



Reference Series #1131

Margaret Thorne Lighthall Barnwell

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Publication Date: January 1996

Margaret Barnwell was the wife of Bishop Middleton S. Barnwell, founder and first president of Boise Junior College. Barnwell was also the Episcopal Bishop of Idaho from 1925 through 1934. In her role as the wife of a clergyman Margaret was a “supportive wife” and a “lovely and gracious hostess” while entertaining members of the church and the community.

Margaret married Bishop Barnwell at St. Andrew’s Church in New Bedford, Massachusetts in 1911. They had no children. She accompanied the Bishop to his later positions at the Church of the Advent in Birmingham, Alabama, and as field secretary to the Protestant Episcopal Church of the National Council.

The Barnwell’s arrived in Boise, Idaho in 1925 for Middleton Barnwell to assume his position as Bishop of Idaho and head of St. Margaret’s School, a secondary academy and boarding school for girls in Boise. While in Boise, a niece of Bishop Barnwell, Shirley Barnwell, lived with them and attended school.

The Bishop’s House, where the Barnwell’s lived, was located next to St. Margaret’s Hall; both faced Idaho Street, between 1st and 2nd streets. According to church sources part of the responsibilities of the wife of the Bishop during those times was to “keep him in good physical condition and happy.” Additionally, Margaret often served as hostess at their home for various community and church functions. A favorite get-away was the Episcopal Church Camp on Lake Coeur d’Alene known as Point McDonald, now known as Camp Cross. Margaret and the Bishop often attended these retreats.

In 1932 Bishop Barnwell established Boise Junior College which used the facilities of the former St. Margaret’s School as its campus for eight years. In the Fall of 1940, Boise Junior College



moved to its present site. St. Margaret's was used by St. Luke's Hospital as a nursing school until it was torn down to accommodate expansion at St. Luke's. The Bishop's House was moved to its present location on the grounds of the Old Penitentiary in 1976. It has been fully restored and is often used for weddings and other gatherings.

The Barnwell's left Boise in 1934, however, the Bishop returned in 1956 to give the commencement address to the graduating class of Boise Junior College. Church sources indicate that the Barnwell's seemed very happy together. Margaret and the Bishop were fun-loving, and Margaret appeared to be at ease with her role as the wife of the Bishop.