



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

# National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

1480

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name: American Falls Reservoir Flooded Townsite  
other name/site number: \_\_\_\_\_

### 2. Location

street & number American Falls Reservoir [ ] not for publication  
city or town American Falls [X] vicinity  
state: Idaho code: ID county: Power code: 077 zip code: 83211

### 3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this [X] nomination [ ] request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [ ] nationally [X] statewide [ ] locally. ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

[Signature] 25 Oct 01  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
Idaho Historic Preservation Office  
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [X] meets [ ] does not meet the National ([ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments).

Edward Friedman Federal Preservation Officer  
December 29, 2001  
Signature of certifying official/Title Date  
Department of the Interior, Bureau of Reclamation  
State or Federal agency and bureau

### 4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that the property is:  
 entered in the National Register.  
[ ] See continuation sheet.  
[ ] determined eligible for the National Register  
[ ] See continuation sheet.  
[ ] determined not eligible for the National Register  
[ ] removed from the National Register  
[ ] other (explain): \_\_\_\_\_

[Signature] 1/28/02  
Signature of Keeper Date of Action  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

American Falls Reservoir Flooded Townsite  
Name of Property

Power County, ID  
County and State

**5. Classification**

**Ownership of Property**

(Check as many boxes as apply)

**Category of Property**

(Check only one box)

**Number of Resources within Property**

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

- private
- public - local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
		buildings
1		sites
		structures
		objects
1	0	Total

**Name of related multiple property listing**

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

**Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register**

N/A

1

**6. Function or Use**

**Historic Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Agriculture: agricultural field
- Agriculture: animal facility
- Agriculture: agricultural outbuilding
- Agriculture: irrigation facility
- Agriculture: storage
- Commerce/Trade: business
- Commerce/Trade: department store
- Commerce/Trade: financial institution
- (see continuation sheet)

**Current Functions**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Agriculture: irrigation facility
- Recreation and Culture: outdoor recreation

**7. Description**

**Architectural Classification**

(Enter categories from instructions)

N/A

**Materials**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- foundation Concrete
- walls
- roof
- other

**Narrative Description**

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

X See continuation sheet(s) for Section No. 7

**8. Statement of Significance**

**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

**Criteria Considerations**

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or a grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

**Areas of Significance**

(Enter categories from instructions)

- Agriculture
- Conservation
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_
- \_\_\_\_\_

**Period of Significance**

1925-1926

**Significant Dates**

N/A

**Significant Person**

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

**Cultural Affiliation**

N/A

**Architect/builder**

N/A

**Narrative Statement of Significance**

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**Bibliography**

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

**Previous documentation on file (NPS):**

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

**Primary location of additional data:**

- State Historical Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository:

Bureau of Reclamation, Burley Office, Idaho.

**10. Geographical Data**

**Acreeage of Property** 1,460 acres

**UTM References**

(Place additional UTM refernces on a continuation sheet).

A 1/2 3/4/7/6/0/0 4/7/4/0/6/2/0 B 1/2 3/4/8/2/4/0 4/7/3/9/3/2/0  
Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

C 1/2 3/4/7/9/8/0 4/7/4/0/6/4/0 D 1/2 3/4/7/6/0/0 4/7/3/8/0/2/0  
Zone Easting Northing Zone Easting Northing

[ X ] See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet).

[ X ] See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet).

[ X ] See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Dale M. Gray  
organization Frontier Historical Consultants date June 1, 2001  
street & number HC 85 Box 211 telephone (208) 834-3061  
city or town Grand View state ID zip code 83624

**Additional Documentation**

Submit the following items with the completed form:

**Continuation Sheets**

**Maps**

A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

**Photographs**

Representative **black and white photographs** of the property.

**Additional items**

(Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

**Property Owner**

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name/title U. S. Bureau of Reclamation  
street & number 214 Broadway Ave. telephone 208-344-1461  
city or town Boise state ID zip code 83702

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 *et seq.*).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P. O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.



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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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American Falls Reservoir Flooded Townsite  
Power County, Idaho

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## Narrative Description:

The American Falls Reservoir Flooded Townsite consists of the submerged remains of the pre-1925 town of American Falls, Idaho, located in the reservoir north of present-day American Falls. Since the structures were removed during the construction of American Falls Dam in 1925 and 1926, the site now consists only of foundations, sidewalks and building depressions. This former townsite is only visible during low-water years; but when exposed, the former townsite is a unique landscape that has changed little over time. Even though wave action has caused some erosion around sidewalks and foundations, this landscape still retains good integrity of location, setting, materials, feeling and association.

The flooded townsite consists of the lower portions of the town of American Falls and all its pre-1925 additions. These additions are the Kiers, Riverside, Imes, Union and Union Acreage, and a portion of the Original Townsite. The area contains numerous concrete sidewalks, especially in the former business district. Some of the sidewalks appear to be raised due to erosion of the roads and lots on either side. Many of the sidewalks are cracked and broken from the use of heavy iron-wheeled trucks used to move the buildings out of the lots. As such, the broken sidewalks are integral to the historic landscape. Not all of the sidewalks remain, however, as some were salvaged during the time of the town relocation and used to create a retaining wall in Stebbins Park.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the former townsite are the physical remains of former buildings. These consist of both building depressions and concrete foundations. Within the former business district of the Original Townsite are 17 business-building foundations. In the Kiers Addition are three grandstand foundations from the former ball park. In the Riverside Addition are 56 business building foundations, four dwelling foundations, one outbuilding foundation, six church foundations, one school foundation and one hospital foundation. Of all the remaining foundations and basements, only that of the Baugh Hotel never completely empties of water, even in drought years. Within the Imes Addition are eight dwelling and six outbuilding foundations. In the Union Addition are four dwelling foundations. There are no foundations in the Union Acreage. Some of the dwelling foundations in the Original Townsite, Riverside and Union additions are not in evidence, as many of the houses had simple log sill or pier foundations that would have been moved along with the houses. Others may have had stone or concrete foundations that were removed for reuse in the new townsite. Finally, some may have been covered by deposition of silt.

