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GERTSCH, William Darrell, 1940-
THE UPPER SNAKE RIVER PROJECT: A HISTORICAL
STUDY OF RECLAMATION AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT,
1890-1930.

University of Washington, Ph.D., 1974
History, modern

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UNIVERSITY OF WASHINGTON

Date: August 7, 1974

We have carefully read the dissertation entitled "The Upper Snake River Project:
a Historical Study of Reclamation and Regional Development, 1890-1930"

submitted by
William Darrell Gertsch in partial fulfillment of
the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
and recommend its acceptance. In support of this recommendation we present the following
joint statement of evaluation to be filed with the dissertation.

Mr. Gertsch has examined a large number of Federal, state, and local documents, as well as private records and secondary accounts, in order to put together for the first time an historical narrative and analysis of the role of private and (later) public irrigation in the development of the Upper Snake River Valley during the period of Idaho's greatest economic growth. The author has added significantly to previous studies of Western land reclamation--so central a phenomenon in the history of the Westward movement after 1890--by his special focus on the only generally successful example of private enterprise under the unique provisions of the Carey Act of 1894. This has enabled him to be the first to draw some specific comparisons between the private projects developed on Carey Act lands and later projects developed by the state and Federal governments on public lands, culminating in the American Falls project of the 1920's. Mr. Gertsch has successfully utilized his sources to present an accurate, knowledgeable, and often compelling story of farmers, land-investors, and townspeople cooperating to transform a forbidding and intractable portion of the American "desert" into one of the half-dozen highest-yield agricultural valleys in the United States. We recommend acceptance.

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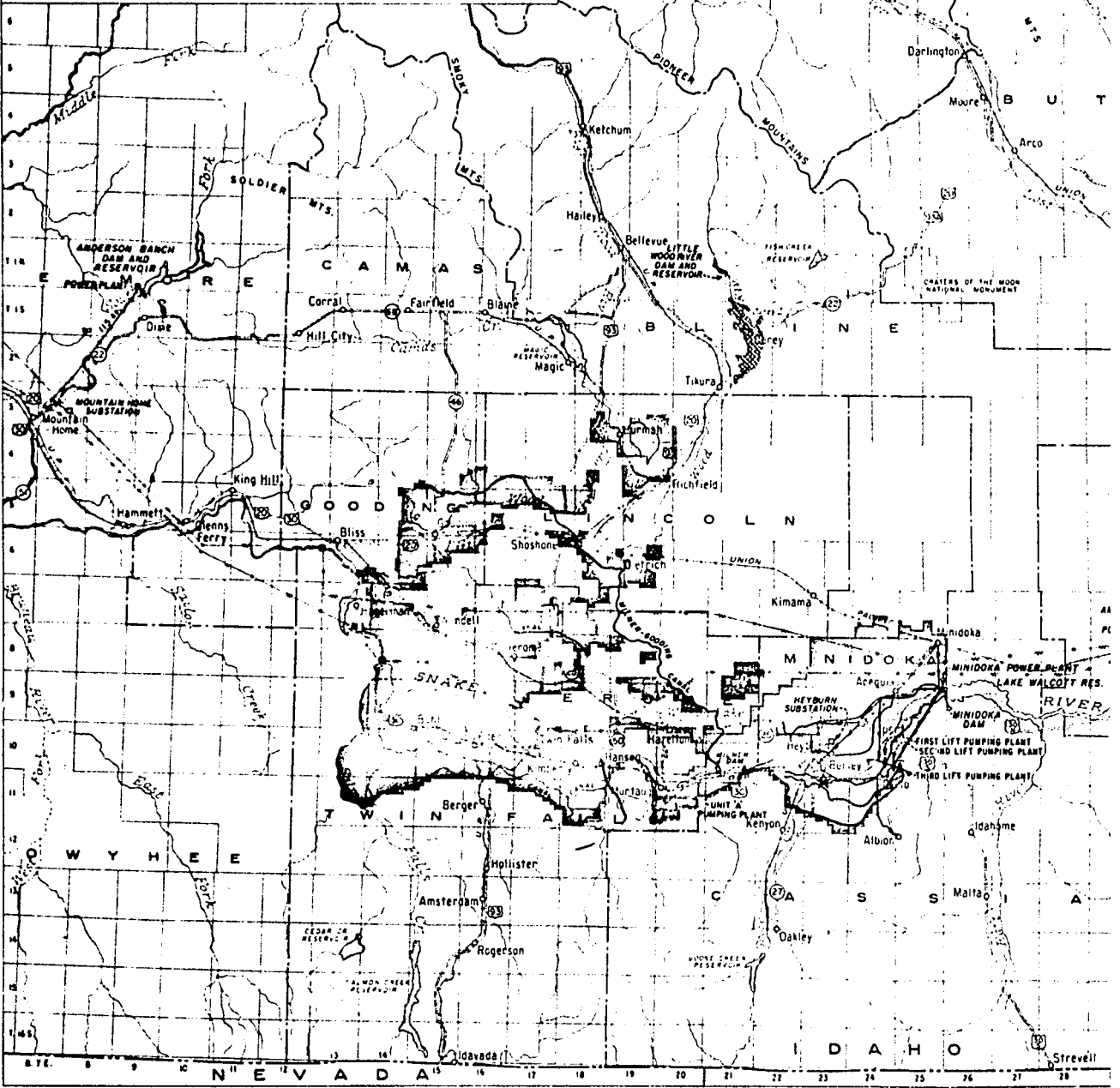
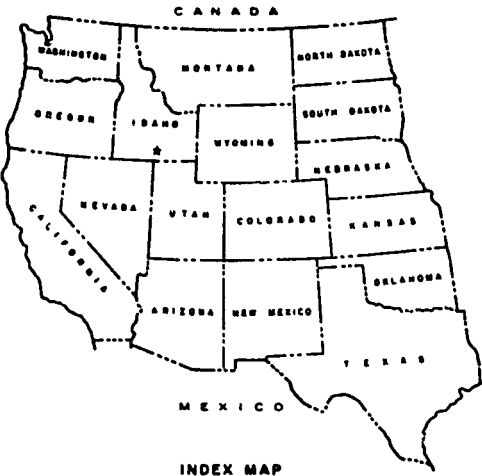
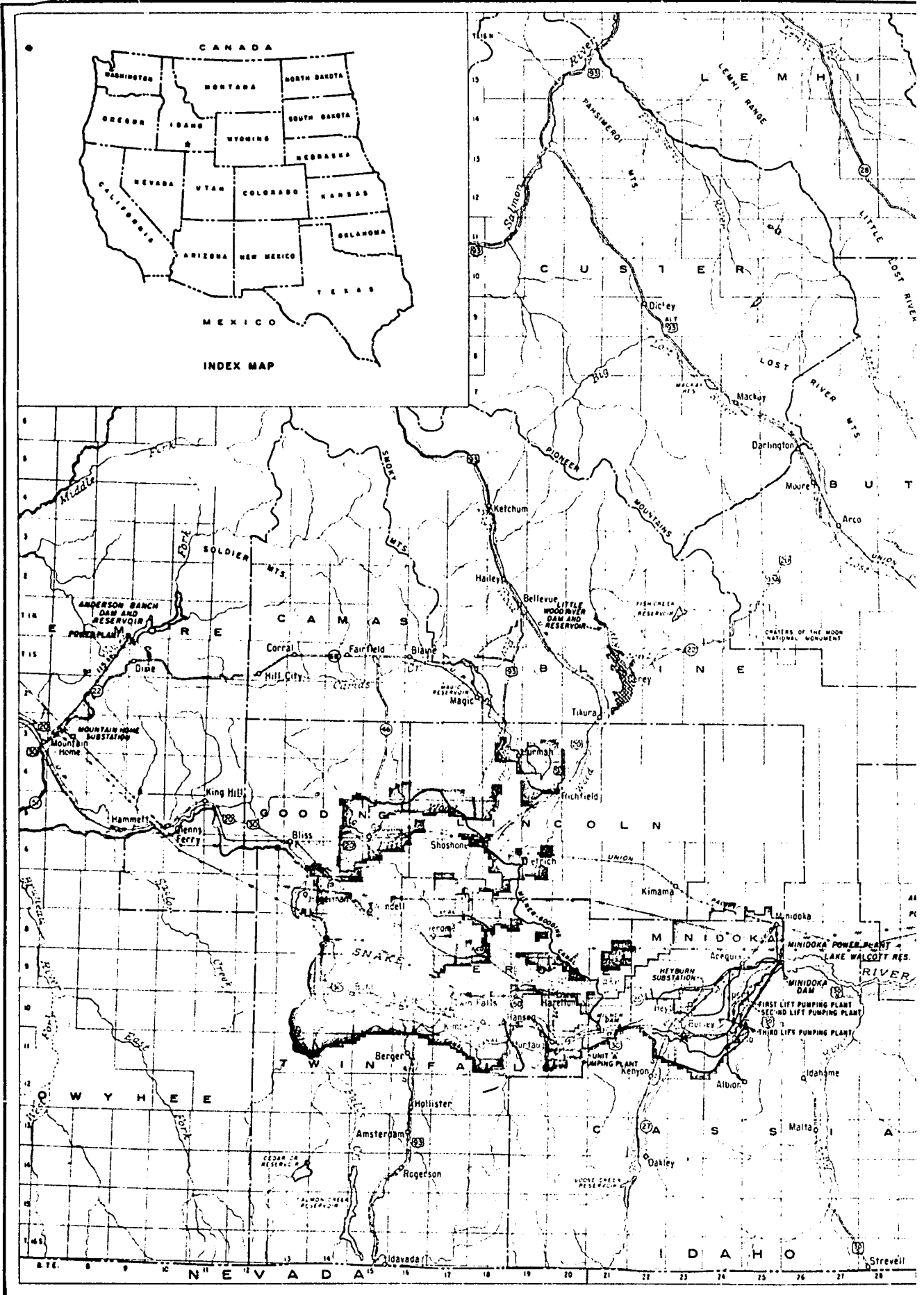
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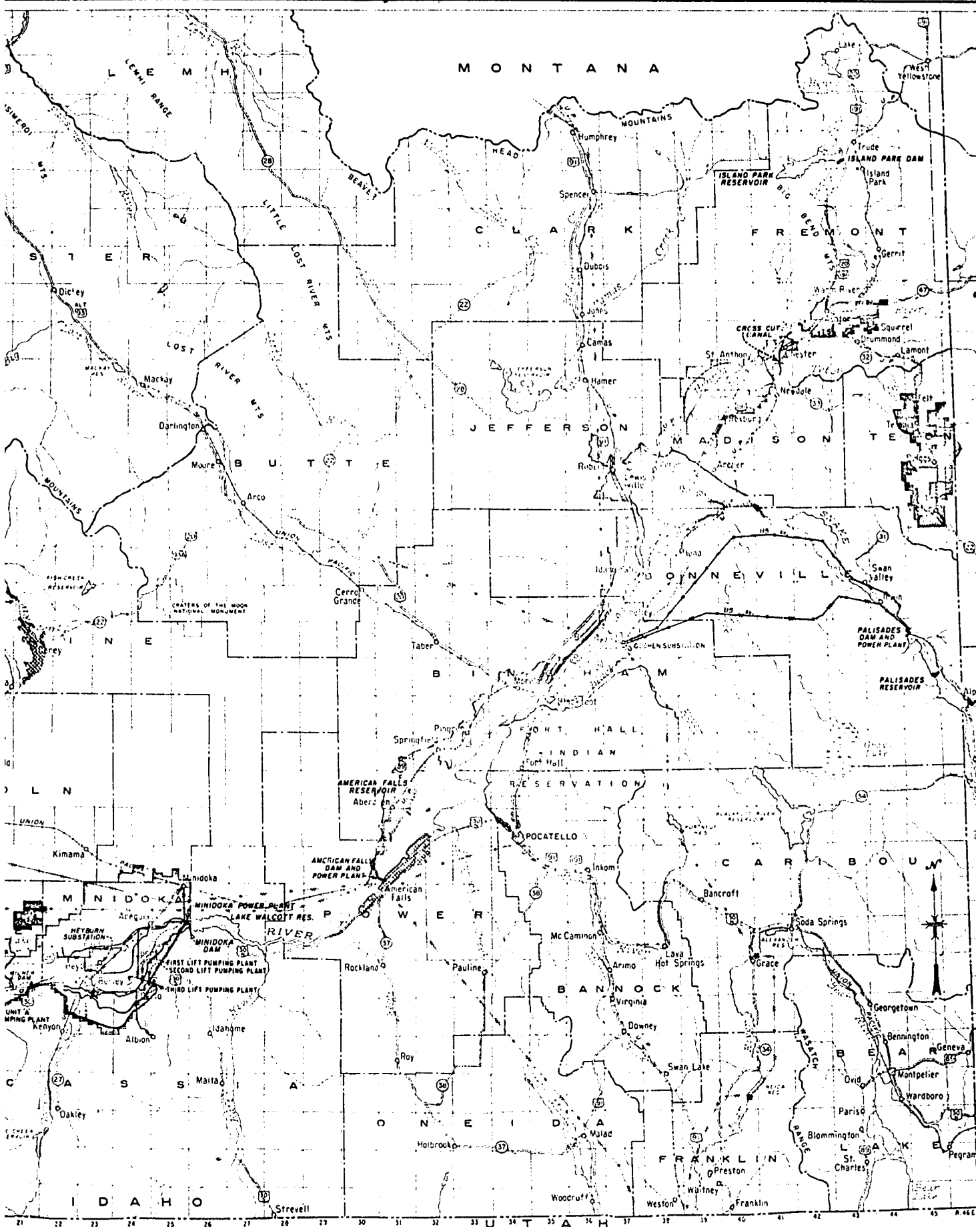
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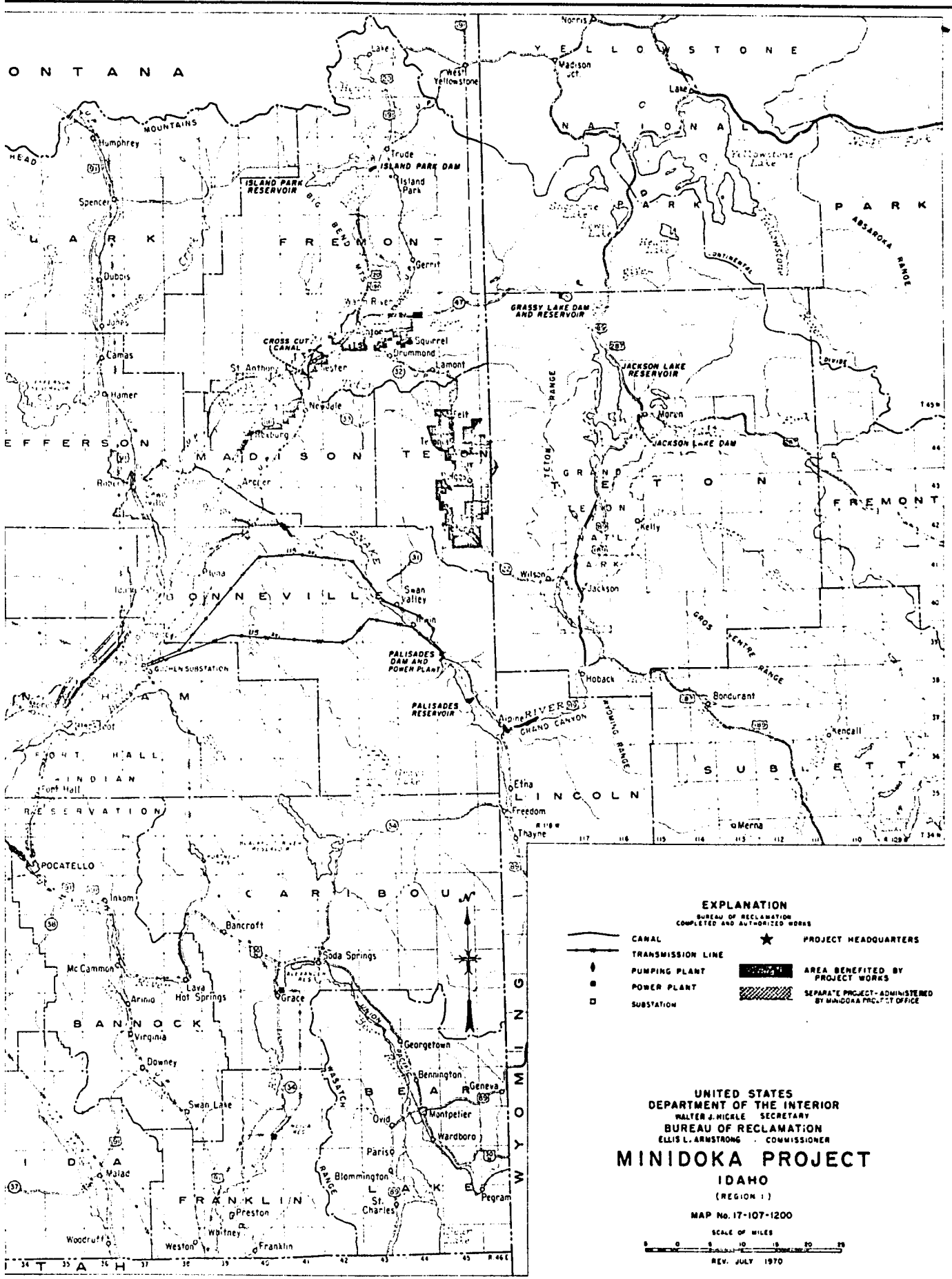
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MONTANA



