigation history,” says Sharon Hubler, former Executive Director of the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands. Now it’s surrounded by homes and subdivisions. “My how times have changed.”

We’ll also learn how the Barber Pool donation would help extend the Boise River Greenbelt to Lucky Peak, create a new home for the iconic Idaho Shakespeare Festival outdoor theater, and provide a home for the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation’s state headquarters.

“We knew it would be important to receive a large donation of property because we didn’t have much money or property at the time,” recalls Larry Leasure, long-time IFPL board member and CEO of White-Leasure Development Company. “We were very young as the state’s first land trust, so Boise Cascade put a lot of faith in us to manage the open space they gifted to us in a responsible way.”

### **Barber Pool, Barber Dam and the town of Barber**

Initially, in the early 1900s, the principals working to build a hydroelectric dam and sawmill at the site of the small company town of Barber thought they could log the forests

in the Grimes Creek, Centerville and Mores Creek areas and float the logs down the Boise River to the mill during spring runoff.

“In the spring of 1903, news of a mammoth lumber mill to be constructed six miles east of downtown Boise made the headlines of the Idaho Daily Statesman. The enterprise would include a sawmill, an iron works, and all the features and amenities of a company town,” according to a historical paper written by TAG Historical Research and Consulting. “The proposed mill operations encompassed several hundred acres of land on the north and south sides of the Boise River, where Boise pioneers established several large farms and ranches. The operation was undertaken by three investors from Eau Claire, Wisconsin: James T. Barber, Sumner G. Moon, and Charles W. Lockwood.”

The trio had exhausted the forests of the Midwest. They were looking for a new source of timberlands in the Grimes Creek and Mores Creek areas for their new company called Barber Lumber Company. They purchased 800 acres of private land around the Barber Dam area, including lands on the south side of the Boise River from the Coston family.

Construction on Barber Dam and the sawmill started in 1904 and finished in 1906, according to a reference article by the Idaho State Historical Society.

But the principals may have put the cart in front of the horse.

High flood-water carrying logs and heavy sediment loads from gold-mining activity in the Idaho City Mining District threatened to fill and choke Barber Pool completely with silt. In addition, the impending construction of Arrowrock Dam upstream would stand in the way of floating logs to the mill from the Middle Fork of the Boise River.

Company officials switched gears and eyed the possibility of building a railroad to Centerville to ship the logs to the mill.

But first, they got embroiled in litigation over the acquisition of forest land to be logged for the mill. Former U.S. Senator William Borah was their attorney. Barber Lumber Co. already owned 61,000 acres of forest land, and they sought to purchase 12,000 acres of additional lands from the Idaho State Land Board. Disputes ensued over the value of the timber. The state wanted \$150,000 for 12,000 acres of timberland. Barber Lumber Co. officials thought that price was much too high.

And then a national economic panic in 1907 brought negotiations to a halt. Suddenly, no capital was available to

borrow to secure the timberland.

Soon afterwards, Barber Lumber Co. merged with the larger Payette Lumber and Manufacturing Co., which held title to timberlands in a nearby watershed. That would give them more capital to work with. And then the Bureau of Reclamation built a rail line to the site of Arrowrock Dam, reducing the investment needed for a rail line to access timberlands upstream on Mores Creek.

Eventually, the Idaho Land Board decided to sell the timber, but not the land, to the new combined company, called Boise Payette Lumber Company. The Intermountain Railway would be built after all, beginning in 1914.

Approximately 450 men worked on the back-breaking project with manual labor and horsepower. The men worked “from seven camps along the route. They built the line up a canyon with some narrow gorges that required 14 bridges and a 200-foot tunnel on the Stierman-Centerville stretch, north of the junction of Grimes and Mores Creeks,” an article by the Idaho State Historical Society said.

Four spur lines were built to access more logging areas from the main trunk lines to Centerville and New Centerville. The total construction cost of the rail lines was \$317,915; an additional \$70,000 was spent to acquire the Arrowrock rail line.

Logging operations occurred mainly from 1915 to 1926. Following that time, the construction of roads would undercut the profitability of hauling logs by train. Intermountain Railway also hauled sheep to spring and summer range on the way to Centerville, a small amount of mining supplies and people traveling to the Boise Basin.



*A crane unloads logs from rail cars at the Barber Mill, circa 1915. (courtesy Zella Kniefel)*



*Looking farther upriver from Barber Dam and Barber Pool area, which covers nearly the entire valley. Note the New York Canal is operational at this point. (Courtesy ISHS)*

Ninety percent of the railroad’s profits came from hauling logs to the Barber mill.

Up to 350 men worked at Barber Mill. The town of Barber provided employee housing, a post office, a school, a hotel and a general store, which also served as the train station. The roads were made of dirt, with board sidewalks along the side. The mill produced lumber for local and regional markets.