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# National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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American Falls Reservoir Flooded Townsite  
Power County, Idaho

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## Statement of Significance

The American Falls Reservoir Flooded Townsite is being nominated to the National Register under Criterion A at the statewide level for its significance in the areas of Agriculture and Conservation. The town of American Falls was well established and growing in the early decades of the twentieth century, but the need for stored water for agricultural use in the arid, southern Idaho environment made it necessary and prudent for the Bureau of Reclamation to move much of the town to higher ground in order to flood the area where the town originally sat. The construction of the American Falls Dam and the resulting relocation of the town of American Falls plays a pivotal role in the historic development of Idaho as an agricultural state. Its construction proved key to perfecting southern Idaho's vast irrigation system. The American Falls Reservoir to this day provides the irrigation water storage necessary to supply southern Idaho's agricultural economy.

## American Falls

The town of American Falls owes its existence to its location along transportation corridors. The Wilson Price Hunt exploration party first camped near the falls in 1811 and John C. Fremont noted in his journal that he camped at "American Falls" in 1843. Thereafter, American Falls became a stopping point for the emigrants traveling along the Oregon Trail.<sup>1</sup>

Accounts vary as to when the seeds of the town were sown, but the first sustained habitation occurred around 1880. A ferry was established across the Snake River above the Falls in 1881. By April, 1882, a post office was established at the fledgling community. The river crossing was chosen by the Oregon Short Line Railroad (OSLRR) to serve as a head-of-rail construction camp during the construction of its Granger, Wyoming to Huntington, Oregon line. The railroad passed through the town in late-1882/early-1883. In 1884, the town was reported to include a "hotel, livery stable, store, depot and saloon".<sup>2</sup> The town was platted in 1886 and settled into existence as an agricultural community.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Madeline Buckendorf, "Oneida Milling and Elevator Company," National Register of Historic Places nomination form, 1993, Section 8, pp. 1-2.

<sup>2</sup> American Falls Chamber of Commerce, *Welcome to Main Street American Falls 1880-1980* (American Falls: Power County Press, 1980), p. 16.

<sup>3</sup> Buckendorf, Section 8, pp. 1-2.

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American Falls Reservoir Flooded Townsite  
Power County, Idaho

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American Falls served as a trading center for cattle and sheep ranchers of the area before the twentieth century. Small irrigated acreages existed in a few places, and dry-farming had started in the southern portion of the original Oneida County as early as the 1890s. With the opening of more public land under the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1902, farm families (many of whom came from Northern Utah) moved to the dryland areas of Oneida County, including the lower Arbon Valley of present day Power County. Settlement increased as dry-farming was promoted by agricultural colleges and the railroads. Successful experimental dry-farms in Northern Utah, increasing international demands for wheat, and higher than normal amounts of precipitation during the early 1900s also caused agricultural expansion into lands previously thought too arid to farm.

A large number of German-American, Russian-American, and Scandinavian-American emigrants from the Dakotas and other mid-western states took up land claims in present-day Power County. Wheat became the area's major crop as national and international markets expanded, and Power County's soil proved to be well-suited for dryland grains. The Oregon Short Line Railroad, which bisected the original American Falls townsite, proved ready transportation to outside markets. . . . By 1910, wooden cribbed grain elevators, warehouses, and a brick flour mill were established there.<sup>4</sup>

American Falls showed steady, if unspectacular, growth through its first thirty years of existence. By 1906, the town had outgrown its original townsite, resulting in the platting of the Riverside Addition. In 1907, the town's population was reported at 500. Four years later, in 1911, the population stood at 950 and the town contained a rich variety of services.

## **Irrigation in Idaho**

The Carey Act of 1894, followed by the National Reclamation Act of 1902, brought large-scale irrigation farming to Idaho for the first time. The Reclamation Act, signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt on June 17, 1902, provided the legal mechanism for money, flowing into the government from the sale of public lands, to be funneled into public reclamation projects, by which the land could be made productive. Work on the first of such projects in Idaho, the Minidoka Project, began in late 1903. This Project involved the construction of a series of dams along the Snake River, beginning with the Minidoka Dam (and later involved the construction of the American Falls Dam, among others). The desert land that lay under the proposed irrigation canals was opened for settlement in early 1904. Originally, one could file on 160-acre parcels, but this was later reduced to only 40-60 acres per person. Water was turned into the canal system in 1907. In 1910, the initial gravity-flow system was supplemented by a pumped system powered by the generators at Minidoka Dam. Just in the Minidoka project, 72,000 acres were under gravity irrigation and another 49,000 acres under pumped irrigation.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Buckendorf, Section 8, pp. 1-2.

<sup>5</sup> Barry Dibble, "Annual Project History, Report of Construction and Operation & Maintenance, Minidoka Project, ID," Vol. XIV, 1920.



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American Falls Reservoir Flooded Townsite  
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An additional 115,000 acres could have benefitted from pump irrigation, but there was not enough water in the Snake River for them. As the nation turned its attention to the war in Europe in the 1910s, good water years and high crop prices spurred the application of irrigation and the spread of a farm-based economy throughout southern Idaho. Farmers used bank loans to expand their holdings and develop their properties for ever greater production. By 1918, 240,000 acres were watered by diversions from the Snake River along its 300-mile course through Southern Idaho.<sup>6</sup>

Nineteen-nineteen proved a watershed year in Idaho's agricultural history. With the end of World War I, farmers saw the value of their crops plummet and they found themselves without the means to make payment on farm loans; many fell behind on the payments to repay the construction of the Minidoka irrigation system. The problem became so severe that Senator William E. Borah began preparing a bill to extend the repayment schedule so that farmers could stay on the land and keep it in production. Many of the banks in southern Idaho were closely tied to the agricultural industry, and those that held a large number of farm loans were soon forced to close their doors.<sup>7</sup>