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EXPLANATION

BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
COMPLETED AND AUTHORIZED WORKS

- CANAL
- TRANSMISSION LINE
- PUMPING PLANT
- POWER PLANT
- SUBSTATION
- PROJECT HEADQUARTERS
- AREA BENEFITED BY PROJECT WORKS
- SEPARATE PROJECT-ADMINISTERED BY MINIDOKA PROJECT OFFICE

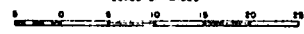
UNITED STATES
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
WALTER J. HICKLE SECRETARY
BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
ELLIS L. ARMSTRONG COMMISSIONER

MINIDOKA PROJECT

IDAHO
(REGION 1)

MAP No. 17-107-1200

SCALE OF MILES



REV. JULY 1970

INTRODUCTION

Romances have been written about railroading and mining and pioneer saloons. Why has there been so little about irrigation? The plans? The finagling? The speculations? The dams? The ditches? The men and women who dreamed them up and made them? I want to do some justice to a few.

--Elliot Paul, Desperate Scenery

The town of Shoshone in south Lincoln County, Idaho, was the early terminus of many twentieth-century pioneers arriving from points east and west to carve out a homestead and a new way of life in the forbidding desert of south central Idaho. Minidoka, about 45 miles to the east, was a similar terminus on the Oregon Short Line railroad. Passing through Shoshone in the summer of 1972, I journeyed to a point in the desert about seven or eight miles north of Minidoka and south of those great lava fields which, in their most rugged state, form the Craters of the Moon National Monument. I went in part seeking a sagebrush Walden--a carefully rationalized refuge from libraries and archival haunts--but mainly I went to achieve a sense of identification with the settlers who tried to build homes here seventy years ago; to see how they might have viewed their new environment, both here in the Minidoka-Kimama desert and in the counties to the south. It is difficult to understand this environment merely through the distil-

lation of memoirs or folk histories.¹

The scene of which I was only momentarily a part and which was the essence of every moment of the pioneers' lives is at once beautiful and hostile; a scene of deafening quiet and solitude, intermittently broken by the warbling of the desert meadowlark, the occasional clucking of a grouse or pheasant. With the onset of darkness this aviary rhapsody gives way to the varied hoots and screeches of night owls and hawks, and the occasional wail of a coyote.

The gently undulating plains consist of a seemingly interminable sea of dull, bluish-grey, gnarled sagebrush whose pervasive, pungent fragrance (especially when cut for an evening fire) is a welcome refrain from the hydrocarbons and sulfur dioxide of the city. The ground is liberally strewn with extrusions of lava rock, worn monuments to a distant age of great geologic transformation in the Snake River Plain. As one goes further south, and into Jerome, Twin Falls, and Cassia counties, the earth becomes noticeably free of lava rock. There also, beyond the agricultural districts, the sage grows to much greater heights -- six to eight feet -- attesting to the enormous intrinsic fertility of the soil. Today, this fertility manifests itself through a prolific yield in potatoes, beans, sugar beets, grain, alfalfa, and fruits.

The homesteading experience here in the Minidoka-Kimama desert, however, had not been so sanguine. The settlers began

¹A collection of personal reminiscences of homesteading in the Kimama-Minidoka area has been compiled by Gerhard Riedesel, Arid Acres (Pullman, Washington, 1969).

arriving in 1912, several years after Carey Act and Bureau of Reclamation water had been supplied to the southern districts through gravity irrigation and pump systems from the Snake River. Still, in many ways the experiences of the Kimama settlers paralleled the early experiences of their more fortunate neighbors to the south on the irrigated tracts, especially before the irrigated farms were firmly established and productive.²

The family biographies of those who homesteaded this dry land tract reveal an overwhelming number to be of German or Russian origins, many of whom had come directly from the old country and others who had arrived in Idaho after previous farming experience in the Dakotas, Minnesota and other Midwestern states, and Eastern Washington. Some had prospered in their previous locations, whether at business or farming; others were still trying to make it. All, however, had responded to the opportunities of a new frontier in Idaho where land was cheap, the climate a cure for many humid-area maladies, and where diligent labor would reap abundant harvests. A typical arrival of prospective home builders might consist of "young couples who were staked by their parents with a cashier's check and a railroad box car. The box car was called an emigrant's car and the family and all its belongings, including livestock

²Annie Pike Greenwood, We Sagebrush Folks (New York, 1934) is a highly readable account of homesteading experience on an irrigated tract on the north side of the Snake River.

arrived together in one car."³ The excitement of starting a new life in a new country was not without some moments of strong hesitation and reluctance, as one woman's initial encounter with her new frontier poignantly demonstrates:

"The long black passenger train ground to a jerky stop at the Adelaide siding [near Kimama, no longer on the map] and I hurried to the end of the coach with my children as the brakeman opened the heavy door to let us out. My heart sank when I got a view of the 'outdoors' - nothing but a wide expanse of greenish grey sagebrush. Not a building, not a tree, not a living thing was in sight.

"'Will there be someone here to meet you?', asked the brakeman. In answer to his own question he pointed to a cloud of dust approaching in the distance - a team and hack. 'There's your ride' he said, and he waved to the engineer and the train rolled away, leaving us standing forelornly on the berm of earth beside the railroad tracks.

"I brushed back some tears as we waited. Had I given up my spacious house with its friendly trees, its green lawn, and its bright flowers for this desolate country?"⁴

Her account, however, goes on to relate how over the years she completely fell in love with her Idaho desert homestead and mourned its eventual abandonment.

The homesteader's immediate problem after providing shelter for his family, which more often than not was merely a shanty or tar paper shack, was to clear some of his land for farming. Typically, a settler would drag a large beam or railroad rail back

³Riedesel, 16.

⁴Riedesel, 11.

and forth across his land, tearing and uprooting the large clumps of sagebrush. One settler who attempted dry farming to the west of the Kimama area remarked that as a young man he and his father would grub the sage by hand, clearing as much as an acre per day.⁵ Another clearing operation consisted of removing the hundreds of lava rocks which inevitably covered the homesteads. As one drives the Kimama district today, dozens of huge rockpiles dot the landscape, the only remaining evidence of the back-breaking toil exerted by husband, wife, and children in their aborted efforts to coax a livelihood from the dry desert land. The rockpile on one abandoned homestead near Adelaide is 105 feet long, nine feet high, and 15 feet wide.⁶

Among the many problems confronting the Kimama-Minidoka homesteader none were more insurmountable, and ultimately more fatal to his dreams, than the lack of water. A complementary difficulty for some was their tendency to apply humid-area farming techniques to a land which received less than half the amount of natural precipitation necessary for diversified, unaided agriculture--techniques such as trying to raise spring wheat, or attempting to grow crops season after season in the same field without intermediate fallowing.

An exceedingly few, financially sound homesteaders were

⁵Interview with Mr. Clyde Bragg of Jerome, Idaho, April 16, 1972.

⁶Riedesel, 13.

able to fund the expenses of a 300 foot well for their culinary water and perhaps enough to irrigate a small garden. Windmills marked the well location and provided the pumping force. Most had to haul their water to large cisterns, either from a nearby town or from a benevolent neighbor. The 18 mile round trip by wagon required for one homesteader was probably not uncommon.⁷ Small subsistence gardens were commonly planted in small drainage basins in order to catch the rain and snow run-offs when they occurred. Nowhere were expensive deep well pumping systems used for crop irrigation.

Naturally, these circumstances of farming greatly limited both the variety and quality of crops which were attempted by the early homesteaders. Dry farming is typically most successful with winter wheat, planted in the fall and harvested the following summer, a technique which thereby uses the moisture of two seasons for one growing crop. Fourteen bushels to the acre, in the early years, was considered a bumper crop, especially when some dry years yielded nothing.⁸ Rye and barley were less successful crops. The west end homesteader to whom I have made earlier reference commented that rye was his family's best crop, but in dry years it seldom grew higher

⁷Riedesel, 26.

⁸Riedesel, 36. By contrast, Twin Falls County wheat production in the same period was 32 bushels per acre. U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1925, Part III (Western States). By 1969, the yield in winter wheat for Twin Falls County had risen to 64 bushels per acre.

than a man's thumbnail.⁹ After such futility, hardship, and profitless labor he moved with his family from their dry land desert farm south to the North Side Carey Act irrigation project in Jerome County.¹⁰

While water--or rather the lack of water--was the chink in the homestead hopes of the Kimama area settler, it was by no means his only problem. Other problems he shared, to a greater or lesser degree, with the homesteaders on the reclamation tracts to the south. Jack rabbits, gophers, and squirrels waged a frontal assault on the desert homestead family, devouring crops and undermining irrigation systems. The ravenous jack rabbit especially, stands out in early memoirs as a most formidable barrier to progress. Defying rabbit fences and repopulating after "rabbit drives" by the farmers during which thousands of jacks would be clubbed to death, the rabbits were to southern Idaho homesteaders what the crickets were to the desperate Mormon colony in Utah in 1848, except the rabbits were an ever-present menace, one whose threat was overcome only over the years with increasing numbers of settlers and improved methods of control. One early account of a dry farm family from

⁹Bragg, op. cit.

¹⁰Two very large private irrigation projects were undertaken before 1908 under the provisions of the Carey Act (1894). The North Side Project includes most of present Jerome County; the South Side Project was in present Twin Falls County. Each took its water from the diversion dam at Milner, 12 miles down the Snake River from the town of Burley. Chapters 2 and 3 contain expanded treatment of reclamation development, both private and federal, on the Snake River and its tributaries.

Switzerland is most descriptive of the strength of the rabbit threat:

For several years we had good crops of winter wheat. That prompted Dad to provide a well and build a large barn and granary. But then came the dry years, and with them the jack rabbits and gophers. The jack rabbits came to the green wheat fields about sundown. They came from the lavas and the uncleared sagebrush fields where they "shaded up" during the daytime. They came in hordes so thick that it looked as tho the ground was moving. Guns were useless against them, for tho you could drop what you hit the rest kept right on coming.¹¹

According to some Minidoka County farmers today, jack rabbits were a primary reason for the abandonment of many early dry farm homesteads.

Life on the early twentieth-century agricultural frontier of southern Idaho was not without most of those miseries and hardships which attended life on other frontiers in other times. Especially was this so for those who, like the Kimama-Minidoka homesteaders and pre-reclamation era settlers in the adjoining counties, tried to build homes without the assistance and planning of a parent "project." It is one of the great virtues of the reclamation era in Idaho that with the advent of large scale reclamation--whether by private companies such as the Twin Falls Land and Water Company operating under the Carey Act or by the federal government--townsites were planned and

¹¹Riedesel, 26.

centers of civilization blossomed in the desert as rapidly as did the crops in the fertile soil. These several towns--Twin Falls, Buhl, Filer, Kimberly, Jerome, Hazelton, Burley, Rupert--served as focal points for the societal needs and interests of the settlers, and helped to mitigate at least some of the customary harshness and privations of life which accompanied the settlement of earlier frontiers.

The compilation of farming difficulties and other trials of frontier life endured by the Kimama-Minnidoka homesteaders--lack of readily available water, jack rabbits, squirrels, sandstorms, drought, unyielding claims--began gradually to force the abandonment of this experiment of dry farming and home building in the Idaho desert. To supplement their meager and failing farm incomes many farmers began to turn to other, more relatively profitable pursuits. Some turned to the autumn trapping of coyotes and bobcats whose pelts carried high bounties. One enterprising trapper tried capturing the animals in the summer months and keeping them alive until the market in the fall would bring premium prices on their pelts. But the animals perished in captivity.¹² Other homesteaders turned to section work for the railroad; or to small businesses; to roadbuilding; or, more cautiously, bootlegging. By 1920, defeated homesteaders began filtering out of the area, commencing

¹²Riedesel, 4.

an exodus which lasted throughout the decade.¹³ A few quit farming altogether and moved to Pocatello where the railroad yards promised greater economic security, or to nearby towns where they established small businesses. Others stayed with farming, but moved onto much smaller farms on the irrigation projects to the south. For those many who left the Idaho desert altogether, California, Oregon, or the familiar Dakotas were the most frequently recorded refuges from a hostile environment. By 1932 all were gone; even the most well-to-do, the hardiest, and the most reluctant were driven out. Sagebrush again "reclaimed" the areas where once crops had struggled against drought and pests; all traces of farming and human effort disappeared--except where graves and large piles of lava rock marked abandoned dreams.

