

THE BUILDING OF THE DAM

ACHIEVEMENT

Men built this Dam - as the years went by -
 As a challenge to a cloudless sky.
 And now the living water flows
 Down broad canals, and where it goes
 Tree-shaded homes dot fields of green,
 With fragrant orchards in between.
 The arid earth, inert so long,
 Is vibrant with a harvest song.

Irene Welch Grissom

"At the time I arrived in American Falls, a popular subject for discussion vuz whether or not a dam would be built, and, if they did, what would happen to the town? When it finally got settled, I managed to land a job with the construction crew on the Dam. At the time it was finished, it stood 94 feet tall and just fifty feet short of a mile long. It vuz the biggest concrete construction ever built anywheres. For a short time, we had that fame. This Dam brought the desert enormous economic return from irrigation and hydroelectric power. Very soon, even bigger Dams dwarfed this one and the importance of this first one has been forgot. From the way the politicians in Washington D.C. fought against building it, it is a wonder if ever got built at all.

"The history about this place is interesting to me. When the white man first come to this country, most Indians vuz friendly. When the settlers started to build fences, they objected. Finally, Chief Pocatello got fed up with the white man's greed but he lost. With all he knew to do, he could not stop the destruction of 'their Indian way' of life. And any of us would do the same in his situation. He vuz a brave man.

"The next big Bannock leader, Chief Pokribo, did things different. He vuz smart enough to see Indians vuz out numbered so he tried to get along, according to the White Rule with his people on the Reservation. When he understood about the Dam putting the best Indian ground under water, he objected! He went to Washington D.C. to stop the construction. I can't say as I blame him. If I'd been him, I would have fought, too.

"Well, those Washington politicians got a 'holt' of him and filled him full of a bunch of lies. They convinced Chief Pokribo the Dam would bring benefits for his people. In the end, the Indians lost their land. Nearly every promise made to the Indians by a Politician got broke. Even today, Politicians can be depended on doing lies. Anyvays, today, the best land in this entire desert is under a million acres of water!

"In 1903 the first Railroad Bridge got built right here across the Snake River. It cost \$10,000 to build. In 1927 the Dam cost five million. In both cases, it cost a lot of money but there ain't no way either of 'em could be built for that today. Idaho has good fertile ground. If a farmer can get dependable water, that will put him in control of his destiny so he can prosper.

"Power County first got formed in 1913. The town of American Falls started in 1906 and Rockland even earlier. When Gross Mutter Fredrieche come to Pleasant Valley, the town vuz still brand new. A real frontier. I saw an old advertising pamphlet about this place and they sure did brag it up. The pamphlet claimed the town had three

churches, two hat stores, two barbers, a tinshop, a bakery, and five realtors. Three attorneys, four hotels, two newspapers, a theatre, a movie house, and a four year high school! I 'heerd' reports of many big plans that fell through. Two that never finished, a railroad line between Aberdeen and American Falls and, a trolley line between Rockland and American Falls and Arbon! Those organizers really expected this place to grow into a big city, fast!

"The Carey Land Act got the power to build irrigation projects and then the Bureau of Reclamation had the job to build Dams to reclaim worthless land but the Civil Engineers had the job of building Dams for flood control. In a way, they did the same thing or it seemed like it. Anyways, they all had authority and these agency built most all Dams in the country whether for good reasons or not.

"After the Bureau of Reclamation got the go-ahead to build our Dam, the town got put on notice to move; it vuz going under water. It vuz a darn nice town with sidewalks and well built buildings. This upheaval so discouraged many families and businesses that they just moved away for good. During construction, for a short time, this place turned into a 'boom town'. Afterwards there vuz less business than before.

"After jacking up a building, wheels could go underneath and that's how they moved some buildings. Other buildings were moved brick by brick. To move everything in a town is a big, expensive project! Not to mention it vuz a great inconvenience for everybody. Houses, businesses, Churches, Theaters, Hotels, everything had to move. That old town of American Falls vuz a nice built town with good streets and sidewalks. Trying to move the grain elevators vuz the toughest problem. Only the sidewalks stayed behind and the concrete grain elevator. It still stands there today in the water, a landmark from the past. For years, a feller could make out where the streets once had been because the tops of the trees could be seen sticking up through the water. In dry years the water level drops low enough so a part of the old town comes out of water. Folks like to poke around the old sidewalks and streets just to see if any treasure can be found.

"The new town site should have been laid out better. Maybe you thought from the looks of it, it happened by accident? Humph! A high priced government engineer got paid to lay out our new town! There is no excuse to set up a new town and make narrow streets when he had miles of open ground to set it on! On purpose, he laid out the streets so none of 'em run straight. A drunk sheepherder coulda' done a better job! And it cost more than half a million dollars including a new Train Depot!

"Building the Dam had plenty of drawbacks but it had some benefits. The construction give work to a lot of men and one of 'em vuz me. I landed a job in 1926 and got paid \$3.60 a day. I lived at home. I took other jobs, too, if I had the chance.

"I enjoyed my job on the Dam the easiest work I ever had before. I got to work sitting, too! So much happened all the time and all of it vuz new to me except for the mules. Mules worked on big teams of thirty four. Whether working with a big team or a small team it is similar because **mules is mules!** Each team pulled a really big machine, with the long handle in the back. I forget now, — ahh, I don't know if I got it exactly right but it could be a Fresno scraper?

"Me and mules always seemed in disagreement; we just **never** got along. I had a mule once and even that 'critter' I couldn't handle. Even so, the mule is a good working animal and deserves to be respected. They are strong and can pull about 2900 pounds.

"In some ways mules are smart. For one thing, **they can tell time!** How these animals do it, I don't know, but I learned one thing. Nobody needs to carry a watch or worry about quitting time. **Mules will let you know when they figure it is time** for a

"I consider it an honor to say a few words in behalf of my people on this unusual occasion. I would that I might reach your understanding so you realize the very great sacrifice we made in order that this big dam might blossom into reality, I.....on behalf of my people, agreed to the flooding of our lands.

"In giving up this large tract of our land forever for your large reservoir, we are sharing with you our limited supply of bread. We needed this land to supply our humble needs. Our simple life is based on the land. No one....can understand what this sacrifice means to us. It was a good part of our inheritance, our winter home.

"We give it up because we have consented to share our lands with you. You are great and strong, we are poor and humble and few. You are growing ever more powerful.

"We want you to be our good friend. We want to be your good friend. We want our children to grow up to be good men and women just like your children. We only ask that you be patient with us. Help us educate our children and care for our sick ones. We are trying to adapt our ways to your ways, we shall succeed."