By 1934, the lumber market went south as did company profits for Boise Payette Lumber Co. Their Emmett mill closed entirely in 1930, and the Barber mill was closed and dismantled in 1934. The Intermountain Railway was abandoned the following year. Some of the homes from Barber were purchased and moved to the Idaho Soldier’s Home as housing for employees.

It’s important to note that after a long series of corporate mergers, Boise Payette Lumber Co. merged with Cascade Lumber Co. to become Boise Cascade Corporation in 1957 - the largest lumber-producing company in the state. With integrated operations and diversified plants (including pulp and paper mills, paper products, and new brands), the company’s net worth rose from \$7.8 million in 1935 to \$45.4 million in 1959 – two years after consolidating with Cascade Lumber Co. in Yakima. Boise Cascade would continue to grow and anchor the City of Boise as one of its major corporate headquarters and a big source of philanthropy for the community.

Barber Dam, meanwhile, continues to operate to this day and produces hydropower. Most importantly, it stores water in the Barber Pool area for fish, wildlife and adjacent wetlands.



*Early construction photo of the New York Canal, being built above Barber Pool.  
(Courtesy Bureau of Reclamation)*

### The New York Canal

The New York Canal would play a significant, but smaller role in the formation of Barber Pool, being located on a bench above the south side of the Boise River.

The men who had a huge vision for irrigating the entire Boise Valley first filed for water rights.

“John H. Burns filed a claim for 3,000 second feet of water, November 13, 1882, and A. D. Foote, the company engineer, located 1,500 more the next year,” according to a historical article by the Idaho State Historical Society. “With a canal capable of handling 4,500 second feet of water, they hoped eventually to irrigate 500,000 acres. In 1883, Foote surveyed a seventy-five mile main canal, along with a system of lateral ditches. By fall he had a truly handsome promotional map of a massive reclamation system for Boise Valley. Provision was made for 5,000 miles of lateral ditches. He had to spend \$4,000 a month to get this work done. Still, it was worth the cost. Without such an elaborate (if over-expensive) survey, investors would not be interested in providing the million or one and a half million dollars required for the initial stage of construction.”

Foote’s plan called for a canal “twenty-seven feet wide on the bottom, forty-seven feet on top, and seventeen and one-half feet deep. To run his canal at the highest practical elevation, he planned to start it in the river canyon above the valley; the initial three miles in the canyon, he figured, would require \$75,000 per mile. Five year’s work, he hoped, would get the main canal built.”

But first he would need significant capital funds to build it. The project moved very slowly without enough capital for years. Suffice it to say that many different financing schemes occurred for 20+ years before an opportunity arose to have the federal government finance the project through the Reclamation Act. Arrowrock Dam would be built by

the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and brought online by 1915, providing significant storage water for irrigated farms in the valley.

“In 1908, the New York Canal was enlarged to handle the project that Foote originally had planned,” the ISHS article continues. “A substantial diversion dam was constructed below the canyon so that that difficult canyon stretch could be omitted from the canal. Diversion Dam was built high enough to run water into the canal at that point, and on February 22, 1909, some 3,000 people lined the canal below the dam for a mile or two to watch when water finally was diverted into the large canal. Deer Flat Reservoir (later known as Lake

Lowell) also had been built in time to receive water from the New York Canal in 1909.”

Fast forward to present day, the New York Canal continues to serve as a major water artery, carrying irrigation water from the Boise Valley to lands around Lake Lowell, Nampa and Caldwell. The canal runs for 41 miles in length and brings irrigation water to a series of lateral canals that serve 165,000 acres of farmland in the valley.



*Robert Hansberger, CEO, Boise Cascade (courtesy Boise State University Facebook page)*

### Donation of Barber Pool

Six years after the formation of the Idaho Foundation for Parks and Lands in 1972, Boise Cascade Corporation officials approached Hope Kading, Chairwoman of the Foundation Board of Directors, about possibly accepting a gift of property owned by Boise Cascade Corp. around Barber Pool.

Hubler remembers that Boise Cascade officials saw the property as “surplus” given that the old Barber Mill site hadn’t been used since the mid-1930s. They owned 411 acres of land on both side of the Boise River alongside Barber Pool.

Leasure remembers talking to Boise Cascade CEO Bob Hansberger about the land when both of them served on the College of Idaho Board of Trustees. Boise Cascade tested the waters, you might say, by gifting “Boise Cascade Lake” or Veterans Pond, the site of an old gravel pit, to the Foundation. (more about this to come in an upcoming newsletter)

“That was kind of a test drive, if you will,” Leasure says.

The Foundation gifted Boise Cascade Lake and 35 acres of land to the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation in 1977, a year before the Barber Pool donation. IDPR developed a management agreement with the City of Boise to manage Veterans State Park.

Leasure remembers working together with Kading to cultivate and finalize the deal with Boise Cascade. He recalls that Alice Dieter, Alice Hennessey, Hansberger, and John Fery, the next CEO to lead Boise Cascade, were all of supportive of donating the land to the Foundation as potential open space and conservation property. Hennessey in particular helped move the project along during the CEO transition from Hansberger to Fery, he says.