Irrigation system managers also began to realize that there simply wasn't enough water to go around. Late in the summer, ditch companies began to have trouble delivering water at the very time it was needed most. The low Minidoka Dam provided some storage of spring run-off, but was primarily a diversion and power structure. Far upstream in Wyoming, the Jackson Dam provided 400,000 acre feet of storage -- less in drought years. The situation went from dire to desperate in 1919 when the state suffered the worst drought in Idaho's recorded history. The Twin Falls Canal Company, one of thirty water districts and forty canal companies along the River, could only deliver thirty percent of its usual water. Other districts, such as the Danskin Irrigation District, extended their diversion structures further and further into the stream of the Snake River in an effort to keep water flowing into their canals. Eventually, the Danskin Irrigation District constructed a 400-foot, canvas-lined structure that diverted the entire remaining flow of the stream into their canal. Farmers downstream were forced to haul water to cook, wash, and drink. Few crops were harvested on the north or south sides of the Snake River that year, and losses were reported at \$25 million. It became apparent to water managers that the survival of irrigated farming in southern Idaho depended upon obtaining additional water storage. A large reservoir was needed to capture spring run-off for use in late summer.<sup>8</sup>

## American Falls Dam

The notion of a dam at American Falls was said to have been first broached by I. P. Perrine of Twin Falls. Preliminary interest was driven by speculation that a dam at American Falls could be used to bring irrigation water to the Bruneau desert. The first work on the dam occurred in 1908 when some

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<sup>6</sup> Barry Dibble, "Annual Report," Vol. XIII, 1919.

<sup>7</sup> Irvin E. Rockwell, *The Saga of American Falls Dam*, (Cynthiana, Ky: Hobson Book Press, 1947); Dibble 1921; 1922; 1923. Bank failures continued through the 1920s, ceased with the start of construction of American Falls Dam and began reopening upon the completion of the project.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.; Arrington, Leonard, "Irrigation in the Snake River Valley: An Historical Overview," *Idaho Yesterdays*, Volume 30, Numbers 1-2, Spring/Summer 1986, pp. 6-8.

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American Falls Reservoir Flooded Townsite  
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preliminary testing of the site took place, but it wasn't until 1918 that a thorough geological investigation of the site was conducted by Professor W. O. Crosby of the Boston Institute of Technology. The concept evolved and grew until, in 1919, a dam was proposed that would impound 2-3 million acre-feet of water. Such a dam would provide assured water storage in drought years and would allow the expansion of the Minidoka-Project-irrigated lands to 250,000 acres. Of the twelve dam sites available along the Snake River, only the one at American Falls had the capacity to provide adequate water storage. In 1920, the Reclamation Service dropped plans to expand irrigation into the Bruneau area. The 1919 drought taught the Service that any additional water storage should be used to make the existing system fully functional. In 1920, the Reclamation Service drill crews, under the direction of Bert A. Hall, conducted testing of the proposed American Falls Dam site, and the American Falls project was formally authorized by the Secretary of the Interior on September 18, 1920.<sup>9</sup>

Despite the agricultural depression, twenty-one of the thirty upper-river irrigation districts subscribed to 700,000 acre-feet of the proposed reservoir at a flexible rate of about 25 cents per acre. In September of 1920, the Reclamation Service set up offices in American Falls and began the work of surveying the dam and canal system and assessing property to be flooded by the reservoir water. This effort was put into high gear with infusion of \$1,735,000 appropriated by Congress through the work of Idaho's Congressman, Addison T. Smith.

The American Falls site was by far the best for the storage of water, and so the project moved forward at that site, despite a number of complications and drawbacks that had to be addressed before construction could begin. To start, the Falls were already being used by a small hydroelectric facility owned by Idaho Power, which had the priority water rights. The change in elevation for the Snake River at American Falls had attracted early attention of settlers and hydro-power interests. In 1902, the American Falls Water Power Company and the American Falls Power, Light, and Water Company had competing power plants at the Falls. The former had a plant on the east shore, while the latter had a power plant on a small island in the river. A third power plant was built on the west shore in 1904 by the Idaho Consolidated Power Company and was run in conjunction with the American Falls Power, Light, and Water Company's plant. The holdings of the American Falls Water Power Company, specifically the East Side Power Plant, were acquired by the American Falls Power Company in 1905, which expanded the head and tail race, but stopped construction when it ran out of investment capital. After the hydroelectric investment bubble burst in the late 1900s /early 1910s, the three power plants were consolidated under the Southern Idaho Water Power Company. This company then completed work on the East Side Plant.<sup>10</sup>

In 1916, the Southern Idaho Water Company was one of five companies that were consolidated into the Idaho Power Company. A horseshoe-shaped dam was completed above American Falls to provide

<sup>9</sup> Dibble, "Annual Report," Vol. XIV, 1920; Vertical Files, Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>10</sup> Susan M. Stacy, *Legacy of Light: A History of the Idaho Power Company*, (Boise, Idaho: Idaho Power, 1991), p. 74; Idaho Power Company, *A History of the Development of the Electric Industry in Southern Idaho and Eastern Oregon, 1907-1943, with References to Idaho Power Company and its Predecessors*, (Boise, Idaho: Idaho Power Company, 1943).

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water for the company's three power plants. The construction of this small dam forced the company to sort through and settle a complex maze of legal water rights issues. A power line was built from American Falls to deliver electricity to the nearby town of Pocatello.

When the new dam at American Falls was proposed, Idaho Power held a significant portion of the water rights to the Snake River flow over American Falls. The construction of a new 87-foot high dam would put two of its power plants out of service, requiring it to significantly expand its East Side Plant. It would also submerge the Pocatello power line and would interrupt electrical service until the reservoir was filled and water could be sent through the new turbines.

In addition to the complicated power company concerns, the reservoir, when filled, would cover important agricultural lands and would extend twenty-five miles upstream, covering 30,000 acres of Ft. Hall Indian Reservation. The Oregon Short Line ran their main line across a bridge at American Falls, thus, miles of their track would be flooded and they would have to raise their bridge by 22 feet. A bewildering system of over thirty irrigation districts would have to be joined into a Reservoir District to finance and distribute water from the reservoir.

