

THE HISTORY OF POWER COUNTY

By Elizabeth Clayton

Power County, located west of Bingham County in southeastern Idaho, is in the center of a large dry-farming wheat belt. It was officially made a county in 1913. American Falls Dam and Reservoir are within its confines -- the gateway to reclamation projects reaching 170 miles westward. It covers an area of 903,040 acres, on which are several hundred farms, and ranks first in Idaho wheat production. American Falls, its county seat, is one of the chief wheat shipping centers in the United States. Thousands of acres are irrigated, many of them only since the diversion of water from the Palisades Dam.

American Falls (altitude of 4,330 and population over 2,000), was moved when the construction of the dam began. The dam was completed in 1925. A railroad, power plant, and highway were moved. The bridge of the Union Pacific is below the dam, and Idaho Power Company's hydroelectric plant is below the bridge. Trenner Memorial Park, with a rocky terrace made of lava from the Craters of the Moon, has one of the largest fish hatcheries in the state. The hatchery has an output of over one million rainbow, cut-throat, and steelhead trout each year. A part of the old Oregon Trail is visible in the town and for a short distance south. Before American Falls existed the site was named American Falls, because a party of American trappers, coming down the river in a canoe, were drowned as they went over the falls. After that it was named on maps to prevent a reoccurrence of the tragedy.

One of the county's landmarks is Emigrant Rock, on which autographs of early travelers and emigrants are dated as early as 1849.

A massacre occurred at Massacre Rocks on August 10, 1862, when a train of eleven wagons, drawn by ox teams, and carrying twenty-five families from Iowa, were attacked by Indians. The emigrants had spent nearly the whole summer crossing Nebraska, Wyoming, and Idaho to this place through dust, over rocks, under hot sun. The wagons were plundered and burned, the beasts driven off. Nine were slain, six were scalped, and a few escaped. The following day the next wagon train buried the dead.

One of the oldest gunmen in the American Falls country was Jim Bowman. He would lie in his cabin below Ruger Springs for days at a time in a drunken stupor, protected by his faithful dogs. He was always in possession of gold, but no one dared trespass or knew where he got it.

The first settlers raised cattle and sheep. The country now has the pure-bred herd of one of the largest dairies in the state. The summer range produces more than 13,000 cattle annually. With more extensive irrigation

and larger production of winter hay the cattle and sheep industries will expand.

Small fur-bearing animals called chinchillas are also raised; chinchilla farming is a most lucrative enterprise.

The region affords a number of recreational opportunities. Along the dam's 125 miles of shoreline are beaches for swimming and boating. Fishing is good above and below the dam, and hunters enjoy ducks and geese in the fall and early winter. Some bones of prehistoric animals have been dug from the cliffs and flat lands.

One of the most interesting happenings in recent years was the discovery of the Crystal Ice Caves a short distance from American Falls on Highway 39. The caves were found by David Fortsh of Pocatello and Perry Fenstermaker, a teacher at Aberdeen. When the caves were first discovered, the discovery was so unbelievable that the main cave was named Liar's Cave.

The caves are the result of a long succession of lava flows. The Wapi lava flow, covering 160 square miles, is south of the caves. Pillar Butte, formed by constant non-violent eruptions, is the source of this flow. There are several craters in the summit of Pillar Butte. A volcanic rift, or fissure, runs northward from the Wapi flow.

The road to the caves, on Highway 39, six miles from American Falls, affords a good view as one passes near the summit of Grandview Crater. The Craters of the Moon are visible toward the northwest, as are the jagged peaks of the Sawtooth Mountains and other ranges.

The entrance to the caves is through King's Bowl, an enlarged portion of the rift, through which lava and other materials have been ejected. The beauty inside the caves is spectacular, and unusual volcanic features can be seen by tourists. They were first opened to the public June 27, 1964.

The American Falls Dam and Hydroelectric Power Plant, now an interchange for electricity between Utah and Idaho, has been the greatest aid to growth and prosperity in Power County. The hydroelectric plant generates 19,440 megawatts (million watts) each month. Irvin E. Rockwell, Senator Borah, and the engineers and other Idahoans who struggled for years to insure the completion of the dam would be proud today of Power County's prosperity and accomplishments.

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AMANDA MEADOWS AND HER FAMILY
PIONEERS OF POWER COUNTY
by Elizabeth Clayton

Today, when the very values of accomplishment and loyalty are questioned, it gives one a feeling of permanence to remember our Idaho pioneers. The fears that they overcame and their faith in this state are inspiring.

One of these citizens, ninety-five years old, March 30, 1968 - Mrs. Amanda Meadows - has been honored by the people of her home-town, American Falls. An open house was held, and relatives and friends came to pay their respects.

Amanda was born in Coalville, Utah, of sturdy pioneer stock. Her parents were Thomas and Esther Garn. There were six children in the family, three boys and three girls.