The point of this twenty year summary of the Kimama-Minidoka homestead experience is apparent. These pioneers had experienced the same difficulties of trying to cope with a semi-arid environment as had settlers a generation earlier on the western edge of the Great Plains. This difficulty consisted of a single overriding characteristic, aptly summarized by

¹³The collapse of farm prices in the 1920's created an out-migration from most of Idaho's farming districts. The combined population of Twin Falls, Jerome, Minidoka, and Cassia counties fell from 58,821 in 1920 to a figure of 50,918 in 1930. This inquiry is developed further in Chapter 4. Statistics cited from Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 14th Census of the United States, 1920, Vol 3 (Washington: GPO, 1922), 234-237; 15th Census of the United States, 1930, Vol 3, Part I (Washington, 1932), 567-571.

Wallace Stegner: "That one simple fact [that twenty inches of rainfall are needed for diversified, sustained agriculture-- an amount not to be found, except in high mountain watersheds, west of the 100th meridian] was to be, and is still to be, more fecund of social and economic and institutional change in the West than all the acts of all the Presidents and Congresses from the Louisiana Purchase to the present."¹⁴

To compare statistically the meaning of the Kimama-Minidoka experience, at the time the last settlers were pulling out, the aggregate value of farms (land and buildings) in the irrigated counties in 1930 was 76.8 million dollars, over half this amount (43.3 million) in highly productive Twin Falls County alone.¹⁵ In 1925, again during the Kimama exodus, irrigation farmers on the Twin Falls tract (south side project) marketed, according to the Chamber of Commerce, 18 million dollars in total farm products.¹⁶

The geographical area to which reference has been made constitutes part of what is popularly called the "Magic Valley"

¹⁴Wallace Stegner, Beyond the Hundredth Meridian (Boston, 1935), 214.

¹⁵Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, 1935 Census of Agriculture, Vol I. The breakdown by counties was Twin Falls 43.3; Jerome 13.6; Minidoka 7.8; Cassia 12.1. All figures are in millions of dollars. In terms of agricultural dollar investment per person in 1930, the figures for the four counties represents \$1500 per person. For Twin Falls County the value of farm investment was \$2060 per person.

¹⁶Twin Falls Chamber of Commerce, cited in C.S. Walgamott, Reminiscences of Early Days (Seattle, 1971, originally published in 1926), 123. This figure may be high; the 1925 Census of

of southern Idaho. This valley more generally includes that part of the Snake River basin which is between American Falls and Twin Falls. It is the purpose of this study to examine the course of water resource development and community settlement, under the impact of private and federally sponsored reclamation programs, in that part of the Snake River basin above Twin Falls with emphasis on Magic Valley.

The settlement of the upper Snake River basin generally proceeded along two different lines. Above the American Falls, settlement was accomplished mainly by individuals and small groups who had come to eastern Idaho from Utah. In contrast to the communitarian tradition which characterized the early Utah settlements, and which received added emphasis later with the establishment of several Mormon "united orders," settlement in eastern Idaho after 1880 followed a somewhat more individualistic pattern. There was, for example, a move away from the

Agriculture indicates a value for crops alone (excluding livestock and associated products) of only 4.2 million dollars for Twin Falls County, only one-third what it had been in 1919 after the war. The point is made, nevertheless, that even in the period of farm price depression in the 1920's irrigated agriculture was relatively more prosperous.

It may be of further interest to note, both in terms of the trend of Idaho farm income in the 1920's and the productivity of irrigation districts in general, the comparative crop value of another irrigated Eden in western Idaho near Boise. This is an area irrigated by the Payette, Boise, and Snake Rivers and consists of Payette, Gem, Canyon, and Ada counties. The value of crops in 1919 was 21 million dollars (25.5 for Magic Valley), and in 1924 was 7.0 million dollars (9.4 for Magic Valley). On an agricultural dollar-per-person basis, the crop values for 1919 represent a per capita figure of \$280 and \$440, respectively. U.S. Census of Agriculture, 1925, Part III (Western States).

nucleated village pattern followed in Utah; homesteaders instead tended to live on their farms. The building of water delivery systems was indicative of the absence of strong central direction or planning as canals and diversion works proliferated in the farming districts in the vicinity of Idaho Falls. The many small operating companies and users' associations in existence today reflect this pattern of development. To be sure, a common religious culture tended to give the area a strong sense of regional solidarity, a fact which was well demonstrated during the 1920's in the debate over the big American Falls project. These aspects of settlement and water development in the area of the Snake River basin above American Falls will receive further attention in Chapter 1.

Land settlement in Magic Valley, on the other hand, was accomplished under two acts of the national Congress: the Carey Act (1894) and the National Reclamation Act (1902). Under the former, the reclamation of arid lands was viewed as a responsibility of the respective states, each of which in turn usually left the matter to private enterprise. Chapter 2 recounts the development of the Twin Falls North and South Side projects which were a result of the entrepreneurial aggressiveness of western builders and the financial strength of eastern industrialists.

The full partnership of the United States government in the process of western reclamation is usually seen as the logical conclusion of that series of public land laws which began

with the Homestead Act in 1862 and which later tried to cope with the unique problems of homebuilding in the area of the United States which is bounded by the 100th meridian and the line of the Sierra Nevada-Cascade ranges. In Idaho, where private reclamation development under the Carey Act was proving to be so successful, the tendency of many settlers (especially those who had a personal stake in private developments) was to denigrate the entry of the federal government into the reclamation business. In their view, the western tradition of individualism and free enterprise seemed to be more consistent with the spirit of American economic development. The entry of the federal government into western reclamation seemed to undercut this foundation. But was this a typically western view, or did many in the west (those who stood to gain from the reclamation works) work for and ultimately welcome the assistance of the federal government, in the face of stout opposition from the east and midwest? Chapter 3 examines the coming of the first federal works in Idaho, the Minidoka project which grew up on the river just to the east of the successful private enterprises but which also contributed a great deal to the success of those enterprises.

Drought - so endemic to the American inland west - has had a significant influence in building a community of interest among those settlements in the upper Snake River basin. Short water years, coming almost at five year intervals after 1905, had the effect of educating people that they could not forever

count on an adequate and consistent natural flow of water in the Snake River. Those in the area above American Falls naturally believed that since their water appropriation dates were much earlier than those in Magic Valley, they should have first chance at any water coming down the river. But in dry years, when that water coming down represented storage water which had been released from Jackson Lake intended for the federal lands in Magic Valley, it did not seem to matter to upper valley users what kind of water it was. There developed, therefore, a spirit of antagonism, suspicion, and regional interests which clashed over a proposal to develop a huge federal project at American Falls which, it was intended, would ensure the water supply of interests in both regions. This is the subject of Chapter 4.

The short narrative of dry-land homesteading experience in the Minidoka-Kimama desert between 1910 and 1930 was intended to accent the special difficulties in establishing agricultural communities in a region which receives limited natural rainfall. The prosperity of the irrigated districts in Magic Valley during this twenty year period was a dramatic contrast. The reclamation era in Idaho, inaugurated first by private construction and development companies followed closely by federal reclamation projects, brought fundamental demographic and economic changes to southern Idaho. Vast areas of sagebrush wasteland were converted into regions of prolific agricultural productivity with prosperous, well-ordered communities. The imperatives of cooperation and a sense of community were imposed upon the region

by the exigencies of an arid environment and scarce resources. This, in turn, resulted in the modification of certain institutions which have no exact parallel in more humid areas of the United States. The Idaho agricultural frontier represents both an extension of and a new dimension to a long history of western settlement and economic growth.

CHAPTER 1

THE GEOGRAPHICAL AND HISTORICAL SETTING

Born in incredible beauty--flowing
through incredible desolation--
nourishing incredible fertility...

--Bill Gulick, Snake River Country

A river is more than an amenity. It
is a treasure.

--Oliver Wendell Holmes

William E. Smythe, a former Omaha newspaper editor and one of the West's early and most fervent irrigation crusaders commented somewhat grandiloquently in 1900, that Mount Union in Wyoming, on the northern-most boundary between Fremont and Sublette Counties in the Wind River Range was the "Mother of Civilization in the western half continent where water is King ...the melting snows of this peak...give birth to three rivers [the Missouri, the Columbia, and the Colorado] which, in the course of their long journeys to the sea, control the industrial character of a region which will ultimately be the home of more people than any nation of Europe, and probably of twice as many people as now dwell within the United States."¹ Smythe had designated one of the several points along the Continental Divide which separate the Columbia and the Missouri Basins,

¹William E. Smythe, "The Struggle for Water in the West," Atlantic Monthly, 86 (November 1900), 646.

as well as the apex of the mountainous alcove which gives rise to the Green River, the most important tributary of the Colorado. Smythe's geography was accurate enough for so large a poetic vision, but for those centers of civilization in south Idaho, from Gooding County and Magic Valley in the west to Bonneville County in the east, those areas whose historical development rested on a strong agricultural economic base, the story more appropriately originates about one hundred miles to the northwest. There the Snake River is born in the fantastically beautiful northern extremes of the Teton Wilderness Area and lower Yellowstone National Park. At that point the Continental Divide evenly bisects the distance between the source of the Snake on the west of the Divide, and the Yellowstone River on the east, the latter as it enters Yellowstone Lake in its course to the Missouri. Around Mount Hancock and the base of Big Game Ridge on the Park-Wilderness Area boundary, invisible to all but the backpacker, the Snake River begins its tortuous course to the Columbia.

Augmenting its flow from the Heart and Lewis Lakes in the Park, the Snake first appears to the casual visitor as it joins with the Lewis River near the south entrance of Yellowstone Park. In the Grand Teton-Jackson Hole country the Snake River is an integral part of that famous scenic grandeur of western Wyoming. Its waters at that point, backed up by the Jackson Lake Dam since 1906 seem more functionally related to the recreational and scenic appreciation of passing Americans than it does for its more prosaic but essential part in the vast federal

Minidoka reclamation project which provides water for Magic Valley farmers several hundred miles downstream. Below Jackson Dam and before the river bends its way westerly into Idaho its flow is considerably augmented by several important rivers which contribute to downstream capacity--the Buffalo, Gros Ventre, Hoback, and Grey's Rivers. It may be worth noting, somewhat wistfully, that from the mouth of the Hoback River below Jackson to the Idaho border is one of the only two remaining stretches of the Snake which have not as yet been tamed by dams and reservoirs. Here the river cascades through precipitous forested canyons before being calmed by the newest of the upper valley reclamation and hydroelectric projects, the Palisades Dam in Idaho. If history is a guide, this canyon in Wyoming before long is likely to become a stern battleground between environmentalists on the one side and dam builders, earth movers, and utility companies on the other.

Near the small farming community of Ririe, Idaho, the river emerges from its rugged wilderness origins and enters an environment of a quite different nature, the vast arid Snake River Plains. It seems an act of Providential compensation that the aridity of southern Idaho is offset by such a curiously wandering river as the Snake, rising in its high eastern mountainous catchment and bringing life to where life could not otherwise exist. The Snake River Plains, an eastward extension of the great Columbia Plateau, constitutes a 16,000 square mile gently rolling, monotonous lava plateau described by a geologist

as "one of the best of its kind in the world."² The plateau slopes toward the Snake River from the north and from east to west, albeit imperceptibly. The elevation at Ashton in the extreme upper valley is 5000 feet. The elevation at Twin Falls in the dip of the Snake's crescent-shaped channel is 3825 feet, while eighty miles north of Twin Falls across the Snake River Plains, Hailey's elevation is 5342 feet. Below Magic Valley, the river passes through Ontario on the Idaho-Oregon line at an elevation of 2154 feet.

Over most of the Snake River Plains, successive flows of lava in comparatively recent geologic history have consolidated into black basaltic rock which forms the bedrock throughout most of the area. In addition to the decomposition of the lava rock and volcanic ash the soil is enriched by a windborne material of silt and fine sand called loess, deposited from mountainous alluvial deposits and slopes.³ The loess and the decomposition of volcanic material provides the lands of Magic Valley and the Plains in general with a potential fertility almost without parallel. The only nutrient seriously lacking in this arid soil is nitrogen, but farmers have compensated for this deficiency by systematic crop rotation and by the growing of alfalfa, clover, or other leguminous crops which return humus and nitrogen to the soil, in turn providing greater yields of potatoes,

²Nevin M. Fenneman, *Physiography of the Western United States* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1931), 236.

³U.S. Department of Agriculture, Bureau of Soils. *Soil Survey of the Twin Falls Area, Idaho* (Washington: GPO, 1925).

beans, beets, and grains. This particular composition of soil with its lava structure has rendered negligible the problem of drainage which has particularly bedeviled irrigation in many parts of the West. The broken and porous lava facilitates irrigation water drainage from farm lands and prevents water-logging of the soil which dissolves its minerals and results in the formation of alkali on the surface. It is difficult to overemphasize the beneficence of this soil structure to the early irrigation projects on the Snake, not only because large scale irrigation science was still being developed, but also because private and federal reclamation projects with their liberal land policies had attracted people new to farming. The projects had also brought farming people west from more humid regions, people who were unfamiliar with the unique requirements of arid region agriculture and irrigation. The land, in short, was unusually tolerant of error.

For over 160 miles, from where Henry's Fork joins the Snake River north of Idaho Falls to the mouth of the Wood River just below Hagerman and the Thousand Springs area, there are no tributaries to the Snake from the rugged mountains north of the Plains.⁴

Those rivers which do flow south from mountainous central Idaho emerge onto the Plains and shortly thereafter disappear

⁴Henry's Fork is sometimes referred to as the North Fork of the Snake River while the river proper, prior to this confluence, is designated as the South Fork. I will adhere to the terms "Henry's Fork" and "Snake River."

into "sinks" becoming part of what some believe to be one of the world's largest natural aquifers.⁵ It is believed that the Thousand Springs, 25 miles below Twin Falls, is the eventual outlet of these "lost" streams which flow underground for a considerably duration of time.