However, the question on most people's minds as they considered a dam at American Falls was what to do with the town of American Falls. About three-quarters of the town would be under the reservoir as it was planned. Estimates to obtain just the rights-of-way for the dam and the relocated Oregon Short Line were put at \$124,314.31,<sup>11</sup> but preliminary studies by the Reclamation Service estimated that it would take \$3 million to remove and relocate the village above water line. As large as this amount was, there was little hesitation to move forward; the site was considered far too important.

When Congressional money was released in March of 1921, Reclamation Service crews began the task of analyzing the dam site and assessing the value of the town of American Falls. As of July 1, 1921, the Service had either bought or contracted to buy 93 properties. Property for a new townsite adjacent to the old was purchased from a number of owners and sagebrush removed.<sup>12</sup> By September, 1921, \$460,000 had been spent on surveys and in the purchase of approximately one-third of the old town of American Falls.<sup>13</sup> Meanwhile, as plans progressed in 1921, the Idaho Power Company and the Reclamation Service began negotiating a deal: The company would be reimbursed \$1 million for its water rights and would retain rights for the use of its East Side Dam and the right to use reservoir water for power generation. By early autumn, the agreement had only to be signed by Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall within 90 days in order for the dam project to begin in earnest.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> F. C. Bohlson, "Estimate of Actual Disbursements for Feb., 1921, Covering work at American Falls, Idaho," January 31, 1921. On file at Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>12</sup> D. W. Davis, letter to Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, August 31, 1923. Not all of the sales were voluntary. DeWitt Garrison Brown refused to sell and ultimately filed suit against the United States to stop the condemnation of his land. The case rose to the Idaho Supreme Court where Brown was defeated. See *United States v. Brown*, 279 Fed. 168.

<sup>13</sup> Rockwell, p. 18; Anonymous, "Properties for American Falls Reservoir, Either Bought or Contracted for Prior to July 1, 1921, Bureau of Reclamation files, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>14</sup> Stacy, pp. 74-75; Rockwell, p. 23.

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In September, 1921, as things progressed, Secretary of the Interior Fall took a whirlwind tour of irrigation projects in the western states. Following a tour of the new Arrowrock Dam near Boise, Fall arrived at American Falls on September 5, 1921. Rather than wine and dine him at the site of the proposed dam, local project director, Arthur Powell Davis, took Fall on an arduous 177-mile tour of the proposed shoreline of the American Falls Reservoir. Traveling by automobile without benefit of roads, the Secretary returned to American Falls having only objections to the massive project. He was appalled when told of the \$460,000 already spent on studies and land acquisition, and that further, \$3 million more would be needed to move the town, \$1 million to buy out Idaho Power, and additional sums to construct the dam, to purchase the railroad right-of-way, and to purchase Indian lands.<sup>15</sup>

Fall objected to flooding productive agricultural lands and funding new irrigation projects when farmers working irrigated lands were becoming delinquent on their water payments. Even as Fall toured the American Falls Reservoir, Idaho's Senator William Borah was preparing a bill to extend debt repayment for Idaho farmers in the Minidoka Project downstream from American Falls. Fall adamantly objected to the government funding new irrigation projects when existing projects were losing money. Secretary Fall departed Idaho leaving the future of the dam project in question.

According to the terms of the agreement reached with Idaho Power, Fall had 90 days to sign the agreement before it became invalid on January 13, 1922. In December, 1921, word was received by the American Falls office of the Reclamation Service that Fall had not yet signed the agreement and had further issued orders to close the office and to abandon the project.

Politicians and captains of industry responded to this news with a flurry of meetings that culminated with the Idaho Congressional delegation of Senator W. E. Borah, Senator Frank Gooding and Congressman Addison T. Smith working with Idaho's Governor and other local politicians and prominent businessmen to reverse Fall's decision. When the Congressional delegation went to meet with Secretary Fall, they found him conspicuous in his absence. To escape the heat of the Tea Pot Dome scandal, Fall had removed himself to his Three Rivers Ranch in New Mexico and was accepting no messages other than from the President of the United States. When it became clear that the 90-day dead-line would likely pass before Fall even returned to Washington D. C., attention was turned to the Idaho Power Company. Going against the advice of his Wall Street advisors, Idaho Power Company head, Sidney Z. Mitchell, proclaimed that if Fall did not return by the January 13, 1922 deadline for the agreement, his company would extend the agreement until Fall did return. The extension was signed by Mitchell and Judge Finney, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, late in the day on January 13.<sup>16</sup>

When Secretary Fall finally returned to Washington late in January, 1922, Senator Borah quickly arranged a meeting the next morning to convince Fall to sign the Idaho Power agreement. This meeting between a hand-picked Idaho delegation and Fall was nearly derailed when Senator Gooding burst in bombastically expressing his opinions in no uncertain terms. The meeting broke up in disarray, but Borah managed to quietly talk with Fall even as the others left. Arranging to meet alone, the two

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<sup>15</sup> Rockwell, pp. 19-24.

<sup>16</sup> Rockwell, pp. 33-48.

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worked toward a compromise, but Fall declared that he would not sign the Idaho Power agreement unless Idaho farmers funded half of the costs. Sidney Mitchell joined Borah the next morning for the next round of meetings with Fall and proposed a consolidated reservoir district that would be able to issue bonds sufficient to cover the Idaho farmer's half of the construction costs. Fall agreed to revive the project if Borah pulled his farm relief bill and Idaho's half of the project money was put up by November 1, 1924.<sup>17</sup>

Wasting no time, Idaho's Governor James H. Brady published a call to meet in Pocatello on February 17, 1922. Over two hundred farmers and businessmen representing every irrigation district along 300 miles of the Snake River met with the Governor to learn of events and plan a course to raise the \$2,700,000 necessary to meet the November deadline. The "Big Reservoir" district was to be organized by the Idaho Reclamation Association (IRA). The district would then issue sufficient bonds to cover the farmers' costs.

