Between the years 1912 and 1917, there was a surge of homesteaders to Idaho who were looking for land to farm. They usually arrived in Boise as car-campers—or “auto-tramps”—and stayed in rough tent camps that they made themselves.

At that time, the Boise School District was responsible for building and maintaining all public playgrounds. In 1910, the school district bought 25 acres on this site for a sports stadium. Instead of building the stadium, they leased the property to the Boise Commercial Club for a tourist campground.

Boise Tourist Park was opened in 1918 to a season of 6,000 visitors. The grounds had tent sites, a communal kitchen with hotplates, a laundry with a washing machine, a playground and two cement slabs for washing cars. The admission donation was 25 cents per car. In 1919, a bathhouse was donated by the Idaho Federation of Labor.

Boise Tourist Camps near the Boise River in the late 1920s

After World War I, park use jumped to 20,000 cars per year with an average stay of seven days. With increased use, the Boise Commercial Club began to have difficulty managing the park. In 1927, the city of Boise bought the park and converted the campground to Boise Municipal Park.

By this time in the Great Depression, the public’s enthusiasm for camping had lessened, and the park gained a reputation as a “hobo jungle”. It was finally closed in 1938 and made into a general use park. Eleven acres were donated to Airway Park, Boise’s professional baseball stadium.