The weather pattern of the Snake River Plains is similar to that of most other arid and semi-arid regions of the western United States east of the Cascades - Sierra Nevada line and west of the 100th meridian. It is characterized by low humidity and precipitation, high summer temperatures and abundant sunshine, and comparatively mild winters. Precipitation varies slightly in the Snake Valley according to elevation. In the higher upper valley the annual precipitation averages 12-16 inches, an amount sufficient to permit the dry farming of grain on the eastern tablelands. Below American Falls, the precipitation is less. A seventy year average of 9.11 inches has been recorded at Twin Falls.⁶ This climate may be compared with other sections of the United States where annual precipitation is approximately as follows: southern New England 40 inches; eastern Tennessee 50 inches; New Orleans 60 inches; Crescent City, California 75 inches; Yuma and Tuscon, Arizona 4 inches and 11 inches, respectively. Agriculture cannot succeed this far west on the Snake River Plains without irrigation, and dry

⁵Bill Gulick, Snake River Country (Caldwell, Idaho: The Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1971), 129.

⁶A Look at Twin Falls County, University of Idaho Agricultural Extension Service, 1972, 5.

farming west of American Falls becomes of negligible importance. In the early spring months, the Snake Valley experiences occasionally violent windstorms and thundershowers, but damaging hailstorms and tornado activity characteristic of the Great Plains province are practically unknown.

Shortly after emerging onto the arid plains, and as it forms the point of a crescent which characterizes the shape of its course throughout Idaho, the Snake River is joined by one of its more important tributaries, Henry's Fork. This river, named for Andrew Henry who trapped this country in 1810-11, flows from the lake of the same name on the Continental Divide near West Yellowstone. Before it joins the Snake near Menan, Idaho, Henry's Fork receives the flow of the Warm, Teton, and Falls Rivers, the latter draining all of southwestern Yellowstone Park. The elevation of the Snake's main channel, from where it enters the arid plains to below American Falls approximates that of the surrounding plateau. It is in this stretch of the river that the very earliest agricultural and irrigation development took place. The water was easily diverted from the main channel by means of simple diversion dams at the head of individually or cooperatively constructed pioneer canals.

below American Falls the river enters a canyon the floor of which increasingly recedes from the level of the plain. In- visible as one scans the level arid plain, the spectacular canyon eventually approximates a depth of 800 feet in the stretch of river fifty miles below the diversion dam at Milner, the last point in this part of the channel where the river lends itself

to gravity irrigation of the lands above the canyon. Only as the river approaches the Oregon border does it emerge from its moderate desert trench. Here in western Idaho, another area of intense irrigation agricultural development, the Snake receives the flow of the Boise, Weiser, and Payette Rivers before it begins a 100 mile journey through Hell's Canyon, the most spectacular gorge on the Snake channel; indeed, the deepest river trench in the United States.⁷ The Salmon and Clearwater Rivers are the last two important tributaries of the Snake before it bends its way into Washington and loses its identity to the Columbia River near Pasco, Washington.

The "accursed mad river" no longer warrants this name given the Snake by early French trappers. Throughout the over 1000 mile length of the main channel, eighteen dams have harnessed the wild and turbulent characteristics familiar to early travelers, explorers, and trappers. Only in Hell's Canyon and in the canyon above Alpine, Wyoming, does the Snake still run free. This river, however, the seventh largest in the world, has been the sine qua non for most of the successful development which has occurred in southern Idaho since the turn of the century.

Although the large scale agricultural development of Magic Valley was a comparatively early phenomenon in Idaho's reclamation history and unique in many respects, any account of irri-

⁷Merrill D. Beal and Merle W. Wells, History of Idaho, 3 vols (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, Inc., 1959), I, 12.

gated agricultural development and community growth on the Snake River must properly begin during the 1880's in the vicinity of the bend of the Snake River above Idaho Falls. Here, as we have noted, is where the river channel lends itself most easily to the manipulation of its waters. With only a very gentle westerly slope, the river flows near the level of the plateau, and over the years it has constructed a broad fertile flood plain over which water is easily diverted.

It is important to note, parenthetically, that colonization and agriculture on the upper Snake, from present-day Blackfoot to north of Rexburg, was preceded in time by embryonic irrigation endeavors in other parts of south Idaho. Following the recall by the Mormon Church of its far-flung Indian mission on the Lemhi River where successful irrigation had been practiced in 1855, a more conservative and permanent effort by the Church in establishing an outpost of Zion was consummated in the founding of Franklin, on the Utah-Idaho border, in 1860. Adhering to the tight discipline and spiritually directed organization which had resulted in the successful plantation of colonies and missions throughout Utah and other parts of the Great Basin in the previous decade, the Franklin settlers watered their small plots from a number of creeks which flow out of the Bear River Range. Following the Utah experience their efforts were cooperative, directed by church leaders, and in all likelihood an extension of an encompassing sense of identity, loyalty and united brotherhood inspired by an evangelical religious philos-

ophy. The Franklin settlers laid the foundation for the first permanent irrigation system in the state by digging a $3\frac{1}{2}$ mile canal from Maple Creek and eventually reaped a good harvest of oats, corn, potatoes, and wheat.⁸ Concurrently, Mormon Apostle C. C. Rich had commenced pioneer irrigation agriculture with his small band of colonists on the west side of Bear Lake in 1862. A decade later, in 1871, Mormon settlers in Preston, eight miles north of Franklin, organized one of Idaho's very earliest canal companies. The Cub River and Worm Creek Canal Company financed a \$30,000 canal, fifteen miles long which provided water for 15,000 acres.⁹

At the same time the Mormons were establishing these communities in southern Idaho, irrigation agriculture commenced in the Boise Valley following the discovery of gold there in 1862. Agriculture in the Boise Valley was a direct consequence of the mining industry when many miners, failing to share in the bonanza, turned to farming as a more secure, though less volatile economic enterprise. In addition to vegetables grown to supplement the miners' diet of beans, bread, bacon and coffee, forage crops were also grown to provide for the beef driven into the mining camps. Green onions sold for a dollar per

⁸Beal and Wells, II, 119.

⁹J. Meredith Neil, "A Forgotten Alternative: Reclamation by the States," Idaho Yesterdays, 9(Winter 1965-66), 18.

dozen, with cucumbers and corn going for twice as much.¹⁰ Unlike the upper valley, where pioneer cooperative effort and organizations of farmer-users were the rule in agricultural development, irrigation progress in the Boise Valley (especially after 1880) was primarily the effort of well-financed canal construction corporations whose systems were eventually strengthened by federal projects. By 1900, the Boise Valley (more generally the area of the confluence of the Boise, Payette, Snake, and the Owyhee and Malheur Rivers from Oregon) was the most intensely developed and productive agricultural area in the state. By 1876, Idaho had been given survey demarcations in only three scattered districts; these were the areas around Bear Lake, Boise, and Lewiston in the north.¹¹

Throughout the 1880's, Major John W. Powell had been the catalyst for proposals by government and private groups for a more orderly, planned, and pre-developed approach to the settlement of the western arid regions. For two years, between 1888

¹⁰Mary Gunnell Lewis, "History of Irrigation Development in Idaho" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of Idaho, 1924), 13. Paul Lloyd Murphy, "Irrigation in the Boise Valley 1863-1903: A Study in Pre-Federal Irrigation" (unpublished M.A. thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1948) is a much more detailed account of agricultural development in western Idaho. There will be no attempt in this study to detail the course of development in the Boise Valley. I only wish to note those areas on the Snake River and in southern Idaho where reclamation development and settlement had occurred prior to 1900, and the broad pattern which that development followed.

¹¹Wallace Stegner, Beyond the Hundredth Meridian (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1953), 213.

and 1890, Congress had legally (though somewhat ineffectively) closed the public domain to further settlement between the hundredth meridian and the Pacific, pending the conclusion of Powell's Irrigation Survey. The Survey had intended to select and segregate reservoir sites, irrigable lands, canal sites, and to delineate western watershed boundaries.¹² These were all measures which Powell believed to be essential for the orderly development of civilization and institutions in an arid environment. His objectives were obviously to avoid exploitation and speculation through the means of controlling water sources, to maximize efficiency in the use of limited water resources, and to avoid conflict between geographic political units whose interests would inevitably be focused on the same watershed resources. In other words, he sought to channel settlement in the arid region in a manner calculated to minimize inefficiency and to deter future legal suits between both individuals and state political units which he believed would undoubtedly ensue in the wake of unplanned, haphazard settlement and water use. In 1889 Powell had asked for the segregation of 8 million acres of agricultural, forest, and grazing land along the Snake River in Wyoming and Idaho.¹³ However, the initiative of settlers and land companies (initiative which Powell had hoped to deflect) and the powerful political base upon which western

¹²Stegner, 413

¹³United States Geological Survey, Letters Sent, 173-15, P. 388. Cited in Stegner, 413, 319.

initiative and settlement traditionally had rested both combined to give short life to Powell's proposals, in most cases with the results he had predicted.

That portion of the upper Snake River Valley between Idaho Falls and St. Anthony may perhaps represent the kind of haphazard, ad-hoc resource development which Powell had sought to avoid; particularly is this so when the area is compared with the more efficient, planned developments on the river which came under the federal Minidoka Project or the Carey Act. "A mess" is the connotation used by the present Snake River watermaster to describe the development of the area above Idaho Falls (including Henry's Fork) relative to developments on other parts of the river.¹⁴ However, speculation on what course this resource development might have taken had the area been under Minidoka or TVA-styled sponsorship must not detract from the arduous pioneering effort which did result in permanent and prosperous rural communities. Their permanence is a testament, not alone to magnificent water resources, but also to the individual and cooperative pioneer efforts, lacking in strong financial support, which transformed the desolation into civilization.

¹⁴Interview with Mr. Arthur L. Larson, Watermaster of District Number 36 (that portion of the Snake River Watershed from Jackson Lake to Gooding County in south-central Idaho), Idaho Falls, Idaho, July 5, 1972. Mr. Carlos Randolph, Minidoka Project Superintendent, Burley, Idaho, corroborated this assessment in even harsher terms; interview August 10, 1972.

Before 1879 civilization in the upper Snake River Valley of eastern Idaho consisted primarily of branches of the Shoshone Indian tribe centered on Fort Hall, although the Indians ranged somewhat at will for many years throughout Swan Valley and the Teton Valley in eastern Idaho on into Wyoming. Additionally, the last of the fur trappers worked the river from 1864-1879, managing a bare subsistence until the Montana gold mines provided a more certain market for hunting. Scattered, often temporary ranching was located along the river between Blackfoot and Rigby, and before 1879 the Snake River Forks was characterized as a convenient rendezvous for horse and cattle thieves.¹⁵ What may have been the first attempt at irrigation in the upper valley was a canal started in 1871 near Blackfoot by a young Danish Mormon convert. Taking water from the Blackfoot River and with a reservoir of patience, he harvested the first crop of alfalfa under his spade-dug system nineteen years later.¹⁶

Although the discovery of gold in Montana's Alder Gulch had sparked a considerable amount of travel across eastern Idaho in the 1860's, and stations of supply had been located at present-day Blackfoot and Idaho Falls, it was not until the coming of the railroad that attention was focused on the valley as a site for permanent colonization. The Utah Northern Railroad,

¹⁵Merrill D. Beal, A History of Southeastern Idaho (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers Ltd., 1942), 159.

¹⁶Kate B. Carter, Pioneer Irrigation: Upper Snake River Valley (Salt Lake: Utah Printing Company, 1955), 6.

a narrow-gauge system constructed from Brigham City, Utah north to Butte and Helena crossed Idaho in 1879, and it is from that date that one may trace the ordering of community life and permanent agriculture in the upper Snake River Valley.

We have noted that permanent settlement in the arid regions was usually located first in those areas where water could be easily diverted from river or creek channels. On the Snake River those areas were in the level and fertile bend where the river had formed a flood plain in the shape of a rough semi-circle with Rigby as the hub; a similar such area was on Henry's Fork and its tributaries, especially the Teton River. In 1879 and 1880, an ambitious Mormon from Ogden, Utah, John R. Poole, was encouraged by church authorities to begin colonization in the upper valley. Settlement in the forks country then commenced, centering initially on tiny Menan. Before 1885 settlements had spread to the north of Rexburg and south to present Idaho Falls.

The experience of irrigation in Utah probably explains the amazing rapidity with which canal companies and water users associations were organized. The first such organization occurred under Poole's leadership in Menan. The Long Island Irrigation Company was organized "in a humble home by humble men" with a total capital stock valuation of \$1,237.92 held by 13 stockholders.¹⁷ This company filed the first water right on the Snake River (June 11, 1880), and began the construction of

¹⁷Carter, 149.

an eight mile long canal in the same year. The durability of some of the early pioneer irrigation systems is demonstrated by the valuation of this same company in 1954. The report for that year shows a decreed water right of 20,907 inches compared to an initial right of 2,000 inches,¹⁸ and 332 stockholders in the system compared to the original 13.¹⁹

It would be without much relevance to list or narrate the formation of the scores of canal companies, large and small, organized as settlement spread north and south of the Snake River. The area became and remains today literally honeycombed with primary canal systems. Authorities have disagreed somewhat on the precise number of diversion canals which have existed at any given time, but the latest study of irrigation in the upper valley in the 25 years after 1880 notes that primary canal construction from the Snake channel during that period

¹⁸Inches of water (sometimes referred to as "miners inches") is a measurement of water flow units. One inch is 1/50th of a cubic foot per second of time (50 inches is a flow of one cubic foot per second). This latter flow (50 inches) would provide enough water for two acre feet per day, or enough to cover one acre with two feet of water. In practical terms, some row crops could be sustained by one foot of water per acre which would provide water for about two irrigations per season (six inches each application), while other crops such as alfalfa require up to thirty inches of applied irrigation water per season. Information supplied by Professor Glen Stringham, Department of Irrigation Engineering, Utah State University.

¹⁹Carter, p. 149. The Company has a present storage right of 5,000 acre feet in the Palisades Reservoir; U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Reservoir Space Allocations, 1966, Minidoka Project Office, Burley, Idaho.

had been as follows:²⁰

1885	:	21	canals
1890	:	85	
1895	:	137	
1900	:	210	
1905	:	258	

Then of course, numerous laterals and ditches were constructed from each canal to convey the water out over the land. However one wishes to assess the results of this period of intense construction of irrigation works -- whether by statistics or aerial topography -- one can hardly dispute Idaho historian Merrill Beal's observation that "no other valley can boast a more complete system of canals than is found in the upper Snake River country".²¹ The same observation would apply, with only slightly less emphasis, from the Idaho Falls area to south of present Blackfoot. Here again the most common patterns of agricultural development was cooperative farmers' organizations tapping the creeks, tributaries, and the main rivers, rather than irrigation development by financially strong and more centralized canal corporations as in the Boise experience.

One notable example of more coordinated central planning and cooperative effort among user organizations in the upper

²⁰Carter, 6-7. Arthur Larson, Watermaster, District 36, indicates that there are presently 95 diversion canals on the river above Blackfoot which shows the degree of consolidation which has taken place in recent years; interview July 19, 1972.