Support for the American Falls Reservoir District was sought through meetings, editorials and pamphlets. Every voting irrigator connected with the project was individually contacted and apprized of the situation. The agricultural depression and ensuing closure of local banks had resulted in a backlash of public opinion toward the proposed financing; however, education and lobbying efforts continued through 1923, and a successful vote to form the American Falls Reservoir District took place on January 16, 1923. The District was confirmed by the 11th Judicial District of the State of Idaho on March 24, 1923, and plans were quickly made to issue the bonds in May so that the money might be secured a full year ahead of the deadline. Before the bonds could be issued, however, the Reservoir District had to be proved constitutional, and it took over a year to get that decision from the Idaho Supreme Court, which issued a decision in favor of the District on July 23, 1924. On September 12, \$2,700,000 in bonds were sold to Marshall Field, Glow Ward & Company of Chicago, who were selected from a field of six bidders.<sup>18</sup>

## Construction of the Dam

With local and federal money available, the Bureau of Reclamation<sup>19</sup> selected Utah Construction Company to build the dam. The \$1,936,000 bid was accepted on October 16, 1924. The first dirt was excavated for the dam on March 10, 1925.<sup>20</sup> On July 13, 1925, a giant crowd gathered at American Falls for the dedication of the cornerstone. The new Secretary of the Interior, Herbert Work, sealed the stone in place. Meanwhile, while the dam was under construction, the other complicating issues were addressed.

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<sup>17</sup> Rockwell, pp. 52-61.

<sup>18</sup> Rockwell, pp 89-152; Department of the Interior, "Memorandum for the Press," May 15, 1923.

<sup>19</sup> The Reclamation Service was renamed the Bureau of Reclamation in 1923.

<sup>20</sup> *American Falls Press*, March 12, 1925, p. 1.

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By late 1924, Idaho Power had enlarged their East Side Power plant by adding two generator units. The new 81-mile transmission line to Pocatello was authorized on February 26, 1924 and was in operation July 6, 1924.<sup>21</sup>

The Oregon Short Line right-of-way was also relocated. The railroad was paid \$80,779.79 for their old right-of-way and property within the old townsite. While the Reclamation Service purchased the new right-of-way in 1921, irrigation companies were billed \$205,000 for the grading and relocation work. The railroad bridge across the river was raised 22 feet at a cost of \$250,000. The OSRR spent \$37,000 on the construction of a new depot in the Reclamation Addition.<sup>22</sup>

In exchange for 30,000 acres of flooded tribal land, the Ft. Hall Reservation received \$700,000. Of this, \$100,000 went to enlarge and improve the Ft. Hall irrigation project.<sup>23</sup>

Finally, came the daunting task of relocating an entire town. American Falls had to be removed from the reservoir area and transplanted to a new subdivision, named appropriately the Reclamation Addition. In all, 344 residences, 46 businesses, 3 hotels, 1 school, 6 churches, 1 hospital, 6 grain elevators, one flour mill and numerous small sheds and shacks needed to be removed from the reservoir before water could be retained.<sup>24</sup> But before any buildings could be relocated, the infrastructure for a new community had to be planned and installed.

The new townsite was to be a planned community on land already purchased by the Reclamation Service from Judge H. O. Jones, D. G. Brown, Mrs. Mary Franklin, and the Indian Spring Natatorium in late 1920 and 1921.<sup>25</sup> The ground consisted of nearly empty dryland farm land and undeveloped sagebrush. On May 25, 1921, Russell V. Black had been contracted to lay out the new town using the most advanced methods available, and he submitted a report on September 20, 1921, just missing Secretary Fall's ill-fated trip to American Falls. Black's services were terminated on October 6 and he was replaced by A. R. Tibbitts on November 1.<sup>26</sup>

While Black was replaced as town planner, the fundamentals of his plan were enacted. His planned community expanded outward from a central town square. The sides of the square were dedicated variously to municipal buildings, churches, businesses and residences -- though in implementation the result was far from pure. The broad streets were not laid out square with section lines, but instead at an

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<sup>21</sup> Don Hibbard, "American Falls East Shore Power Plants," National Register of Historic Places Nomination; Dibble, "Annual Report," Vol. XVIII, 1976.

<sup>22</sup> *American Falls Press*, "Official Souvenir Edition," July 13, 1925; Documents on file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>23</sup> Harold Johnson, Steve Joseph, Chuck Mullen, and Thule Egan Stone, "Reclamation of Riverside Addition, American Falls," prepared for Environmental Studies 461, December 10, 1973. Paper on file with Valerie Hoybjerg.

<sup>24</sup> Russell V. Black, "Final Report of Studies and Recommendations for the New Town of American Falls, Idaho," September 20, 1921. Manuscript on file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>25</sup> *American Falls Press*, December 31, 1920, p. 1; Johnson *et al*, "Reclamation of Riverside Addition," p. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Dibble, "Annual Report," Vol. XV, 1921.

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angle so that each home would have a full measure of the morning sun.<sup>27</sup> A business district was set between the square and the Oregon Short Line to the northwest. Beyond the other three sides of the square, residential neighborhoods were laid out. A park was platted along a ravine that descended down to the river.<sup>28</sup>

The plans for the new 300-acre townsite were officially approved by County Commissioners in early September, 1923. The Reclamation Addition contained 867 business and residential lots. Physical development of the townsite was reported for the first time on September 13, 1923. On October 4, 1923, sales of lots in the Reclamation Addition began.<sup>29</sup>

The Service sent out bids for contracts to move buildings, lay seven miles of sewer line, lay nine miles of water mains, install 12 miles of graded and paved streets, build eight miles of new sidewalks, construct power lines to over 350 homes and businesses, and finally, prepare foundations to receive the buildings being moved up from the old town. In all, the Bureau of Reclamation spent \$400,000 in preparing the site for occupation.<sup>30</sup> The speed with which the orders were placed and work began was staggering. Fifteen hundred shade trees to landscape the new community were ordered on March 12 and were planted by March 30. When the old school was deemed unmovable and sold for salvage, bids were let for a new \$80,000 high school on March 28. Ernest White was awarded the contract on April 16, and ground was broken for the new school on April 30. Work was also begun on the new \$40,000 courthouse.<sup>31</sup>

As work progressed on the Reclamation Addition, appraisers systematically assessed the values of land and improvements in the old town. Owners were then made offers for their property. While a few demanded additional money, most accepted the offers. Once the buildings became property of the Bureau of Reclamation, it offered them for sale on the condition that they be removed from the reservoir impoundment area. Owners were given first right of refusal, followed by renters and then the public at large. Sale was conditional on the removal of the building by December 9, 1925. Grain silos were granted an exception and were to be removed by the summer of 1926.<sup>32</sup>

Houses were then relocated into the Reclamation Addition and on the higher ground of the Original Townsite. Four zones were created to group the houses according to value. The lower value homes in the "C" and "D" categories were at first excluded from the Reclamation Addition and were forced to

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<sup>27</sup> Personal communication with Valerie Hoybjerg, March 23, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Black, "Final Report," 1921.

