

A Brief History of Downtown Eagle, Idaho

Early settlers began settling in the area in the 1860's, but the one who seems to be designated as "the Father of Eagle" was a Nova Scotian surveyor, Thomas Hugh Aikens. He moved to Eagle Island (then called Illinois Island after the original settler's home state) in the 1870's, then bought land on the north side of the river between the river and Valley Road (now State Street). The town was named Eagle and Eagle Island after the bald eagles nesting along the Boise River.

The bridge, crossing Boise River, made Eagle a desirable location to live. But it would not have been so, except for some quick maneuvering by Tom Aiken. When the location for the bridge was put to a vote between Eagle or Star, Aiken hired a luxury horse drawn carriage to transport veterans from the Old Soldiers Home to the polls. Their vote carried the day and the bridge was built where it now stands.

By 1896, there were about 30 homes in the Eagle area, at least one church, a Community Hall and soon after, a school, grades one through eight with a very small high school, about 10 students being held in the Odd Fellows Hall in about 1904. (It was a vote held with this small held with this small group of students that chose the name of Eagle for the town had been listed on the 1903 plat as Heron, after an early settler).

A blacksmith shop and small grocery store were started in 1902 and in 1906, the Eagle Drug Store that became the widely known Orville Jackson Drug Store, the longest running business in Eagle. It served customers for almost 100 years with only three owners: L.B. Harris, 1906-1922; Orville Jackson, 1922-1974; and Wayne and Jane Crosby, 1974-2005. The building now houses a furniture store. In addition to the pharmacy, where Jackson would fill a prescription regardless of the customer's ability to pay, Jackson stocked the store with almost anything you could ever need, including a soda fountain. The story is told that in the days before they had a dentist in Eagle, Jackson took a neighbor that had a bad tooth into the back room and yanked it out with hog pliers. Crosbys kept the store name and the one-of-everything kind of store plus the famous, "You Can Always Get It of Orville Jackson" sign that covers the outside wall. It was one of the last General Stores in the country.

Before the town got its own fire engine in 1948 (a used 1931 Howe Fire Truck), the local merchants collected 50-gallon drums and filled them with water. These proved inadequate when on July 4, 1946, fireworks went awry and started a fire at the back of the Eagle Merc, located on the northeast corner of Eagle Road and State Street (the parking lot of Smokey Mountain Pizza). Water from the drums, a hand-operated fire cart, a hose from the service station and a bucket brigade from the drainage ditch south of Orville Jackson's house (and just north of Albertson's) saved the day. The early fire department was all volunteer. Fire alarms were taken on a special phone at the Idaho First National Bank, across the street from the fire station. The banker would hurry across the street, blow the siren and put a message on the blackboard to inform incoming volunteers the location of the fire. The first three to arrive would take the truck and others would follow in cars. The firehouse was located on the south side of State

and west of North Eagle Road (now the site of the Community Center) until 2002, when a new location was built at 966 E Iron Drive, the former site of Merrill's Egg Farm (the back portion of which was destroyed by fire in 1988).

The grade school and high school was a brick building on top of the hill where Eagle grade school now stands. The high school was built below the hill in 1939-1940 and the old school was used for grades one through eight until it was torn down in 1959 to make way for the existing grade school. There were no school buses until the late 1940's so students walked to and from school, some walking as many as 3 miles each way. The gym portion of the old high school still stands and is used as part of the grade school. The high school students were later sent to Meridian High School, then to Centennial High School until 1995, when our own Eagle High School was built.

The original Bank of Eagle was housed in the Drug Store from 1909-1910, when the Eagle Bank was completed (now DaVinci's Restaurant). Photos taken in 1916 show the arched window and door openings that are still a part of the building. One of our claims to fame is the August 11, 1924 bank robbery. Two ex-cons collected \$2,700 in cash before locking up the cashier and his daughter in the airtight vault (still visible in the bar of DaVinci's restaurant). Fortunately the cashier had the foresight to keep a screwdriver and pliers in the vault and was able to open the door from the inside. In their haste to make their escape, the bandits collided with the bank's screen door and knocked it off the hinges. Alert citizens called the police but due to the fact that Eagle did not have its own police force, they arrived too late to catch the bandits (three men and one woman), even though one escaped by riding the Interurban Streetcar to Caldwell then Boise. Picture that speedy escape! Though not captured at the scene of the crime, they left behind enough clues to be apprehended by the end of the day. Two months later, two escaped from jail before being apprehended again and convicted. A detailed and highly entertaining version of the story can be had from the Eagle Museum.

The same photo shows the Eagle Merc Co. across the street, that later became Jerry's Market, and is now the Kelly-Moore Paint Store. Just west of that, is the building that was the Idaho Hotel (nicknamed "Uncle Tom's Cabin") which now houses Rosie's Barber Shop and Curl Up and Dye Beauty Salon.

The Post Office was located within the Eagle Drug Store in the early 1900's, then was moved to the Valley Market which stood just west of Orville Jackson Drive Store (now Smokey Mountain Pizza). It was then moved to a new site dedicated in 1959 between Orville Jackson Drug Store and the Bank building (now the location of Farmer's Insurance Groups). For a short time they moved into what is now the US Timber Building, just south of Kings until the new Post Office was built.

The Library and City Hall was located in the building directly across the street from Orville Jackson Drug Store (now the Eagle Museum) until February 1999, when the library moved to their present site, 100 N Stierman Way. A wonderful mural was painted on the wall that was missed by the young patrons when the library was moved. The flag pole that is still out front was built and donated as an Eagle Scout Project by Todd McCauley in 1985. The Mayor's office was a tiny room on the west side of the building with the library filling (and overflowing) the east and south sides. City Council

Meetings were held from the librarian's chair with attendees sitting in the aisles between the stacks of books. The City Hall moved to what is now the Senior Citizen Building until 2006 when it moved to its present location.

The barber shop that stands attached to and just west of the Eagle Museum was moved from directly across the street at least before 1959. Orville Jackson used to come in every day for a shave and a short haircut when it was needed. Claude Evans was an old bachelor who used to wear his irrigation boots in and you had to wash his face before you could shave him. (One day they found him dead in his house on Floating Feather just east of Eagle Middle School. – offered by Farrin Farnworth)

Photos taken in the early 1900's show a dirt road through the center of Eagle. In 1909, it became one of the stops for the Boise Interurban trolley, which made a loop through the valley connecting Boise, Eagle, Star, Middleton, Caldwell, Nampa then back to Boise. When we moved here in 1971, the road was paved but there was only a yellow blinking caution light and stop sign at the intersection of North Eagle Road and State Street. I was driving through town on State Street the day after they put up the stop light. I watched a farmer drive down the road from the north and without even slowing down, drove right through the red light without any recognition that it existed. Now, most of the traffic passes by Eagle on the "bypass" opened in 1996.

In 1971, when the town was incorporated, there were only 349 (or 359 depending on which "official" census you are reading) citizens. Today there are over 20,000. From a few settlers to 349 in 11 years and then from 349 to over 20,000 in 38 years is pretty good growth and shows that Eagle is a great place to live and raise a family. (Information gathered from newspaper and magazine articles and the Eagle Museum.)
Compiled by Arlene Fielding McCauley with apologies for any inaccuracies. January 2009.