²¹Merrill D. Beal, Snake River Forks Country (Rexburg, Idaho: The Journal Press, 1935), 35.

valley was the construction of the Great Feeder Dam on the Snake River during the winter of 1894-95. Some of the numerous small canal associations taking water from the Snake east of Rigby did so from the south channel of the river, the so-called "dry bed". This channel represented an earlier course of the river and one which in 1894 still received the high water overflow as the Snake, year by year, cut a new channel slightly to the north of the dry bed and left the canal associations progressively drier each year. One investigator noted that there were nine canal headgates in fifteen miles of dry bed channel.²²

The objective of those who organized the Great Feeder Canal Company was to build a dam on the main channel of the river in order to divert water into the south channel or "dry bed" for use by those several small companies which depended upon the dry bed for their water. The company was incorporated in 1894 and, consistent with Idaho water law, designated the point of diversion on the river and filed on 110,000 inches of water. It was capitalized in the amount of \$110,000 in shares of five dollars each for a term of fifty years.²³ The dam was built during the winter by men and teams from each of the smaller individual companies hauling rock and cottonwood timber from the nearby canyons. A large canal was also constructed from the dam, 100 feet wide and a mile long to connect with the south channel. Merle Wells notes that upon completion of the work

²²Lewis, 33.

²³Carter, 80

in 1895, the Great Feeder system then represented the largest single irrigation project in the world.²⁴ The unique success of this pioneer project should be underscored. Before the national Reclamation Act was passed it was clearly the exception when a pioneer irrigation company, even those with strong eastern financial support, could come to fruition and survive the rigors of construction, water resource maintenance, and continued financing. Set in such relief -- before the period of massive federal aid and without extensive support from financial institutions -- the construction and durability of the Great Feeder system, built and owned by the farmers, is all the more remarkable.

Thus, nineteenth-century Idaho presented a variety of patterns in reclamation development. First, in the 1850's, had come the Mormons closely following the land settlement patterns which were being used by most Mormon settlements in the Great Basin. In western Idaho during the early 1880's eastern capitalists caught the gleam of opportunity in reclamation development near Boise, an agricultural area which had been growing rapidly since the discovery of gold in 1862. In the fifteen years before 1900, private development characterized the course of reclamation (though the scale was nowhere comparable to the Twin Falls area which would blossom under the Carey Act), and provided the foundation for federal projects which would commence in the area in 1905. Finally, it was during this

²⁴Beal and Wells, II, 131.

same period that transplanted Mormons entered eastern Idaho. Successful reclamation here was the result of very favorable topography (a fertile flood plain, and water which was easily diverted), previous experience with irrigated agriculture, and the kind of cooperative enterprise which resulted in the Great Feeder system.

Before the turn of the century, most of the easily accessible land and water resources had been either settled or exploited, not only in Idaho but throughout most of the arid western states. These lands, such as eastern Idaho in the 1880's, consisted primarily of areas adjacent to accessible streams where the water could be diverted easily without the necessity of having to invest large sums of money for the construction of expensive diversion work. As the lands along these watercourses were taken up in the years before 1900, extensive settlement beyond this line became dependent on more costly means of bringing water to the new land. The public land laws passed by Congress in the years before 1900 were certainly not tailored to cope with this problem or to facilitate settlement on western arid lands.

Since the Civil War the public land laws passed in the Congress had been only marginally successful in parcelling out the public domain for family homesteads. The several public land acts passed between 1860 and 1900 seem to have had in practice (though not in intent) two common characteristics.

First, the laws were easily circumvented to the benefit of land companies, corporations, and speculators, with the effect that the western farmer most frequently obtained his land from the railroads, state governments, or land companies instead of "proving up" on a government entry. So far had land concentration gone in California as early as 1870, for example, that Fred Shannon noted that a person had to approach a speculator in order to get title to an acre of it.²⁵

The second characteristic of the land laws, particularly those laws which related to the high plains and the intermountain area, is that they were drafted without relation to the economic and physical requirements which the region imposed upon any settlement endeavor. The 640 acres granted under the Desert Land Act (1877), required irrigation within three years, and perhaps represents the clearest example of underestimating the requirements of family settlement in the west. The Homestead Act, on the other hand, provided a land allotment under terms which rendered it too small for stock-raising in an area which sometimes required forty acres to sustain a single steer, and too big for a single family irrigation unit.²⁶ The ultimate

²⁵Fred Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture 1860-1897" (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1945), 72. "Between 1860 and 1900 fewer than one-sixth of the new farms were the result of free entries, perhaps even considerably fewer because of the ease with which land companies obtained properties by false entries and commutation", Louis Hacker, The Course of American Economic Growth and Development (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1970) 187.

²⁶Stegner, 225. Powell had proposed a more realistic arid homestead unit of eighty acres, and four sections (2560 acres) for a grazing unit.

resignation of what was probably a large number of homesteaders who had been tempted into western settlement by misconceived public land policies is reflected in the prose of one settler's letter to a U.S. Land Office register in Kansas:

In answer to your favor of the third instant, in referring to my entry 19005 under the homestead law, will say that I have no cause to show within the prescribed thirty days (nor thirty weeks, nor months even) why my claim should not be forfeited to said piece of land in that arid region where rains are as scarce as the proverbial hen's teeth and as far between as angel's visits; where water is more precious than diamonds; where the lean and hungry coyote barks ever to the majestic silence of the lonely and unpeopled prairies; where the festive jackrabbit wanders unmolested, lordly "monarch of all he surveys" and mourns for his lost companions, the Indian, buffalo and "settler" who are not.

I voluntarily surrender all my right, title and interest in said land forever, and irrevocably to the eminent domain of our own "Uncle Sam", blest be his magnanimous great heart for that beneficent homestead law that plants the settler on his lonely claim forty miles from nowhere and out of God's knowledge, to delve a fortune from the bosom of Mother Earth to the tune of blizzards, cyclones, grasshoppers and chinch bugs, and after a few short and fitful years, full of sorrow and hard work, he seeks his last and only resting place in the bosom of that same Mother Earth, his only companion in his isolation.

I congratulate his excellency, the President on this magnificent addition to the public domain. I thought it forfeited year ago.²⁷

²⁷Unsigned letter found in the papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Idaho Historical Society, Boise, Idaho, General Correspondence. At the top and not in the signature block, the letter bears the name of Reed. This was probably Major Fred R. Reed who was the immigration supervisor for the syndicates which constructed the Twin Falls North and South Side Carey Act projects, and who probably came to possess the letter or its copy.

Idaho's Senator Borah, in 1912, accurately posed the difficulty of settling on arid western agricultural land not under a reclamation system; "The government bets 160 acres against the entry fee of \$14 that the settler can't live on the land for five years without starving to death."²⁸

Though in itself inadequate, the Desert Land Act of 1877 haltingly prepared the way for the subsequent passage of the Carey Act. As originally framed, the Desert Land Act provided that a settler might obtain title to 640 acres of land, provided the property could be brought under irrigation within three years -- a virtual impossibility. The law was amended in 1890 and 1891 to allow for a filing of 320 acres and provided that only 80 acres need be reclaimed within the three year period.

It was against this backdrop of inappropriate public land laws that Congress passed the Carey Act in August, 1894 as part of the general appropriations bill for that year. Named for Wyoming Senator Joseph M. Carey, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Public Lands, the bill was ultimately to achieve only spotted success but it was to have substantial consequences for the economic development of Idaho. In perspective, we can see that the Carey Act was a half-way house between the failure of previous land laws and the enactment of the Newlands Act (1902) inaugurating the era of modern reclamation development.

The Carey Act provided for the cession of a million acres of land to any of the western states and territories willing

²⁸Cited in Roy M. Robbins, Our Landed Heritage, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942), 375

to undertake the reclamation of lands segregated under the grant. The land was to be sold by the state in homestead units of 40, 80, or 160 acres. The law required that at least one-eighth of each tract (a minimum of five acres for a 40 acre unit) be brought under irrigation, at which time final proof could be made and patent on the land issued to the individual settler. Two important amendments were necessary, however, to attract the needed private capital for the construction of costly irrigation works. The first amendment (1896) authorized the state to create a lien against the land, thereby providing a degree of investment security for private capital. The second amendment to the Carey Act (1901) provided for a ten year period of construction and reclamation work, the period to begin at the commencement of the project, rather than requiring completion of the project ten years from the passage of the Act as the original bill had stipulated. It should be noted that the construction company sold water rights (the price of which varied according to the particular project), while the state sold the land at fifty cents per acre, one-half to be paid at time of land application and the remainder when final proof was made. When the system was complete, the contract between the state and the construction company stipulated that the latter would turn the system over to the settlers.

Other features of the operation of the Carey Act should be emphasized; the Articles of Agreement between the federal

government and the State of Idaho are probably exemplary.²⁹ These Articles, signed by Interior Secretary Ethan A. Hitchcock and Governor Frank Steunenberg expressly absolve the federal government from all supervisory or financial responsibility in the matter of construction or reclamation. The grants of land to the state and the final patents were made by the government "free from cost for survey or price", and no state laws or obligations assumed in the process of reclamation were to bind the United States to any obligation beyond the granting of land and issuance of patent when the reclamation had satisfied the terms of the Carey Act.

It is also to be noted that neither the Carey Act nor the Articles of Agreement define the manner in which reclamation was to be accomplished, but that "... said State shall have full power, right, and authority to enact such laws, and from time to time to make and enter into such contracts and agreements, and to create and assume such obligations in relation to and concerning said lands as may be necessary to induce and cause such irrigation and reclamation thereof as is required by this contract and the said acts of Congress..."³⁰ In practice this meant that any participating state was required to plan, fund,

²⁹U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, Articles of Agreement between the Secretary of the Interior and the Governor of Idaho, February 25, 1901. Federal Records Center, Seattle, Washington. Accession No. 62A434, FRC Container No. B4397.

³⁰Ibid., My emphasis.

and supervise the implementation of the Carey Act. This financial and administrative responsibility given to the state perhaps explains in part the reluctance and hesitancy on the part of most western states to take advantage of the Carey Act. In this reluctance we may see one of the principal reasons for the limited success in land settlement under this act. For those states such as Wyoming and Idaho, however, which did establish a reclamation commission and corollary staff to take advantage of the public land gratuity of the federal government, the opportunities were great indeed. We will now look at that development in Idaho which was the national showcase of the Carey Act: The Twin Falls Empire.

CHAPTER 2

THE CAREY ACT IN IDAHO AND THE WEST

"When the whole country is densely populated, the Snake River will be turned out of its bed and used to irrigate this basin."

--Fred B. Goddard, Where to Emigrate and Why (1869)

"And because I can look about me today and see this marvelous development, I say God bless the author of the Carey Act."

--Idaho Senator Weldon B. Heyburn, at Twin Falls on "Railroad Day," August 7, 1905.

In the historical assessments of western economic development, particularly regarding the reclamation of arid lands, the Carey Act has not fared well. Like land laws before it, the legislative vision which produced the Carey Act was still not of a magnitude sufficient enough to meet the demands of an arid desert environment. There are arguments, however, which suggest that the fault lay less with the legislative provisions of the Carey Act than with incompetent state bureaucracies and administrative machinery created to implement the several Carey Act projects in Idaho and other parts of the west. But however reluctant the states may have been to become committed financially and legally in the process of reclamation, the Carey legislation seems to have represented a final effort to preserve

the role of individualism and private enterprise in an aspect of western economic activity where those virtues were becoming increasingly irrelevant. This is not sufficient reason, however, to treat the Carey Act in the same breath with the Timber and Stone legislation or even the Desert Land Act. Rather, it is important to note those areas of the west in the post-1895 period where private reclamation efforts did add significantly to a state's economic structure. And before passing on to the era of federal reclamation, it is incumbent upon the historian to assay the successful projects as well as the most signal failures, and to suggest what seems to have been the most important reasons for the limited success of private reclamation efforts in Idaho and the west generally under the Carey Act.

Twelve western states including Idaho accepted the provisions of the Carey Act and proceeded then to create the necessary state machinery for its implementation. In all of the states except Montana, Oregon, Wyoming, and Idaho reclamation success under the Carey Act was either totally absent or very modest--usually less than 5,000 total acres in each state receiving final patent for the settlers.¹ Of these eight states showing little or no progress, Utah is an interesting exception and deserves passing comment.

¹Mikel H. Williams, History of Development and Current Status of the Carey Act in Idaho (Boise: Idaho Department of Reclamation, March, 1970), 10-13.

In the Utah experience, Professor Leonard Arrington has shown the futility of commencing early reclamation projects in arid regions without the promise of assistance by a central government--or in this case, a church.² In the late 1850's Mormon settlers undertook a colonization effort in the Sevier Desert of Utah, about 110 miles south-southeast of Salt Lake City. Near present Delta (population 1600) several successive diversion dams were constructed across the Sevier River only to be washed out during periods of high spring run-off. Church officials organized a company in 1889, and under provisions of the Desert Land Act, constructed the Sevier Bridge Reservoir works which replaced the nine previous dams, thus giving a degree of permanence and security previously unknown in this part of western Utah. However, beyond this fairly modest project (100,000 acre-feet storage capacity, compared with Idaho's American Falls 1.7 million; Palisades 1.2 million; Jackson Lake 847,000) reclamation in Utah came to depend upon civil instead of church government for success.

In this state where Mormon pioneers had started successful reclamation enterprises a half century before the passage of the Carey Act, only one request for land segregation under this act was ever made. In 1901 Utah accepted the provisions of the Carey Act and established the machinery for its implementation.

²Leonard J. Arrington, "Taming the Turbulent Sevier: A Story of Mormon Desert Conquest," Western Humanities Review, V (Autumn 1951), 393-406.

A single development company was responsible for the reclamation of about 40,000 acres of desert land in the Sevier Desert, most of which was ultimately patented to individual settlers.³ In time, this valley became the principal alfalfa seed producing area in the United States.⁴

The success of this one Utah Carey Act venture, however, depended upon some rather unusual manipulations by Millard County Mormons. In an article published in 1903, the noted Wisconsin economist, Richard T. Ely, commented on the distaste with which Mormons viewed speculative irrigation enterprises.⁵ This seemed to reflect Brigham Young's teachings many years earlier that the scarce resources of the Great Basin should be held in common trust rather than be used for speculative manipulation. After the irrigation works had been constructed, the farmers simply refused to use the water which the corporation provided for them. In a very unsaintly maneuver, they thereby forced the construction company into bankruptcy, whereupon the company was then bought out at a very low price, reorganized at a lower profit plateau, and completed its obligations under the Carey Act. To what degree this precedent may have dampened enthusiasm for further capitalistic reclamation development in Utah it is difficult to say. It was certainly no encouragement.

³Williams, 13.

⁴Arrington, 406.