<sup>29</sup> *American Falls Press*, September 13, 1923, p. 1; September 20, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> *American Falls Press*, "Official Souvenir Edition," July 13, 1925.

<sup>31</sup> *American Falls Press*, March 12, 1925, p. 1; March 28, 1925, p. 1; Jennifer Attebery, "Power County Courthouse," National Register of Historic Places nomination form, 1987.

<sup>32</sup> Copies of these contracts and associated correspondence are on file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

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find lots in the remaining portion of the Original Townsite. A petition was circulated that allowed some of the lower value homes to be moved into the Reclamation Addition. This was passed by the American Falls City Council on December 2, 1924.<sup>33</sup>

Building movers from Ohio and Texas, who had learned their craft moving towns to new railroad locations, arrived in the spring of 1925 to begin moving structures. These companies and individuals were referred to in the *American Falls Press* variously as: E. W. Plant Co.; Willingham; Howard Douglas; Mitchell and Lawson; and Dobbur.<sup>34</sup>

In all, 329 properties were purchased by the Bureau of Reclamation within the American Falls Original Townsite, Riverside Addition, Union Addition, and Kiers Addition. The removal of structures from these properties fell into three categories. On 123 of the properties, the former owners retained title to the buildings and were responsible for their removal or salvage. On 141 of the properties the Bureau of Reclamation obtained title to the buildings and was responsible for their removal or salvage. On 55 of the properties, the former land owners retained title to the property, but contracted their removal through the Bureau of Reclamation as part of the purchase price.<sup>35</sup> Eighty-seven structures were classified as either immovable or not worth moving.<sup>36</sup> Stone and brick structures that could not be moved were torn down for salvage. Smaller structures and those deemed not worth salvaging were simply left to fate. The largest structure in the town, the Oneida Elevator, was a massive concrete silo that was so heavy that it could not be economically moved. It was left in place to stand alone in the waters of the reservoir. It was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.<sup>37</sup>

The first building to be moved to the new townsite was that of Theil Welding, owned by A. R. Theil. The building was moved by Howard Douglas on January 22, 1925.<sup>38</sup> Two weeks later, George Morris' house was on wheels, ready to move, and O. F. Crowley, S. H. McCallough, and E. E. Zarring had signed contracts to move their houses. By mid-February, a temporary "moving road" was under construction in preparation for the moving of an estimated 350 structures. The road crossed the dam construction area at the east end of Campbell Avenue and then followed the old Oregon Trail up the hill to the Reclamation Addition. Upon completion of the moving road, houses and buildings began moving up hill to new foundations. By April 20, 1925, twenty houses had been moved. The local paper

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<sup>33</sup> Resolution for reclassification of Class C and D houses, American Falls Mayor and City Council, December 2, 1924. Document on file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>34</sup> *American Falls Press*, March 12, 1925, p. 1. Individual movers were often referred to in the press by only their last name. For example, the paper reported "Dobbur" received two additional complete moving rigs the week of March 12.

<sup>35</sup> Many of these were not worth moving. The Reclamation Bureau ultimately moved only 16 residences, contracting Lewis and Hall to relocate the buildings within 60 days. *American Falls Press*, April 23, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>36</sup> These figures were derived from a typed and handwritten spreadsheet in the Bureau of Reclamation document files, Burley, Idaho. Railroad, city and utility company properties were excluded from the totals. The document was used by project managers to track the purchase and sale of buildings.

<sup>37</sup> Buckendorf 1993.

<sup>38</sup> *American Falls Press*, January 22, 1925, p. 1.



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complained that the work was not proceeding fast enough because on June 11, only 50 buildings had been moved.

The St. John Lutheran Church made national news in June when the building was caught on the road on Sunday and worshipers attended their church while it was still on wheels.<sup>39</sup> By August, the move was in full swing with several houses on the road at any one time. Some of the larger structures were also being moved. The Grand Hotel, the largest building to be moved in 1925, took a full two weeks in late September to make its way up to its present location on the corner of the town square. Pushing to complete the move, on October 8, 1925, the *American Falls Press*, published a Bureau of Reclamation reminder notice that all buildings, with the exception of the grain elevators, were to be removed by December 1st, or they would revert to the government.<sup>40</sup>

The dam was completed 60 days ahead of schedule on April 21, 1926 at a total cost of \$2,850,000. The dam's gates were shut and water from the spring run-off began to collect in the reservoir. When completed the concrete structure was 80 feet tall and just under one mile in length. About 800 feet of the dam consisted of a concrete spillway. Behind it was a reservoir with a capacity of 1,700,000 acre feet, stretching 22 miles to the east.<sup>41</sup>

Because a full year's run-off was not collected that year, there was still time after closing the gates to move buildings off the higher ground. The giant grain elevators were not moved to the new Oregon Short Line right-of-way until late May, 1926. On July 13, 1926, the moving road was open for the last time to move the former OSL depot. Although a new depot had already been constructed, the old depot was cut in two and transported to the new townsite. On July 29, 1926, Project Manager F. A. Banks closed the "moving road" across the Dam construction site, officially ending the relocation of American Falls.<sup>42</sup>

The American Falls Dam released its first irrigation water on May 2, 1926. Total cost for the dam was only \$2 per acre foot of water, well within the original estimate of \$5 per acre foot. From its first day of operation, the dam provided economic water storage for irrigation districts throughout southern Idaho. As an indication of the security this water brought to the economy, eight days after the American Falls released its first irrigation water, the First National Bank of Paul reopened its doors for business. The American Falls Dam continued releasing irrigation water throughout the successful irrigation season of 1926. On October 26, 1926, it once again shut its gates to begin the annual task of collecting surplus water.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> *American Falls Press*, February 5, 1925, p. 1; February 12, 1925, p. 1; April 30, 1925, p. 1; June 11, 1925, p. 1; June 18, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>40</sup> *American Falls Press*, August 13, 1925, p.1.

