

## **A Thumbnail Sketch of Plantation Golf Course 1917 - 1953**

### **Introduction**

The history of Plantation Golf Course is tied to the history of the electric streetcar system in Boise. The course is located on the site of Pierce Park, an amusement park built in 1907 by Walter E. (W.E.) Pierce, developer of the Boise and Interurban (B&I) Railroad. Pierce purchased a 126-acre farm from James E. and Elizabeth Archer in 1906 setting the land aside for an amusement park adjacent to the right-of-way for the Interurban. The park featured an artificial lake for boating, a dance pavilion, and a summer theater. In addition, to a 1907 *Idaho Statesman* article, “there is also talk of establishing a county club house, here, with golf links etc.” Pierce Park’s grand opening was on June 13, 1908. The park was a popular destination for over ten years.<sup>1</sup>

### **Background and History**

The first electric street railway in the United States began operation in 1887 in Richmond, Virginia. By 1891, only one year after Idaho achieved statehood, businessmen in Boise were initiating construction of the first street railway lines in Boise. The Boise Rapid Transit Company, which incorporated in August of 1890, built a two-mile line from downtown Boise to new subdivisions on the east end of town. Between 1891 and 1919 more companies were chartered, expanding the rails from the city limits to an interurban system that connected communities in Ada and Canyon counties, providing both passenger and freight service.<sup>2</sup>

Walter E. Pierce, the man behind the Boise & Interurban, was the leading developer in Boise. Pierce, the youngest of six children, was born in Waco, Texas, in 1860. Following the death of his father, the family moved to Mississippi. Pierce began work at the age of 11 as a clerk in a grocery store to help support his family. Largely self-educated, by the time he was 26, Pierce had moved to Morton County, Kansas where he owned a business which promoted the county. His company surveyed and located land for development, provided legal services and sold insurance. During his years in Kansas, Pierce met, John M. Haines and Lindley H. Cox. After visiting several likely locations, the three men chose Idaho for a new venture and all three moved to Boise in 1890 where they became partners in W.E. Pierce & Company, concentrating on real estate sales and property development.

The firm’s first venture was to plat and advertise the 64-acre Resseguie Addition north of the Boise commercial center. The lots quickly sold and the company platted several other subdivisions in the city, focusing on the North End. Pierce was also involved in civic affairs. He served as mayor 1895-1897. Under his leadership, Boise began its evolution from a frontier town to a modern city beginning with the paving of downtown streets.

Pierce was driven by unstoppable energy, gracefully balancing his professional and civic duties. He served as president of the Commercial Club (now the Chamber of Commerce),

operated the Natatorium, Boise's natural hot water resort, and organized the Boise and Interurban Railway (B&I), an electric railway connecting communities in Ada and Canyon counties. He endeavored to beautify Boise by planting thousands of trees, and found time to experiment in horticulture, cultivating the "Pierce Everbearing Strawberry Plants."

Pierce was responsible for the construction of many residences and commercial buildings in Boise, including the W.E. Pierce and Company building, a landmark at the corner of Main Street and N. 10 Street for many years. The Pierce building, and many B&I buildings such as substations and wait stations were all designed for Pierce by John Tourtellotte.

Pierce and his wife Maude raised their two daughters Elizabeth (Bette) and Margaret (Peggy) in their home at 1201 Harrison Boulevard. In 1948, after their daughters were grown, the couple moved to a penthouse at the Hotel Boise. Even when devoting time to his family and friends he continued his tireless promotion of Boise. He worked for years to bring a major modern hotel to town, eventually organizing the Boise Community Hotel Company to finance the construction of the Hotel Boise. By 1937, a reporter for the Idaho Statesman concluded that the city was a living monument to the vision and enterprise of W.E. Pierce. After a successful career, Pierce finally retired at age 80. He died on August 21, 1951.

### **Pierce Park**

The land Pierce purchased from the Ashers in 1906 was gradually transformed from farm land into a popular entertainment destination. Pierce knew an amusement park would attract riders and generate revenue for the new Boise & Interurban electric railway. Plans for the park were announced in December 1906. Modeled after "The Oaks", a city park in Portland, Oregon, the new park would feature a roller coaster, a merry-go-round, and a summer theater.<sup>3</sup> In the spring of 1907, Pierce travelled to Pittsburgh to raise \$100,000 from eastern investors for construction of the park.