⁵Richard T. Ely, "Economic Aspects of Mormonism," Harper's Monthly Magazine CVI (April 1903), 620.

Contrary to the Idaho experience, the fact that this successful reclamation effort did not lead to other similar efforts by private or state enterprise in Utah is probably the result of two other more important factors. By 1900 the predominantly Mormon population of Utah had over six million acres irrigated by the diversion of mountain streams and by the location of artesian sources.⁶ The drainage of the Wasatch Front from Provo north to the Idaho border had long since been appropriated, first by pioneers, and then by maturing communities and water users associations. Land segregation and development under the Carey Act presupposed access to availability of unappropriated water sources. In Utah, most sources of water had already been appropriated.

The second factor operating in Utah which may be seen to have limited Carey Act development here and perhaps in other areas of the west (and which may be contrasted with the Idaho experience) is the lack of easily accessible rivers. The drainage of the high Uinta Range in northeastern Utah, bordered on the north by Wyoming, is through Indian reservation lands. The two major rivers in the state, the Green and Colorado Rivers flow mainly through extremely inhospitable badlands and precipitous canyons. In the course of western economic development, one notices the close relationship of population concentration to the physical resources of the land--water, minerals, or

⁶Fred A. Shannon, The Farmer's Last Frontier: Agriculture 1860-1897 (New York: Farrar & Rinehart, 1945), 215-216.

timber--but Utah is exceptional to this general observation. Unlike the Missouri River, the Yellowstone in Montana, the Rio Grande in New Mexico, the Gila River in Arizona, the South Platte and the Arkansas in Colorado, in Utah the courses of the San Juan, Colorado, and Green Rivers have not given rise to an increasing population.

In Utah's brief but successful (though somewhat unusual) experience with the Carey Act we may therefore see some of the limitations inherent elsewhere in the west in the application of this federal land act: the lack of unappropriated water resources or the inaccessibility of large rivers. The fact that Colorado, however, with more abundant water resources, reclaimed successfully only the same small acreage as Utah did under the Carey Act forces us to look elsewhere for the full meaning of this federal land law to the arid western states. The full drama of the Carey Act--its most fruitful successes as well as its most signal failures--was played out in the state of Idaho, and in the course, contributed enormously to the civilization of the Upper Snake River valley as well as to the state's varied economy.

"I have never seen a more perfect farming country in any of my travels. I consider it far superior to anything I have ever seen in Nebraska, Colorado, Utah, or even Oregon." So spoke an enthusiastic Oregon Short Line agent to Charles Francis Adams, new to the railroad's presidency, upon his journey

through southern Idaho in 1885.⁷ The Oregon Short Line, a subsidiary of the parent Union Pacific, had begun construction in 1881 from Granger, Wyoming to link interior America with the promise of the growing Pacific Northwest. By 1884 the road had been constructed through southern Idaho on the route which exists today and finally reached its western terminus at Huntington, Oregon. The original intent of the road builders had been to span southern Idaho as quickly as possible (a "bridge on the Oregon Trail") in order to tap Oregon, Washington, and the imagined wealth of China; but twenty years after completion of the road Adams was equally anxious to tap the new agricultural districts of Idaho. Echoing the sentiments of agent Newman noted above, company immigration officials launched impressive promotional efforts to reach people in the east and midwest to convince them of the wisdom of coming to the irrigated west and to claim a stake in the agricultural boom stimulated by the Carey Act and the Newlands Act of 1902.

But Idaho had already beacons its promise to easterners, particularly to those of an adventuresome temperament such as Ira Burton Perrine. Perrine had come to Idaho from Indiana in 1883 at the age of 22. Alighting from the stagecoach at Hailey, one of the larger towns in the mining district of the Big Wood River which flows out of rugged, central Idaho, Perrine secured initial employment in the famous Mayflower mine at nearby

⁷Robert G. Athern, "The Oregon Short Line", Idaho Yesterdays, 13(Winter 1969-70), 10.

Bullion.⁸ A non-smoker and teetotaller, Perrine's slender frame made him something of a contrast with most other Big Wood miners. But he was here, nevertheless, in the adventure-some west of his youthful dreams earning four dollars a day in the lead and silver producing mines of the Big Wood district.

After a promotion to a position of greater responsibility in the mining business, that of chief ore sampler and supervisor of shipping, Perrine demonstrated a spirit of enterprise and resourcefulness which was to make him famous as an empire builder. Quitting his job at the mine, he trekked eastward 140 miles across the desert with a packhorse to Idaho Falls where he purchased 40 dairy cows. Perrine was going to offer the Big Wood mining camps an unusual alternative to the red-eye whiskey of more traditional fame. In demonstrating that dairying was a more lucrative (and less arduous) vocation than mining, Perrine was fulfilling a role which was repetitive in the history of western settlement. Always, where miners had sought success through a quick exploitive enterprise, more stable "service industries" including agriculture evolved which formed the essential nucleus of permanent settlement. Perrine's adventure in Idaho to this point then was unique in some ways but characteristic in others.

⁸A. O. Kelker, "Ira Perrine's Dream Turned into a Reality," Twin Falls Times-News, June 25, 1972, 12-13. Merrill Beal and Merle W. Wells, History of Idaho, 3 vols (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1959), II, 138.

During the summer of 1884, Perrine kept his mobile dairy in the vicinity of the mines. But in the fall of that year, and in need of winter pasture he moved his herd 75 miles south to the Snake River canyon. Here he encountered one Charles S. Walgamott, an itinerant pioneer and historian of early Idaho, living in a tent near the Shoshone Falls. Walgamott directed Perrine to a location a few miles below the falls to the canyon floor several hundred feet below the surrounding desert plateau. There, framed by a deep alcove in the canyon walls, was a setting of intense beauty, set off by two clear emerald lakes fed by underground springs--Blue Lakes as the site was to become known. Walgamott writes:

I. B. Perrine was pleased. He had found his utopia. Here his youthful vision began to expand. He had planted himself in a spot immediately surrounded by things beautiful, but both to the north and the south desolation existed. This desolation enhanced the beauty of Blue Lakes and afforded food for the imaginative mind and dreamer, and I. B. Perrine was a dreamer.⁹

Blue Lakes was to be Perrine's home and final resting place. It was the showcase of the soon-to-be Twin Falls tract, and a source of awe to its many guests over the years, among whom were William Jennings Bryan (one of Perrine's close friends), Jay Gould, E.H. Harriman, Thomas Moran, and William Allen White.¹⁰

⁹C. S. Walgamott, Reminiscences of Early Days (Seattle: The Shorey Book Store, Facsimile Reproduction, 1971. Originally published in 1926), 113.

¹⁰Kelker, 12-13.

But more importantly, Blue Lakes was to serve as a natural laboratory for Perrine. The first five trees planted at Blue Lakes were carried on horseback 45 miles from the Hagerman valley. Here at Blue Lakes Perrine cultivated by irrigation numerous crops--small grains, fruits, vegetables, and berries--which he marketed in the mining camps and in the few settled communities of Cassia County. The quality of his produce was exceptional and earned him five gold medals for fruit excellence at world fairs in the United States and in Paris, France. From Perrine's early accomplishments at Blue Lakes the implications for an irrigated empire on the Snake River were apparent, and Perrine then lifted his vision from Blue Lakes to the sagebrush wastes bordering for dozens of miles his own tiny Eden. "Being successful with irrigation at Blue Lakes, Perrine then was ready in 1900 to water 500,000 acres by taking water out of the Snake at a point known as 'The Cedars'. It is now Milner Dam."¹

It is necessary at this point to digress momentarily in order to consider another dimension of the Perrine story and the history of the Twin Falls enterprise. Historical "firsts" tend most frequently to be built upon the compiled work of others. The accolades also tend to fall upon the actor of greatest dynamism and the one who brings into a synthesis the preliminary efforts of others. And so it is in the case of

¹Kelker, "The Story of I. B. Perrine, Times-News, June 27, 1971, A24.

Ira B. Perrine. As one sifts the raw material of the Twin Falls story--the now elderly original participants, the company papers, news accounts, fragmentary histories of the early days--one senses the need on the part of some individuals for historical justification (and one could expect no less); the feeling that too much credit has been given some persons and too little to others. The most scholarly treatment of Idaho history scans rapidly over lesser personalities to grasp at I. B. Perrine:

Perhaps Frank Ribbet [sic] and John F. Hansen, two Cassia County pioneer surveyors, were the first to envision the possibility of irrigating the desert lands with water from Snake River. Tradition has it that these men were considering such a possibility in the early nineties. In the meantime, another man was also cogitating upon this stupendous matter [Perrine].

It is affirmed that Frank Ribbett [sic] stood near American Falls in 1880, and spoke of the possibility of diverting the flow of Snake River upon the desert. If so, the vision required time for maturation.¹²

One of the better personal memoirs is somewhat more romantic:

Slowly and surely as the years passed the smell of fruit became stronger than the odor of the sagebrush. Civilization was doing its work. Man had conquered the desert and had made an oasis of that little spot [Blue Lakes]. Why could not man conquer the Great American Desert which surrounded that spot? One evening

¹²Merrill D. Beal and Merle W. Wells, History of Idaho, 3 vols (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1959), II, 137.

that thought stole into the mind of Ira Burton Perrine. It was just like a dream at first but it kept coming back into his mind.¹³

Paul S. A. Bickel, who became the chief engineer of the huge Twin Falls project had as head of his surveys group a young engineer from Missouri, then in his early twenties, John E. Hayes. As if to underscore the magnitude and importance of the task they faced in developing the project, Bickel once declared to Hayes that "an important dam and the largest irrigation canal in the United States must be located with accuracy and in record time."¹⁴ The personal papers of John Hayes reveal the importance of still other individuals in the story of reclamation, not only in Magic Valley but on the entire upper Snake River. Their preparatory work was essential for Perrine's success; their vision as broad; Only the time was less opportune. Hayes himself, in locating a dam site and canal lines for the Twin Falls Land and Water Company was following a course previously traversed by others with amazing accuracy.

Two of the early forerunners were Frank Riblett, a surveyor for Cassia County, and a pioneer settler, John Hansen. Hayes said of the two, "Both of them played signal roles in the initial promotion of the idea that our portion of southern

¹³H.J. Kingsbury, Bucking the Tide (Seattle: Ganis and Harris, 1949), 49.

¹⁴Personal papers of John E. Hayes, notes for 1934. Now in possession of his widow, Anna Hansen Hayes, Twin Falls, Idaho.

Idaho would someday become that irrigated empire, which we now know it to be."¹⁵ As early as 1881, two years before Perrine came to Idaho and thirteen years before the Carey Act, Riblett made surveys for a reclamation system to water what has now become the federal Minidoka south side project just to the east of the Twin Falls area. When the Reclamation Service did lay out the south side Minidoka system between 1905 and 1909, it was nearly identical with Riblett's plans drawn up almost a generation earlier. His own diary reveals the breadth which his vision of reclamation encompassed in those early years:

...in 1881 and in fact until 1889, I ran lines for the future Minidoka project...In 1887, I ran a preliminary line for a canal out of Snake River, starting at a point 35 miles up stream from American Falls...and traversing on down through Cassia County to the ridge west of Rock Creek.¹⁶

Reference to a map will reveal the overly ambitious character of Riblett's proposal. It is essentially a line drawn from near present day Blackfoot, following the curve of the river, to about the western boundary of present Twin Falls County-- a distance of about 170 miles. His diary continues:

In 1893, ran lines for the future Salmon Falls River project, hoping to cover what is now known as the Bruneau.

¹⁵Personal papers of John E. Hayes. Text for radio address on station KTFI, Twin Falls, 1935.

¹⁶Cited by Hayes, Ibid.

These preliminary lines, so far as they are constructed, do not vary much from those in use today and did much to attract the attention of private citizens and the Government, and to start other and more thorough surveys and investigations, as to the possibility of large irrigation from Snake River.

I have still in my possession, a letter from Hon. Fred T. Dubois, then delegate to congress, stating that the report of my surveys of this territory, embodied in a report made by Territorial Governor A. E. Stevenson had helped considerably in preventing the dismemberment of the Idaho Territory, then proposed.¹⁷

As a direct result of Riblett's pioneering surveys, engineers of the Geological Survey ran lines out of the Snake River on both the north and south sides which were purported to be capable of watering three-quarters of a million acres. Additionally, these surveys led to the exploration for feasible reservoir storage sites. The search finally settled on the Swan Lake site in extreme eastern Idaho just below the present Palisades Dam, and on Jackson Lake (or rather the series of small lakes which became the present large lake after impoundment of the waters). The former still remains "undeveloped" and is certain to provoke a future storm of controversy, while the latter was the first reservoir to be constructed in the Minidoka system.

While working with Riblett, John Hansen more realistically perceived that the plans then being proposed for reclaiming the south side of the Snake River valley involved canal systems of

¹⁷Ibid. The Bruneau refers to that very inhospitable territory in the southwest corner of Idaho (Owyhee County) drained by the Bruneau River.

burdensome length, and that a more feasible proposition would be to run the main canal from a diversion dam at the Cedars-- the present Milner Dam site where in fact water is now diverted to both the north side and south side Twin Falls tracts. Hansen made an independent survey running his main line on what was to be practically the same route as the present Twin Falls main and high line canals. John Hayes wrote, "While I was running the location lines for the Twin Falls south side canals in 1903, Mr Hansen showed me his location line, slightly above our locations."¹⁸

These early investigators went beyond the mere survey of potential reclamation systems. They filed appropriation notices for the use of such waters that might be diverted at the Cedars, and they then set about to find the capital necessary for such a venture. But in the depression-ridden 1890s, no capital was to be forthcoming from eastern investors, especially for wild schemes such as watering western deserts. As the later history of the Carey Act was to show, eastern financiers even in good times exhibited great hesitation about investing in western water works. Furthermore, the ebb and flow of private reclamation in Idaho and elsewhere was extremely sensitive to the health of the national economy as the failure of the Kuhn syndicate in 1913 was later to show.

Thus Perrine had much preliminary work to draw upon as he looked beyond his oasis at Blue Lakes; that is, the important

¹⁸Ibid.

work of Hansen, Riblett, and Hayes. The ideas were already current and in the air. They awaited only an appropriate combination of favorable conditions in order to be crystallized into reality.

Furthermore, these earlier surveyors had accurately defined the geographic bounds of probable success in reclamation activities. But we should also recognize the political dimension of their work in helping to influence Congressional support to continue Idaho as a separate territory at a time when many saw only a sagebrush wasteland as an undesirable but necessary adjunct to another state. This political dimension of their work may stand as an equal, perhaps even greater accomplishment, though probably unknown to them at the time. The Perrine story, in turn, becomes less romantic, but properly weighting the historical scales makes it more plausible. Few would disagree with John Hayes, though, as he conceded that it remained for I. B. Perrine, "pioneer fruit grower of Blue Lakes" to begin once more, as they had done earlier, the uphill job of persuading eastern money that a fortune awaited the one who had the courage to build an irrigation system and fashion an agricultural empire in southern Idaho.