<sup>41</sup> Rockwell, pp 153-154; Stacy p. 76; F. A. Banks, "American Falls Reservoir: Plan and Estimate," letter on file at the Bureau of Reclamation Office, Buhl, Idaho.

<sup>42</sup> F. A. Banks, "Moving Road Notice," July 13, 1926. On file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho; Johnson *et al*, "Reclamation of Riverside Addition," pp 9-10.

<sup>43</sup> Dibble, "Annual Report," Vol. XX, 1926.

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5	<u>12</u>	<u>346 780</u>	<u>4737 660</u>	7	<u>12</u>	<u>347 080</u>	<u>4740 040</u>
	Zone	Easting	Northing		Zone	Easting	Northing
6	<u>12</u>	<u>346 770</u>	<u>4739 220</u>				

## Verbal Boundary Description

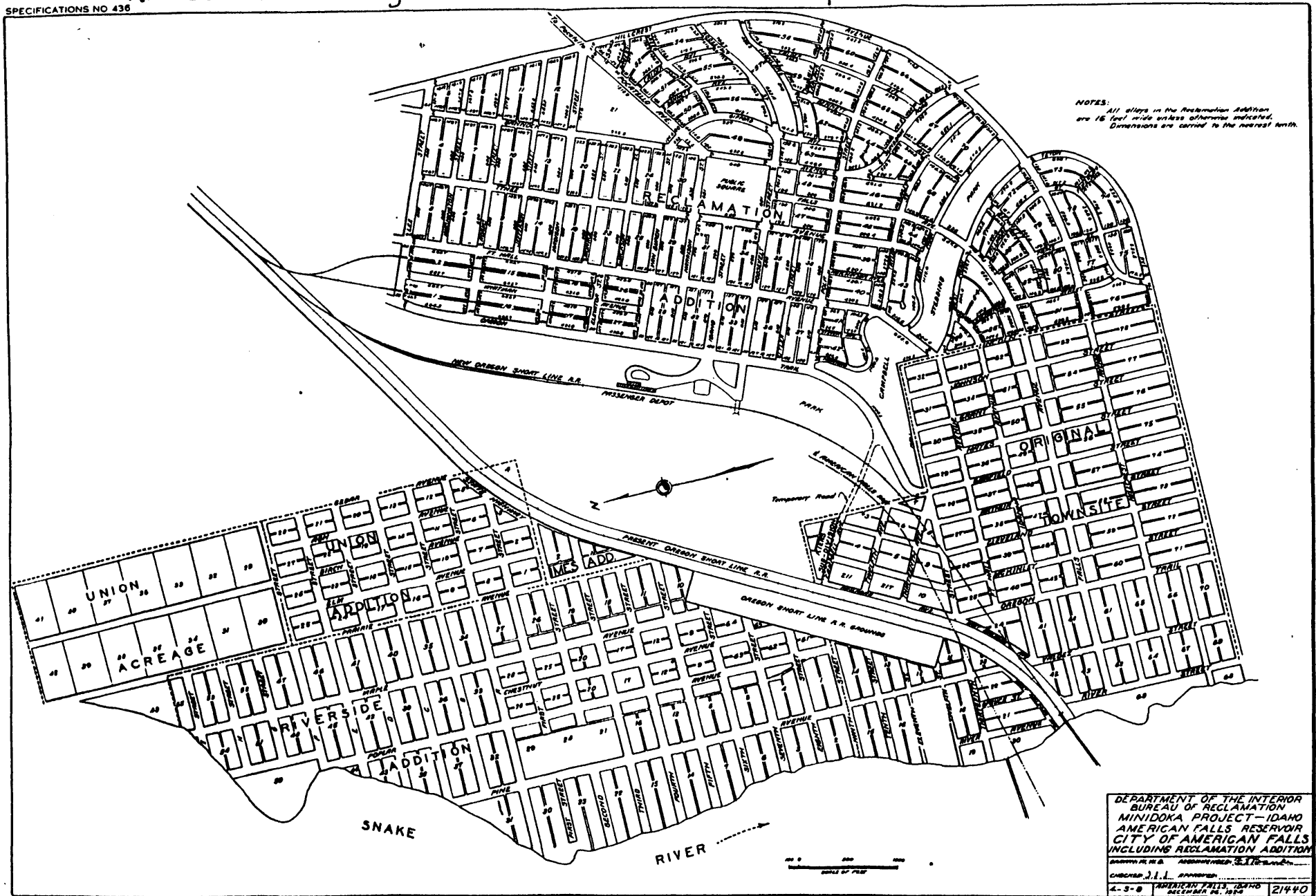
The boundary of the nominated property is as indicated on accompanying American Falls, ID USGS map. The northern boundary corresponds to the northern boundary of the Union Acreage. The eastern boundary corresponds to the eastern boundary of the Union Acreage, the eastern boundary of the Union Addition, the pre-1925 right-of-way of the Oregon Short Line, and the eastern boundary of the business district of the Original Townsite. The southern boundary corresponds to the post-1925 right-of-way of the Oregon Short Line. The western boundary corresponds to the natural riverbank of the Snake River, which also served as the western boundary of the Original Townsite and the Riverside Addition.

## Boundary Justification

The boundary of the nominated property are those portions of the 1925 American Falls, Idaho townsite that were covered by the construction of the American Falls Dam, the construction of the new railroad right-of-way, or flooded by the water of American Falls Reservoir. This includes the northern portions of the Original Townsite along with all of the Riverside, Kiers, Imes and Union Additions and the Union Acreage.