The first step to seal the deal was a land appraisal. The value came out at about \$1 million for the 411 acres of undeveloped sagebrush lands and the cottonwood riparian areas.

Hennessey points out that by this time, Boise Cascade was involved in many, major philanthropy projects in the Boise community. Hansberger was the first chairman of the Boise Art Museum and the first chairman of the Idaho Commission for the Humanities, for example, she noted.

“There was always this sense that we wanted to make Boise a place where smart and young people would want to move to and live, and we were actively engaged in recruiting these kinds of folks to work at Boise Cascade.”



*The Barber Pool land donation allowed the Foundation to assist with extending the Boise River Greenbelt from the Boise city limits to Lucky Peak.*

“We were all about supporting projects for the public good,” Hennessey continued. “The whole area had been preserved by nature, and it was a beautiful setting. It was really the spirit of the transaction that matters – it was clearly the right thing to do.”



*Alice Hennessey*

Leasure remembers signing the papers with Kading and Boise Cascade attorneys to close the deal. Then he and Kading walked downtown to toast the purchase in the restaurant/bar at the top of the Hoff Building.

Once the papers were signed, the Foundation worked on a professional survey of the whole property, ensuring that property boundaries with adjacent private landowners were detailed correctly, Hubler recalls. “We wanted to respect the neighbors and their property lines. It took us well over a year to get that

done.”

Another big priority was to work with the City of Boise, Ada County and IDPR to work on extending the Greenbelt from Municipal Park and Warm Springs Golf Course to Lucky Peak, a distance of about 9 miles.

“That was a really big push at the time,” Leasure says.

In 1986, the Foundation conveyed approximately 34 acres to Ada County, which enabled the extension of the Boise Greenbelt to the Sandy Point Unit of Lucky Peak

State Park. The gift of land allowed Ada County to use the land as a matched asset and qualify for Land and Water Conservation funds for extending the pathway. Much of the pathway alignment followed a portion of the old railroad right of way used to haul logs to the Barber Mill.

That gift also put Ada County in charge of operating Barber Dam itself. The dam produces some hydropower for export out of state, and the water flows passing through Barber Dam are crucially important for fulfilling water rights to irrigation canals, laterals and farmers downstream.

In 1988, the Foundation started work on a management plan for Barber Pool. “We wanted Barber Pool to succeed in its natural state,” Hubler says.

In the early 1990s, Foundation officials backed the prospect of gifting 18 acres of the Barber Pool property to the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation for a new state headquarters building. Multiple locations were under consideration. Hubler remembers that it took two sessions for that to be approved by the Idaho Legislature.

“The location was convenient for customers of snowmobile, boats and off-highway vehicle registrations on their way to the great Idaho outdoors,” she said.

“We also did that transaction thinking that IDPR could manage the Barber Pool property with park professionals,” Leasure says.

Foundation Chair Don Weilmunster, a prominent Idaho rancher and landowner, and Leasure were instrumental in getting the bill through the Legislature.

Several years later, the Foundation worked with the Idaho Shakespeare Festival to sell them 2.56 acres of the Barber Pool property. ISF built a world-class outdoor theater adjacent to the IDPR state office with plenty of parking for the super popular theater venue. It was their fourth location since 1977. ISF officials had to raise more than \$1.5 million to build the theater complex.

Leasure recalls giving Mark Hofflund, Managing Director of the Idaho Shakespeare Festival, and other ISF officials an



*For the Foundation to work with the Idaho Shakespeare Festival to provide a permanent home in the Barber Pool area seemed to be a stroke of genius by all concerned. (Photo courtesy ISF)*

initial tour of the Barber Pool area. “Boy, the river looked just beautiful that day,” Leasure says. “There were ducks on the water and birds singing. I told them, this is our future. This would be a spectacular location for the Shakespeare theater.”

“Just having the new theater gave us the foundation for what we could ultimately bring into it,” notes Mark Hofflund, Managing Director of the Idaho Shakespeare Festival, in the book, *What’s Past is Prologue: Celebrating 40 Seasons of Idaho Shakespeare Festival*. “For example, it was designed to allow for additional lighting equipment. It also gave us a fundraising potential, as well as a national profile when we hosted our colleagues, and it

gave us the artistic frame to do more and better work.”

Looking back, Hubler is amazed at how those developments would enhance the backdrop to the Barber Pool Conservation Area. “It’s just so remarkable what happened out there,” she says.

“I think we all could see that the Barber Pool property could become a long-term asset for the people of Boise,” Leasure says. “We didn’t know exactly how at the time. But looking back at it today, the value of that gift is quite phenomenal. Look at all of these wonderful things that have occurred since we received the property. And the value increases every day.”

*Next: Focus on the donation of lands in the Boise area for Veterans Memorial Park, Boise Cascade Lake and Warm Springs Golf Course.*

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