Here it might be worth noting one of the more pervasive features of the western reclamation movement, one which has gone mostly unchallenged until comparatively recent times. In part, it derives much of its rationale from Jeffersonian agra-

rian assumptions concerning the intrinsic virtue of independent, self-sufficient farmers. It also draws some of its strength from a deeply ingrained, perhaps unconscious, propensity to adhere to the Biblical injunction to subdue and conquer the land. From this general philosophical base proceeds an essentially irrational character or an almost schizoid quality in the support for western reclamation.

The promotional literature designed to attract settlers to the western irrigated tracts was heavily permeated with the old Jeffersonian virtues of an independent and self-sufficient yeomanry. Yet, because of the very high cost of the storage and diversion works, the very nature of irrigated agriculture almost immediately imposed upon the farmer a commercial system of agriculture where a crop surplus was essential in order to defray the costs of his proportionate assessments and water rights. No one can look at the difficulties encountered by the settlers on the federal Minidoka project in Idaho (to be discussed in the following chapter) and see any of the simple agrarian virtues which characterized the traditional Jeffersonian assumptions.

This was even more true as reclamation projects, primarily under federal sponsorship, became bigger and more costly. Increasingly, government subsidies became the sine qua non in the stability of western irrigated agriculture, even though the old virtues continued to provide the rationale for opening more and more land, of giving land to the landless and giving the poor man or war veteran a chance. In some ways, the Bureau

of Reclamation since the 1940's has tried to paper over what has come to be seen as the very real costs in subsidizing irrigation. The means has been to write off the real costs in terms of recreational benefits, flood control, etc. Only in the 1960's has the Bureau's cost accounting methods come under severe criticism, and the need been questioned for subsidizing irrigated agriculture in a time of huge farm surpluses and when millions of acres of eastern farmland are in soil banks. But to assert an element of irrationality in the support for western reclamation is merely to attempt to understand the movement better.

Perrine's immediate task now was to secure the necessary capital to begin the project and to see it through. From about 1900 and for the next several years, eastern bankers and bondsmen became more interested in irrigation projects than they hitherto had been. Many of the big bonding houses were in Chicago, and inasmuch as bond issues were to become the principal means of securing capital, that city was frequently referred to as the "mother of western irrigation." This easier access to capital after 1900, coupled with Perrine's own dynamism, ultimately proved to be the means to success for the huge undertaking on which he had embarked.

Through an intermediary, Perrine first secured \$30,000 for a preliminary survey from a Salt Lake City financier, Stanley B. Milner (after whom the community and dam were named). On

September 3, 1900 the articles of incorporation of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company were drawn up with Milner as president and Perrine vice-president. The company declared a capitalization of \$100,000 which included some interests of Boise investors, though it was organized at Salt Lake City and operated under the laws of that state.¹⁹

After the preliminary survey had been completed, an internecine conflict took place between the Boise and Perrine interests, and after a brief power struggle Milner and Perrine bought out the Boise interests. It had been estimated that \$1,500,000 was needed for construction, an amount well beyond the means of even Stanley Milner. Milner did succeed, however, in getting the assistance of one Witcher Jones, a mining broker who held the accounts of several wealthy men who were at the time investing in western mining securities.²⁰ Jones brought the Milner proposition to the attention of Frank H. Buhl, a millionaire in iron and steel from Sharon, Pennsylvania. Buhl was in Utah at the time investigating the possibilities of certain mining investments. Perrine, with the aid of relay wagon teams, conducted Buhl over both the north and south side sagebrush flats in what must have been a dusty whirlwind tour, and Buhl departed Idaho convinced of the soundness of Perrine's proposal and assured him of financial backing. As it was to eventuate, Perrine still had to float bond issues in the amount

¹⁹Bureau of Reclamation, Articles of Incorporation of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, September 3, 1900; Federal Records Depository, Seattle, Washington; Accession No. 62A134, Container No. B4396.

²⁰Walgamott, 117.

of \$600,000 from Trowbridge and Niver, a major Chicago bonding house. With the legal details accomplished, Frank Buhl took over the project in the name of the Buhl-Kimberly Corporation. Peter Kimberly was an eastern friend and associate of Buhl's. Both men are remembered in the names of communities on the tract which they helped build.

In October of the preceding year (1900), and after incorporation, the Twin Falls Land and Water Company appropriated and filed notice for the diversion of 3000 cubic feet per second of the Snake River for use on the south side tract. The Company also filed claim for 400 cubic feet per second for use on the north side. As early as June 25, 1900, Perrine had individually filed for 3000 cubic feet for use on the north side, a right which was subsequently relinquished by the North Side Canal Company in consideration for Jackson Lake water.²¹

In January 1903, a contract was made between the state of Idaho (which had already segregated the land by contract with the Interior Department in 1901) and the Twin Falls Land and Water Company to develop about 270,000 acres under the terms of the Carey Act. Lands were to be sold at 50 cents per acre (25 cents on initial purchase and 25 cents when final proof was made), and the price of the water right was set at \$25 per acre. Payment for water rights covered a period of ten years,

²¹Bureau of Reclamation, Field Report from George B. Archibald, Carey Act Inspector, to the Commissioner, General Land Office, February 23, 1915, 33-35. Federal Records Depository, Seattle; Accession No. 62A434, Container No. B4396.

three dollars per acre payable in cash, the balance at 6 per cent interest. A maintenance fee of 80 cents per acre per year was charged to meet company operating expenses. Residence on the land was not required until the company notified the settler that water was available for his claim. Final proof (one-eighth of the land under cultivation) had to be made within three years.²²

It is important to note that the company sold water rights, not land. The land was purchased from the state. The Carey Act stipulated that settlers taking up land which the state had segregated (land which would or could be serviced by the constructed works) were required to purchase the water right from the company, thereby giving the construction company some assurance on its investment. Construction was begun on the diversion dam and canal in March 1903, with Paul S. A. Bickel the project engineer and John Hayes his assistant and resident engineer. In the span of two years the dam was complete, the gates were dropped in place and the water of Snake River was diverted into a canal 10 feet deep, 80 feet wide at the bottom and 120 feet at the top, and made water available to 60,000 acres of potential Magic Valley farmland. The largest irrigation project in the country and one of the largest in the world

²²H.G. Raschbacher, Irrigation From Snake River, Idaho (USDA, Office of experiment Stations--Circular No. 65, 1906), 3.

was now underway and it began to receive the national attention and acclaim due it.²³

Despite the magnitude of the project, or perhaps because of it, it took the actual sight of water backing up behind the dam and flowing into the main and low-line canals to dispel the doubts and skepticism of potential settlers. A land sale had been held two years earlier, in June 1903, at Shoshone with the hope of obtaining needed additional capital, but sales at the opening were disappointingly low. Only a dozen or so people turned out, so deep did the skepticism run. It was doubtless an embarrassing day for Perrine, for Frank Buhl was present and had kept a close eye on the land drawing at Shoshone that day. In view of the dismal results of the sales a thoroughly disillusioned Buhl, back in Sharon with 1½ million dollars invested in what was appearing to be a useless Idaho desert, summoned his general manager, Walter G. Filer, to call a meeting in Chicago. Buhl gave him special exhortation to "make sure that farmer Perrine is there."²⁴ On the carpet Perrine was at his best, and instead of being humbled, struck out with a bold new initiative. He assured Buhl that the lands would sell, given the right kind of promotion. He asked Buhl for a

²³See for example, E.G. Adams, "America's Greatest Irrigation Enterprise," Pacific Monthly XXII(November 1904), 281-287; D.W. Ross, "Work of the Reclamation Service in Idaho," Pacific Monthly XVI(September 1906), 313-316.

²⁴Kingsbury, 52-53.

5 year contract in which Perrine was to sell 25,000 acres per year. Having once again persuaded Buhl of the profits to be made on the tract, Perrine then secured a \$40,000 loan from a Chicago bank for promotional activities.

The first land sale on the tract itself occurred in October 1904. At that time the only building on the tract was the small wooden shack of the Twin Falls Investment Company, an organization charged with the responsibility of land sales; Perrine was vice-president and general manager. By this time, still four months before the water would be turned in, the sales company disposed of 11,000 acres. But after the canal gates were finally opened, new confidence sparked the hopes of potential settlers. John Hayes remarked of this occasion:

A nation had been watching that tense drama at the Milner Dam, and as soon as success was realized there, prospective investors scrambled headlong, much in the same manner of the earlier gold seekers...Between March first and March third [1905], \$65,000 worth of lots were sold on the Twin Falls townsite which was then merely a diagonally laid out/square/mile, the streets cleared of sagebrush...and marked by pine stakes as to the boundaries of lots which were, before many years, to hold fine business blocks of brick and stone, landscaped parks, and substantial homes and gardens.²⁵

At another land sale, on March 23, an additional 35,000 acres were sold. Hayes' claim that "not one acre of the land sold then or later, ever reverted to the company because of nonpayment of interest or principle" seems corroborated by

²⁵Personal papers of John Hayes, notes #12, undated, 4.

the business records of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company. On innumerable occasions requests were made to the company by settlers asking for a delay in a payment schedule or an extension of terms. Invariably the company was sympathetic, although not without a word of warning or an assessment of increased interest payments. As it turned out, such a policy not only was justified in terms of cordial relations but it also appeared to be good business sense.

By late 1905 the growth and progress had been so spectacular that a visitor to the Twin Falls tract might have been able to sense the hesitation of Herodotus on his return from the Nile, afraid to tell of the immense crops he had seen for fear his friends would think he had lost the ability to communicate the truth. Additionally, one hundred and twenty-five freight teams were making regular trips back and forth between Twin Falls and the railroad at Shoshone (the railroad did not reach Twin Falls until August, 1905). It was reported that in one week 70 car loads of lumber were sold to land and lot holders.²⁶ Before winter, Twin Falls had its first bank, doctor, attorney, dentist, barber, school, newspaper, a combination saloon and restaurant (called the Bucket of Blood), and rooming house--the rudiments of civilization made possible by the chemistry of uniting land with water. By 1910, the tax evaluation of Twin Falls County (created by the state legislature in

²⁶Kingsbury, 52-53.

1907) was assessed at 5.7 million dollars. John Hayes noted in 1934 that the average selling price of land had more than tripled, and on a "farmed-per-acre" basis, the tract value had increased \$25,755,000 or about one million dollars per year over a period of 25 years.²⁷ At a time (1934) when the right to produce maximum crops was being questioned, Hayes withheld commenting on the proposition of the Agricultural Adjustment Act, but noted that farmers on the tract produced as much as 40 bushels of beans to the acre, four tons of alfalfa, 15 tons of sugar beets, 50 bushels of wheat, and 200 sacks of potatoes.²⁸

Whatever indices of growth one chooses--population, increase in agricultural production, tax evaluations--people no longer began to think of southern Idaho as merely "a bridge on the Oregon Trail" which, in the words of Captain Fremont, "would not produce enough of fodder to provide even a stopping place on the trail."²⁹ With the growth of urban centers (urban is used here in a relative sense, for observers in the 1970's would consider Idaho to be lacking most of the qualities of urbanization), particularly the growth of the tracts two principal cities, Twin Falls and Buhl, with lesser centers at Kimberley, Filer, and Hansen, the south side project of the Twin

²⁷Papers of John Hayes, notes #13, undated, 5.

²⁸Ibid.

²⁹Cited in papers of John Hayes, notes #11, 1935, 7.

Falls Land and Water Company became the embryonic model of today's federal Minidoka Project and the agricultural jewel of the entire upper Snake River basin. Well might the name of Magic Valley be identified with Twin Falls.

From many parts of the west entrepreneurs sought the key to the Twin Falls success. From Denver came a letter from the president of a Colorado power and irrigation company, a company with land which had been segregated under the Carey Act. He asked, "...If you could spare the time and trouble to tell us how you found settlers for your project, it certainly would be greatly appreciated by us." He then proceeded to question: What was the name of the colonizing company, the construction company, how many acres, how long did it take, the cost?³⁰

A reply in late 1910 to the president of the Canadian Pacific Railroad Company required from Voigt a complete exposition of the Carey Act and an expression of regret that because the Twin Falls project was complete and had been turned over to the Twin Falls Canal Company (the users' organization), there were no more printed materials or advertising.³¹ From the Bitter Root Valley Irrigation Company in South Dakota came

³⁰Letter to Fred Voigt, secretary of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, from Lafayette Hughes, The Great Northern Irrigation and Power Company, Denver, Colo.; Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Idaho State Historical Society; Boise, Idaho, Box 2.

³¹Letter from Voigt to Charles Peterson of the Canadian Pacific RR Company, Calgary, November 12, 1910. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 1.

a request for copies of water and land deeds with completed contracts.³²

Other inquiries sought advice on the proper kind of receipt books, the use of ledgers, the duties of the watermaster and ditchriders. A thinly veiled fear was expressed by the manager of the Kings Hill Extension Irrigation Company, a sister Carey Act project sixty miles downstream on the Snake River from Twin Falls:

We are just now completing the canals..and within the next twenty days will have our water available for delivery. The writer who has the misfortune of being the manager of this project (it is certainly a misfortune to be manager of any irrigation project) has had absolutely no experience in the operation of a canal system. Am writing this to ask if you would consider it an imposition..to call upon you and if you can manage to give us some time and explain in some detail the general system that you have found the most efficient..³³

The manager's fear was well justified, for the Kings Hill Project was one of many Carey Act ventures which quickly folded.

But it seemed that wherever Ira "Burt" Perrine touched the desert, the sage permanently gave way to crops and settlers and towns; first at Blue Lakes, then the 270,000 acre south side

³²Letter to Voigt from the Bitter Root Valley Irrigation Company, Mitchell, South Dakota; March 30, 1910. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 1.

³³Letter to Voigt from L.G. Bradley, Kings Hill Irrigation Company, Hammett, Idaho, April 4, 1910; Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 1.

project. With this nearing completion by 1909, Perrine cast about for new projects. Frank Buhl had reaped an enormous profit from his south side investment, but was disinclined to embark on another such venture. Stanley Milner, from Salt Lake, Perrine's first financier and partner, and Peter Kimberley, Buhl's eastern partner, were both dead.