The B&I opened for regular service on August 7, 1907. Two weeks later, on August 25<sup>th</sup>, a band concert was announced at Pierce Park, featuring the Columbia Band, a popular local group. The planned rides and other amenities were not yet available, but a new band stand was constructed and picnic tables were set up for visitors. The B&I advertised a special fare for passengers traveling to the park. Under the headline, "Big Crowd Finds Pleasure in [the] Delightful Air of the Boise Valley," the *Idaho Statesman* reported: "There were picnics, watermelon in abundance, the Columbia Band played, and the Interurban cars were loaded with people, three in a seat, and many standing."<sup>4</sup>

Throughout the fall and into winter, the park became a popular spot for picnics and concerts. In January 1908 Pierce purchased an additional 22 acres. In March, contractor J. W. Monarch began work, digging an artificial lake and building a road from the park entrance to the lake. Monarch also fenced the property and planted an estimated 800 trees to "make uniform shade" when they reach maturity. Many of the trees were removed twenty years later to make room for golf fairways.<sup>5</sup>

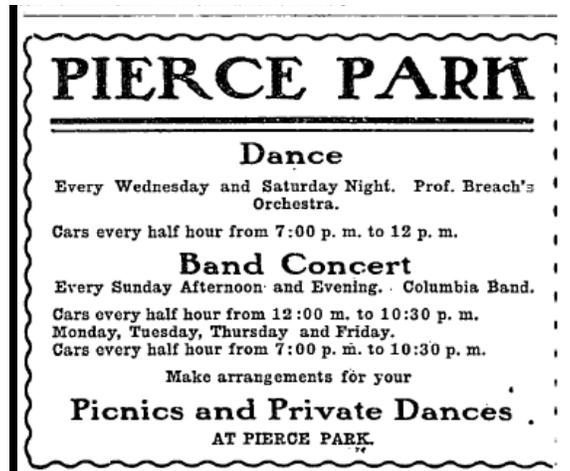


Boating on Lake Elmore, Pierce Park, Boise, Idaho circa 1910. Collection TAG Historical Research & Consulting

When the park opened for the season in June 1908, improvements from the previous year were noted in the local papers: refreshment stands, a dance pavilion, a lighted bridge over the new lake, and a lighted entryway, emblazoned with the words “Pierce Park Eight boats were available for rent on the new lake, named Lake Elmore by Pierce after a favorite fishing spot in Mississippi. Other available entertainment, included swings, and Shetland ponies and carriages to ride the park grounds. The Columbia Band played concerts every Sunday afternoon and evening. On Saturday and Wednesday evenings, an orchestra play dance music. The park was a favorite location for everything from church picnics to club meetings. Thousands of people visited Pierce Park during its heyday.



View of Lake Elmore, looking towards Pierce Park substation (left) and car barn (right). TAG Historical Research & Consulting



Advertisement, July 25, 1908, *The Idaho Daily Statesman*

In 1910 Pierce and his associates platted the Pierce Park subdivision, which featured 1-1/2 to 2-1/2 acre lots, directly across from the park, with easy access to the B&I for transportation. *The Idaho Statesman* reported, “The quality of the soil, excellent railroad service, proximity to Boise and many other good features tend to make this tract unusually attractive to those who desire an ideal suburban home location.”<sup>6</sup> The Pierce Park name was also applied to the neighborhood school, which was located in the subdivision, and to the B&I substation and car barns located across from the park entrance.



Entrance gates to Pierce Park. (TAG Historical Research & Consulting)

In 1911 Pierce and his associates sold the B & I to W.S and J.W. Kuhn, investors from Pennsylvania.<sup>7</sup> Through a series of mergers with other streetcar companies the B & I eventually became the Boise Valley Traction Company (BVTC). It took a large amount of capital to run a streetcar company and the related businesses. Although Pierce Park was open for picnicking and ice-skating the buildings such as the dance pavilion and the

clubhouse had to be maintained. For several years, after Pierce sold the B & I, Pierce Park was leased to managers who continued to operate the park as an amusement park and social center for the next five years.<sup>8</sup> .<sup>9</sup>

## **The Boise Country Club**

*The Idaho Statesman* reported on July 15, 1916, “If the ambitions of certain public-spirited citizens are realized, Boise will soon be able to boast a new club to be known as the Boise Golf and Country Club, located at Pierce Park. Plans for the formation of such an organization are now being discussed and a preliminary meeting of those behind the movement was held at the Boise Commercial Club rooms Friday night.”

According to Martin Poole, author of an “Early History of Plantation Country Club”, golf was first introduced to Boise in 1900 by a group of enthusiasts who laid out six holes at the Boise Barracks. The early Boise club joined a handful of clubs that existed in the Northwest, including the Tacoma Golf Club (1894), the Seattle Golf Club (1896), the Country Club of Seattle (1896), and the Spokane Country Club (1898) in Washington State, and the Gearhart Golf Course (circa 1891) and Waverly Golf Club (1896) in Oregon.

Robert Davidson, owner of Davidson Grocery, led the group of businessmen who organized the Boise Country Club. The club was not exclusively a golf club--there were plans to offer other activities such as tennis and polo, a popular sport in Boise. The club’s officers were Davidson (president), Judge Frank S. Dietrich (vice president), and Lewis W. Ensign (secretary treasurer).<sup>10</sup> The Boise Country Club filed for incorporation on September 9, 1916. The newly organized Club had ambitious plans. By November 1916, the club’s directors had negotiated a lease of the Pierce Park with the Boise Valley Traction Company (BVTC). The two parties agreed to a lease for a period of ten years, with the club holding the option to buy the property at the end of that period for \$35,000. Under the terms of the lease, the club would take active possession of the site in April 1917.<sup>11</sup>