Original Townsite began late 1870's early 1880s - Kiers Sub-Division abt. the same time  
 Riverside Addition began 1905 - Imes & Union shortly after

SPECIFICATIONS NO 436





American Falls Flooded Townsite  
Power County, Idaho

Dale Gray

August 2, 2001

Idaho SHPO, Boise, Idaho

Sidewalk tunnels viewed to south,  
Roll #1 frame 13

Photo 1 of 4





American Falls Flooded Townsite

Power County, Idaho

Dale Gray

August 2, 2001

Idaho SHPO, Boise, Idaho

Business block foundation viewed to north,

Roll #1 Frame 15

Photo 2 of 8



American Falls Flooded Townsite

Power County, Idaho

Dale Gray

August 2, 2001

Idaho SHPO, Boise, Idaho

Foundation emerging from water viewed to the west-northwest.

Roll #1 frame 5

Photo 3 of 8



American Falls Flooded Townsite

Power County, Idaho

Dale Gray

August 2, 2001

Idaho SHPO, Boise, Idaho

Stone foundation with empty floor joist sockets viewed to west.

Roll #1 Frame #7

Photo 4 of 8



American Falls Flooded Townsite

Power County, Idaho

Dale Gray

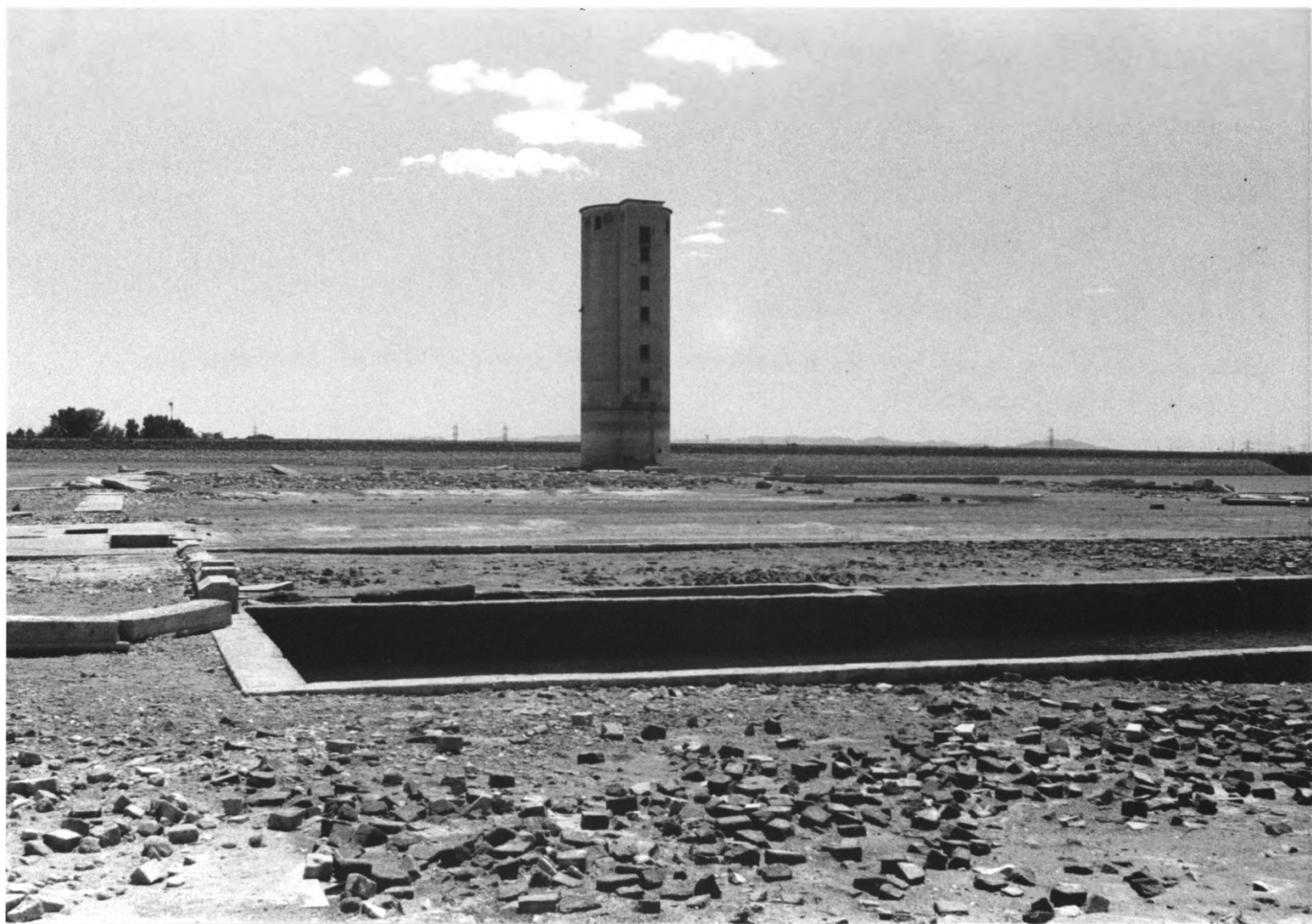
August 2, 2001

Idaho SHPO, Boise, Idaho

Business basement foundation viewed to the west-northwest,

Roll #1 frame 8

Photo 5 of 8





American Falls Flooded Townsite

Power County, Idaho

Dale Gray

August 2, 2001

Idaho SHPO, Boise, Idaho

Oneida Milling and grain elevator and business district viewed to  
south-southwest.

Roll #1 Frame 9

Photo 6 of 8



American Falls Flooded Townsite

Power County, Idaho

Dale Gray

August 2, 2001

Idaho SHPO, Boise, Idaho

Business foundations at water's edge viewed to northwest.

Roll #1. frame 11

photo 7 of 8



American Falls Flooded Townsite

Power County, Idaho

Dale Gray

August 2, 2001

Idaho SHPO, Boise, Idaho

Business foundation, railroad underpass and modern elevators  
viewed to the east.

Roll #1 frame 12

Photo 8 of 8