

# IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

## REFERENCE SERIES

MIDDLETON STUART BARNWELL - 1882-1957

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Bishop Middleton S. Barnwell was the founder and first president of Boise Junior College. His vision was instrumental in establishing the institution that would later emerge as Boise State University.

Barnwell was born in Louisville, Kentucky on September 9, 1882. He received his Associate Degree from Center College in Danville, Kentucky and his Bachelors and Doctorate from the Virginia Theological Seminary, an Episcopalian school. Barnwell became assistant rector at Christ Chapel in Baltimore in 1909. By 1911 he had become rector of St. Andrew's Church in New Bedford, Massachusetts, where he married Margaret Thorne Lighthall.

In 1913 he left his position at St. Andrew's and moved to Birmingham, Alabama, where he worked at the Church of the Advent from 1913-1923. After his third position, Barnwell became field secretary to the Protestant Episcopal Church of the National Council. The Church consecrated him Bishop of Idaho in 1925 after two years as field secretary.

In that position, he ran St. Margaret's School, a secondary girls academy in Boise, located on Idaho Street between 1st and 2nd streets. However, the economic collapse of the 1930's caused the academy to compete with public schools for attendance, and Bishop Barnwell advocated that the academy become a junior college. He believed that a junior college located in Boise would enable local high school graduates to start their postsecondary education without out-of-state costs. By February 1932, at the height of the Depression, Bishop Barnwell began his crusade to form a junior college out of St. Margaret's.

Bishop Barnwell approached many in the Boise area for donations, with little luck. Even against poor financial odds the Episcopalian Church found the money to support the school without donations. Boise Junior College opened September 6, 1932, with seventy students and fourteen faculty members; eight full-time and six part-time. Barnwell served as president from 1932 until 1934 when he stepped down, recommending that Boise Junior College leave the control of the Episcopalian Church and become a public institution. His words to the first graduating class of 1932 noted how Boise Junior College was born.

All achievement begins in vision and continues through labor and through faith which is the most misunderstood word in

the English language. Faith is not believing something you can't prove, faith is seeing something which is as yet invisible. And that's the sort of faith with which we began this school.

Barnwell returned twenty-two years later to address the 1956 graduating class. He appeared pleased with the success of Boise Junior College and stated in his commencement address that, "it is not often that men live to see the reward of their labors. It is not often that men begin a great undertaking and live to see it become great. That privilege which few men have is mine today as I see what the college has become."

Bishop Middleton S. Barnwell died less than a year later in Savannah, Georgia at the age of 74 years.

By Guila Ford and Elizabeth Jacox

(This information has not been edited.)

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