The club had ambitious plans for the site. The group contracted with golf course architect Henry Chandler Egan (1884-1936) of Medford, Oregon to lay out an 18-hole course. Improvements in the area of the park between Lake Elmore and the Boise River were planned to start immediately, right after Thanksgiving. .<sup>12</sup> In the spring club members brought rose bushes and other flowering plant to “Grounds Beautiful” events. Egan’s plans for the fairways and rough included cutting paths of 150 to 175 feet through the forest of trees planted ten years earlier by Pierce. Other work included remodeling the dance pavilion into the club house. The clubhouse opened with a gala dance party on June 21, 1917. The course opened with six holes ready for play on July 18, 1917. Work on the course continued and at the annual club meeting it was reported that work continued on the clubhouse and ten holes would be ready for play by spring.<sup>13</sup>

The Boise Country Club hired several golf professionals beginning in 1917 with John William “Jack” Renner, followed by George Carney (1918) and James “Jimmie” Simpson

(1919). The Club hosted its first major golf tournament in August 1918, by organizing the Southern Idaho Golf Championship, won by Robert Davidson. <sup>14</sup>

For several years, the course was a lively place and the newspaper was filled with accounts of golf tournaments, dances, teas and weddings which were events held at the course. A series of floods in 1921 damaged areas of the course and washed out Hole No. 7 which had to be rebuilt. <sup>15</sup> Although a popular place for social events, interest in golf in Boise appeared to lag during the 1920s. Membership drives were undertaken, but the club membership did not increase. In 1922, the Club began discussions with the Boise Golf Club (now called the Mountain View Golf Club) to consider merging the clubs. The clubs hired Henry Chandler Egan to locate a suitable site for a new course, but plans were ultimately dropped. <sup>16</sup>



The first tee, Boise Country Club. *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, April 16, 1922 p. 1

By the 1920s, the transition from amusement park to golf course was completed. Then in December 1926, the Boise Country Club disbanded, the country club was no longer used as a golf course. For the next four years no golf was played at the site. Instead it became a dinner and dancing club, called “The Plantation”, which would later lend the name for the golf club established in March 1930.



*The Idaho Daily Statesman* October 6, 1928 p. 2.

In February, 1930 a new golf course, organized as the "Plantation Golf Course", was incorporated for \$25,000 by William A. Ruth, J.F Martin, and E. L. McElvain. Howard Tucker was hired as manager. Tucker used the remaining buildings on site for golf course facilities. The 1906 dancing pavilion was remodeled into a clubhouse with living space for Tucker and his family on the second floor. It burned down in a fire in January 1937 and a new clubhouse, designed in the "Old English Style", was constructed to take its place.<sup>17</sup> Under Tucker, the course was expanded to 18 holes and gradually reminders of Pierce Park were removed. In 1954, the landmark gates to Pierce Park were torn down as part of a remodeling project. Except for Lake Elmore, no trace of Pierce Park remains at the site.

<sup>1</sup> "Boise & Interurban Will Create A Lake", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, August 23, 1906 p. 5

<sup>2</sup> Information regarding the Interurban and Walter E. Pierce is from Treasure Valley's Electric Railway, Barbara Perry Bauer and Elizabeth Jacox, 2013.

<sup>3</sup> "To Build Fine Park Down Valley", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*. May 28, 1907 p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> "Formal Opening Pierce Park," *The Idaho Daily Statesman*. August 26, 1907 p.2

<sup>5</sup> "Bids Found to Be to High", March 2, 1908, p. 2; Activity at Pierce Park, March 21, 1908 p. 8" *The Idaho Daily Statesman*.

<sup>6</sup> "Strong Demand for Local Property", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, June 26, 1910 p. 5

<sup>7</sup> The history of the electric railway in Boise and Ada County is outside the scope of this report. Through a series of transfers and mergers the B & I and other valley streetcar companies were merged as Idaho Railway Light & Power Co in 1912 and operated as Idaho Traction Company. It was sold as Boise Valley Traction Co in 1915 and passenger

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service ended in May 1928. Boise Western was set up for on tracks of the old electric railway to move freight from Boise to Caldwell but by 1935 had been totally abandoned.

<sup>8</sup> "J.A. Warren Lessee for Pierce Park" *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, August 18, 1907.p.5

<sup>9</sup> "Boise Country Club Planned", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, August 20, 1916 p. 5.; "Club Leases Pierce Park Country Organization will Provide Golf Links and a Spacious House", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, November 22, 1916 p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid, p.2

<sup>11</sup> "Club Leases Pierce Park", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, November 22, 1916 p. 5.

<sup>12</sup> "Park is Leased to Country Club", *The Evening Capital News*, November 22, 1916 p.

<sup>13</sup> Poole, p. 6.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid p. 7

<sup>15</sup> "Boise Club Course Ready for Play Soon", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, June 5, 1921 p. 8.

<sup>16</sup> Poole p. 8. "Egan to Report Soon on Golf Club Course", *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, November 16, 1921 p. 6.

<sup>17</sup> "Golf Officials to Rebuild Club" *The Idaho Daily Statesman*, January 28, 1937.