

Dedication of Ann Morrison Park, June 7, 1959



Siblings: Ann Morrison & Kathryn Albertson Parks

written by Grove Koger



You've probably noticed how siblings tend to stake out opposite corners of the emotional landscape. One might be serious and the other bright and sunny, one disciplined and the other blithely irresponsible. So it is with two of the older parks in Boise's "Ribbon of Jewels," Ann Morrison Park and its sister across the road, Kathryn Albertson Park. They lie a stone's throw from each other on the same bank of the Boise River, yet they couldn't be more dissimilar.

Ann Morrison Park is named for the wife of Harry Morrison, co-founder of Boise's famed Morrison-Knudsen Company. A native of the Boise Basin, Ann Daly moved to the city when she was sixteen and married Harry in December of 1914. After Ann died in October of 1957 after 43 years of marriage, Harry approached Boise Mayor Russell Edlefsen about constructing a tribute to his late wife. His plan? To build a park and donate it—in the name of the Harry W. Morrison Family Foundation—to the city.

The site Harry had in mind was a swampy stretch of river-bottom land stretching for about a mile along the south bank of the Boise River. One hundred acres of it had been optioned for a second high school, but when Boiseans voted down the necessary bond, Harry snapped it up, along with half

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photo courtesy of Boise Parks and Recreation

a dozen adjoining parcels. He named J.V. "Vern" Otter manager, telling him that he wanted the job finished by June 7, 1959.

Heavy equipment was redirected from a dam-building project, the existing vegetation was burned off, thousands of yards of soil were trucked in and—sure enough—the park was completed on time. That Sunday Boise's new Mayor, Robert L. Day, accepted the park on behalf of the city, and some ten thousand people turned out. Flapping in the cool June breeze were the flags of the 46 countries that Ann had visited while accompanying her husband on his projects.

Ann Morrison Park had taken ten months and more than \$1.25 million to build. Stretching from Americana Boulevard almost all the way to Capitol, it covers 153 acres, and includes areas designed for sports, picnics, and boating. A six-acre memorial near the park's entrance features a long grassy mall, and beyond it lies a 220-foot reflecting pool and a spectacular illuminated fountain. A tall, strikingly modernistic clock tower donated by the Daly Family stands near its center.

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More than three decades had passed by the time Kathryn Albertson Park was dedicated on October 17, 1989. Times and attitudes had changed. The differences between the two parks reflect not only the differing personalities of their creators and dedicatees, but also differing philosophies of how land—and water—might be put to best use for the public good.

Kathryn Albertson was, of course, the wife of supermarket chain founder Joe Albertson. The couple bought the 41-acre plot lying below their Houston Road home in 1978 and donated it to the city the following year with the understanding that it be developed into a park within a decade. But the park was a long time coming. It eventually became clear that the city wasn't going to be able to come up with the money necessary

for improvements, but Joe had already evolved a plan to transform the land into something truly unusual. He was ready to spend \$1.5 million to develop a quiet, idyllic spot that people and wildlife could share.

On second thought, maybe we should rephrase that as "wildlife and people." It seems that Joe Albertson was an enthusiastic wildfowler, and wanted to create a sanctuary for resident and migratory birds. With that goal in mind, he asked Hans Borbonus of Cloverdale Nursery to design and build the park. The plan Borbonus came up with features lawns, shallow ponds, and a diverse selection of vegetation. A marshy, bird-friendly spot at the park's west end has been preserved intact, and over time the mature trees that Boiseans were asked to donate have grown even more mature.

The park's bridges are supported by timbers salvaged from what was once an Idaho Power Company span across the Snake River. Two rustic shelters stand near the park's ponds, and one of them, the Rookery, incorporates several other historical components. It's supported by beams from a hangar at the airport that stood on what's now the Boise State University campus, and its roof is covered with terra cotta tiles from Joe's first supermarket. A cross-section of the world's largest ponderosa pine, more than 300 years old when it was cut, is on display nearby, while informative signs scattered throughout the park make it an outdoor classroom. Depending on the season, you may see turtles, bullfrogs, owls and herons, and in the early morning you're as likely to encounter deer and foxes as other humans.

Kathryn Albertson Park is as remarkable for what it doesn't have as for what it does. There's parking near its entrance on Americana, of course, but with its nearly two miles of winding footpaths, it's designed for walkers. Bicycles, skateboards and roller blades aren't allowed. There are no sports fields. Dogs are prohibited from March 1 through June 30 in order to protect nesting waterfowl.

This remarkable sanctuary was originally going to be known simply as Albertson Park, but a Boise resident pointed out to Joe that with a Julia Davis Park and an Ann Morrison Park already gracing the city, a Kathryn Albertson Park only made sense. And so it did. After some sixteen months of construction, Boise Mayor Dirk Kempthorne accepted the park in mid-October 1989, noting that it would be the "envy of any city in America." And so it is! **B**