Amanda's mother, Ann Eldridge Garn, arrived in Salt Lake City shortly after the first settlers. These were difficult days, and food was, at times, very scarce. Ann's mother dug the roots of the Sego lily for food when it was necessary. Eventually Ann's father managed Zion's Cooperative Mercantile Institution for a number of years.

Amanda's father, Thomas Garn, came to Utah from Sandusky, Ohio. He had driven an ox team across the plains.

Grandfather Joseph Meadows worked for the Willies Company. This was a handcart organization, coming from the Missouri river section of the country. On the way, Joseph and other members were caught in an early snow in Wyoming. The storm was severe and most of them perished. When rescue teams arrived from Salt Lake, Joseph was among the few survivors.

Amanda went to grade school in Coalville and then attended Summit Lake Academy. Later, when she was working in a cafe there, she was introduced to a widower, Franklin Meadows. They courted, in traditional manner, and were married.

Soon after, they moved to Iona, Idaho, with Steven and Coral, Franklin's children. Franklin raised sheep, and Amanda became the proud owner of a coal-black horse, which she named "Bird". He was a gentle horse, and she loved to drive him to town. "Bird" disappeared one day, and Amanda was heartbroken. She dreamed that she saw him returning, dragging a rope along the road. A few days later she looked out the window and saw him approaching their place, just as in her dream, dragging his rope in the dust. She was overjoyed.

While they were living in Iona their first son, Elwood, was born. Amanda and Franklin were delighted.

After a few years Franklin and Amanda and family moved to Le Grande, Oregon, where they farmed. It was here that their second son, Vard, was born.

While they were living in Le Grande, Franklin heard that land could be homesteaded in Idaho, and decided to give it a try. He and Amanda's brother, Martin, decided to go back to Idaho, and leave Amanda and the family there until they could establish a proper place for them.

Franklin and Martin homesteaded twelve miles south of the section where American Falls now stands. The two men lived in a tent that winter, while they cleared the land of sagebrush, and built a cabin. Amanda joined them in the spring of 1906, after the cabin was completed.

Franklin and Martin planted a large section of their land in wheat. This particular variety of wheat was called "Gold Coin Wheat". It matured beautifully - a beardless grain with long straw and red chaff. They thrilled to see it growing, rippling over the hills - 160 acres of it. This was the first large area of wheat to mature in that section, and it caused much excitement. Newspaper and real estate men came to take pictures of it before it was harvested. This attracted thousands of people to this area to homestead land. They came from Washington, Oregon, and even Europe.

After this crop of wheat was harvested, it was hauled to American Falls and stored in the basement of the old Fall Creek Mercantile. The grist mill was at Albion, sixty miles away. The grain was taken there, and Franklin and Martin brought back bran and shorts, called middlings. As this region developed into wheat country, a flour mill was built in American Falls, on the same location where the lake now lies.

There was great excitement when the first telephone was installed at the Meadows ranch, on the barbed wire fence. It worked exceptionally well except in wet weather, when it was grounded.

Three more boys and one girl had now been born into the family. As there were no school buses, Amanda and Franklin decided to move to American Falls. They built a home, and remained to rear and educate their children there.

Amanda and Franklin observed American Falls grow and change over a period of years. In the early days it was known as a cow town, with board walks and dirt paths, six to eight inches deep. Residents used lumber wagons to travel in, and the more affluent rode in white-topped buggies, made by the Studebaker Company. The buggies had curtains that could be rolled up and down. While Amanda and Franklin lived on the ranch, it took a whole day to travel back and forth to town, usually carrying about sixty-five sacks of grain.

At that time there were no doctors, just midwives. One of the first doctors was known as "Doc West". The Meadows remember that he constantly had aggravating trouble with his car. The initials E. M. P. were on the side of the car. When he was asked what they meant he answered, "Every morning fix-em".

The family had happy times on camping trips. On one occasion they were camped on Fall Creek Road, near the south fork of the Snake river. Everyone was snuggled down in blankets, about to go to sleep when Franklin yelled, "Every body watch out".

Amanda asked, "What is it, a bear?"

Franklin answered, "No, there is a bee in bed with us."

There was much laughter and shaking of bed covers, before they all settled down for the night.

Amanda has been a busy church worker, has enjoyed playing the piano and attending home-talent shows, and has done exceptionally fine handwork. During the war she devoted much of her time in knitting, sewing and making supplies for the Red Cross.

Coral and Melvin (son and daughter) have now passed away, and Franklin died in 1955. The living children include Steven, Professor Emeritus at Idaho State University; Elwood, retired, and living in Arizona; Vard, an Idaho state senator for seven years, mayor of American Falls for ten years, and bishop of the LDS church for twenty years (now farming in the American Falls area) and Merle, now Mrs. Sidney Harris, in Rio de Janeiro, South America, with her husband, who represents the Department of Agriculture in that country.

This pioneer lady has every right to be proud of her achievements in the best of all professions -- wife, mother, and outstanding citizen of Idaho.

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