Actually, on the same day the Twin Falls Land and Water Company had filed a notice of water location and appropriation for the south side project (October 11, 1900), Perrine had also filed an appropriation notice for the use of 400 cubic feet per second for diversion to the north side of Snake River, the point of diversion being the same for both sides-- "the Cedars" or Milner Dam site.³⁴ So it was natural that here in 1907 Perrine should focus his attention to the possible development of a similar tract on the north side, so successful had been his present venture. In liquidating his western irrigation interests Frank Buhl gave Perrine an option for the sum of \$300,000 on all his interests in the Milner Dam for the diversion of water to the north side. Perrine was ultimately successful in obtaining eastern financial support and in taking up the \$300,000 option with the Pittsburg interests of W. S. and J. S. Kuhn. An indenture was completed by Frank Buhl which conveyed to W. S. Kuhn for the sum of one

³⁴Bureau of Reclamation, Notice of Water Right Location, Exhibits C and D, October 11, 1900; Federal Records Depository, Seattle. Accession No. 62A434, Container No. B4397.

dollar "all the property, franchises, rights and privileges... for the construction of irrigation works...by virtue of the contract...between the Twin Falls Land and Water Company and the State of Idaho, for the building of irrigation works under... the Carey Act."³⁵ Thus on January 1, 1907 the Kuhn syndicate had acquired all rights of development north of the river, including a proportionate interest in the Milner Dam. These interests were deeded to the Twin Falls North Side Land and Water Company, a company which operated under the incorporation laws of the state of Delaware.

Idaho irrigation projects were a relatively small segment of Kuhn's financial empire, but they were made possible by his eastern banking, railroad, power, and coal interests, as well as by successful reclamation ventures in California. The interdependence of these many interests were to be revealed in 1913 when the Kuhn Empire began to fail and the north side project was finally forced into the hands of a bondholders' committee.

In other ways, the history of the north side project was less sanguine than had been that of the south side. The tract, which today encompasses most of Jerome County and includes the towns of Jerome, Hazelton, Eden, and Wendell, was developed in three successive land segregations under the Carey Act which initially included about 125,000 acres. At the opening of the

³⁵Bureau of Reclamation, Indenture Between the Twin Falls Land and Water Co., with W.S. Kuhn, Exhibit A, April 2, 1907; Federal Records Depository, Seattle. Accession No. 62A134, Container No. B4397.

north side lands in 1907, applications totaling 48,000 acres were received--18,000 in excess of what was at that time available.³⁶ The continued and prolific growth of the south side tract was clearly whetting the hopes of land hungry settlers and potential small businessmen. At the land opening at Jerome on October 1, 1907, 50,000 acres were filed on within 48 hours.³⁷

Contemporary accounts of the opening reveal the optimism and bustle of the proceedings. The day had brought with it coldness and a drizzle of rain. "The grog shop located near the land office received no more than passing fancy as the estimated 1000 persons who came to the event had a purpose of a more serious nature."³⁸ The crowd was noted to be one of a highly cosmopolitan nature, with Chicago businessmen and many from midwestern and eastern states--Iowa, Nebraska, the Dakotas, Indiana, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, and Washington. "There were men in silk hats, straw hats, and no hats; men in slickers, in bear skins, and one man particularly attracted attention for his cream colored suit with white shoes," so reported the North Side News.³⁹ All those who had registered by filing applications for land had their names placed in a hopper. One chose his homestead in the order his name was drawn. The more choice

³⁶The Twin Falls News, April 26, 1907, 1.

³⁷The Twin Falls News, October 4, 1907, 2.

³⁸The North Side News (Golden Jubilee Edition; Jerome, Idaho), June 20, 1957, 11.

³⁹Ibid.

land, of course, went to those whose names were drawn first. It was reported that the man whose name was drawn first, a Missourian, made his 160 acre selection just south of the Jerome townsite. As an indication of the promise which many believed this tract portended, two hours after he had deposited \$521 for the land right, he refused an offer of \$16,000 for the land. His son farms the tract today.

As Perrine had done for the south side project, an immense barrage of promotional activity helped bring land applicants to Jerome. The biggest selling point of course was the south side. The volcanic ash soil of the region was repeatedly emphasized, and instances were cited where many who had taken farms on the south side sold out in a few years with great profits. Fruit raising was another emphasis of the promotion men. Sorghum cane yielded 166 gallons of syrup per acre which brought 95¢ per gallon on the local market. "The sun shines 300 days a year with ten inches annual rainfall. The land slopes gently to the south and produces enormous crops of everything that can be raised in a temperate climate" was a popular promotional refrain.⁴⁰

But the north side operation was probably the first twentieth-century tract, whether financed by government or by private sources, to begin to experience the most important

⁴⁰Ibid, 10.

problem endemic to the upper Snake River basin, or indeed to any extensive area of reclamation activity. With each succeeding segregation of land on the north side, the water rights were correspondingly tenuous. In short water years, in other words, those settlers on the first segregation had prior claim on water, and it was entirely possible that settlers on the third segregation, in an extreme situation, would receive none.⁴¹ The optimism of the Kuhns however, was such that in their 1909 advertising matter they could claim:

The water supply is far in excess of possible needs. In addition to the underlying rights in Snake River, owned by the Company, the U.S. government has arranged with the Twin Falls North Side Land and Water Company to release each year if necessary, from their great reservoir in Jackson Lake, 150,000 acre-feet or 49,000,000 gallons of water. This supply, in addition to the presence of great reservoir sites on the tract, insures the entrymen an abundance of water for irrigating the entire tract.⁴²

⁴¹It may be of interest to note the comparison of Utah water law in this instance. One investigator has noted that among those in Utah holding primary water rights (rights equal to the ordinary low-water flow of the stream and based upon seven years of undisturbed use), there is no distinction of priorities, regardless of the fact that there may be considerable time between periods of settlement. "This is a reflection of the custom in Mormon colonial policy to reserve as far as practicable for later settlers in a community the same advantages and opportunities as were enjoyed by those who broke the trail and laid the foundations." Feramorz Young Fox, "The Mormon Land System: A Study of the Settlement and Utilization of Land Under Direction of the Mormon Church" (unpublished Ph.D dissertation, Northwestern University, 1932), 140.

⁴²Lynn Crandall, "History of Irrigation Development in Snake River Valley," Address to Snake River water users, Idaho Falls, Idaho, 1946.

As subsequent experience was to show, however, the Kuhns missed on two counts. First, one of the contemplated reservoirs for the Jerome tract would not fill because of the extremely porous soil; and second, the Jerome tract in later years required over five times the amount of water which the Kuhns had originally estimated. The storage allocations of the north side tract in 1966 exceeded 825,000 acre-feet.⁴³

One observation is pertinent here. The extent of the Kuhns' miscalculations regarding the needs of the Jerome tract had meant utter failure for dozens of other Carey Act projects, both in Idaho and elsewhere. As one attempts to weigh the elements contributing to success or failure on these privately developed reclamation efforts--and more will be said on this shortly--the initial prerequisite for success was a reasonably steady and abundant supply of water. If this seems all too obvious it apparently did not seem so for dozens of would-be entrepreneurs early in the century. While many Carey Act failures could be attributed to company mismanagement or bureaucratic bungling even where water was abundant, many more failures occurred as a result of over-optimism in the calculation of consistently available water. And it is important to note that this overarching requirement--consistently available water--was not fulfilled until the passage of the National Reclamation Act (the Newlands Act) in 1902 and the subsequent construction

⁴³Reservoir Space Allocations, July, 1966. Bureau of Reclamation, Minidoka Project Superintendent's Office, Burley, Idaho.

of a large storage reservoir system on the Snake and its tributaries.

A comparison of the north and south side tracts is instructive in this regard. The south side project (240,000 acres) had a very substantial and early water appropriation of the natural flow of the Snake River. In the years since its development the managers of the system have found it necessary to buy storage space in Jackson Lake and American Falls reservoirs in an amount totaling only 248,000 acre feet (about one acre-foot per acre for purposes of later comparison). On the other hand, the Jerome tract, enlarged over the years to about 185,000 acres, is dependent on 826,000 acre feet of water in federally constructed storage reservoirs (about $4\frac{1}{2}$ acre feet per acre).⁴⁴ The point is, it is difficult to overestimate the importance of federal reclamation activity to the success and magnitude of some of the privately financed Carey Act projects, and the Twin Falls north side in particular.

If the south side project was the nucleus of the Twin Falls empire, the Jerome tract was its most brilliant satellite. The Kuhns continued to underwrite Magic Valley irrigation projects. The wealthy Pennsylvanians had not walked into southern Idaho blindly. In each instance they were allied with experienced professionals. Ira Perrine and engineer P.S.A. Bickel helped

⁴⁴Decreed Water Rights, District No. 36, April 1, 1961. Interview with Snake River watermaster, A.L. Larson, Idaho Falls, Idaho; July 15, 1972.

guide the Jerome project to completion as they had done for the south side (though company organization was quite different). Perrine and John Hayes who had been the surveyor for the Twin Falls Land and Water Company also interested the Kuhns in the so-called Twin Falls Salmon River project, a 150,000 acre tract just to the south of the original Twin Falls project (the name of "Twin Falls" was associated with several projects as if to invoke the sweet smell of success which the first project had wrought). At the Salmon River opening (not to be confused with the great "river of no return" in central Idaho) The Twin Falls News announced, "Not since Rameses opened the historic valley of the Nile to settlement under the pioneer irrigation project in the world, has there been such a notable land opening as that which occurred on Monday, June 1 [1908]."⁴⁵ A correspondent wrote from crowded Twin Falls City, "Total registration for the Salmon River drawing is 2900; money on deposit \$950,000. Town of Twin Falls is full of people; greatest land drawing known."⁴⁶ Land applications on the Salmon River tract were made for a half-million acres, and \$1,500,000 was ultimately put up by those desiring land. But on this tract, initially so promising, the promoters badly overreached themselves resulting in untold misery for hundreds of people. Of the 150,000 acres, only 35,000 were eventually patented, with a correspond-

⁴⁵Twin Falls News, June 5, 1908, 1.

⁴⁶Letter from Voigt to A.C. Milner, May 29, 1908. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 3.

ingly high degree of privation for many settlers because of the lack of sufficient water.

The 15,000 acre Twin Falls-Oakley project, surrounding the present town of Oakley and watered from Goose Creek was also a Kuhn development. The three Kuhn projects and the original south side tract--collectively the "Twin Falls Empire"--represents the largest privately constructed reclamation project in the United States.

For the Kuhns however, the end was not as satisfying as the adventure in Idaho had been for Frank Buhl. The majority of the stock in the Kuhns' reclamation projects had been owned by the Kuhn-dominated American Water Works and Guarantee Company of Pittsburgh. This holding company was the owner also of majority stock in the West Penn Railroad, the United Coal Company, "thirty or forty" water works plants, the three Idaho reclamation projects discussed, and the Sacramento Valley Irrigation Company.⁴⁷ The Kuhns' bond issues in Idaho projects alone amounted to over \$41 million as an indication of the magnitude of their operations.⁴⁸ In the year preceding the outbreak of World War I, and as part of the national economic recession of 1913, the parent holding company of the Kuhn

⁴⁷Letter from Samuel H. Hayes, TFL&WC attorney, to George Archibald, Carey Act Inspector in Salt Lake, June 22, 1914. Bureau of Reclamation, Federal Records Depository, Seattle. Accession no. 62A434, Container No. B4397.

⁴⁸North Side News, Jerome, Idaho; June 20, 1957, 19.

empire was placed in the hands of a New York receiver as a result of the failure of the First-Second National Bank of Pittsburgh. For the present purposes, a bondholders' committee assumed control of the big Jerome tract, and through the highly capable Russell E. Shepherd who thereupon became manager of the project, the irrigation works were completed and in 1920 was finally turned over to the users' organization, the North Side Canal Company.⁴⁹ It had been a long and difficult course.

Although many problems had been created by the Kuhn failure and some hardships endured, particularly on the Salmon tract, the people of Magic Valley were generally (though not unanimously) sympathetic with the Kuhns and were reluctant to accuse them of financial misdeeds (Secretary McAdoo had implied that the Justice Department would investigate the bank's management). A contemporary editorial seemed to reflect the opinion of most of those in the Twin Falls area:

...Without the aid of these men [the Kuhns] the degree of development which this particular section has attained would not have been possible. The Kuhns are among the builders of the age. They have ever been among the pioneers and the producers. Great areas have been rendered productive where formerly the jack rabbit held undisputed sway. Small armies of men have drawn salaries from the Kuhn strongbox which in turn have gone indirectly into further development.⁵⁰

A Jerome businessmen's organization forwarded a resolution to the Kuhns on March 12, 1914, which expressed the sympathy which

⁴⁹Williams, 74.

⁵⁰The Twin Falls News, July 10, 1913, 4.

those of the Jerome vicinity felt for them, and further expressed the hope that their troubles would be of short duration.⁵¹

This sense of personal identity with the Kuhns had been the result of a relationship which the Kuhns themselves had carefully cultivated in their dealings with the settlers and the officers of the company. In the west generally and Idaho specifically, they had an enviable reputation of integrity and human interest in people. At the time of the business failure in December 1913, the Idaho Statesman (published in Boise) made known a letter which W.S. Kuhn, in better times, had written to one of the company officers. It read:

We cannot help but feel that we have a paternal interest in all of them [the settlers] and while we like to meet with business success, there is still beyond that much to think of in the irrigation projects...if there is any place that you find or anyone that you know who needs more than the helping hand and the warm heart that you extend, you are free to make a distribution up to any liberal amount as you see fit.

This side of the Kuhn investment, the Boise newspaper remarked, "represents the gold that does not tarnish, the security that does not depreciate, the guarantee that bears no discount."⁵² Despite this failure, and unlike all too many other Carey Act projects, none of the irrigation companies of the "Twin Falls

⁵¹North Side News, June 20, 1957, 19.

⁵²The Idaho Statesman, December, 1913. Cited in the North Side News, June 20, 1957, 18.

Empire" ever went into receivership. This may be the result of favorable geography and water resources as much as the skill or luck of engineers and promoters. One is still left, however, with the conviction that the Perrines, Buhls, Bickels, and Kuhns all built well.

Having now considered the development of the Twin Falls empire--the national showcase of the Carey Act--it is pertinent to this inquiry to look at the implementation of the Act in a broader perspective, noting the limits of its application and to see the outlines of why, despite the successes already described, the act is appropriately referred to as a "half-way house."

It will be recalled from an earlier remark that a state's contract with the national government did not in any way obligate the national government for the construction or maintenance of reclamation works. It was a common tendency in this case for state legislatures to establish commissions, state land boards, or state reclamation engineering offices, but to do so without assuming any state legal or financial responsibility. The principal responsibility of the state (besides selling the segregated lands) was to pass judgment on proposed reclamation works submitted by private contractors, and then forward a recommendation to the Interior Department for segregation of the lands from the public domain. What I would like to suggest is that this reluctance by the states to become more responsibly involved caused the Carey Act to be almost stillborn, or as a

minimum, to work to the great disadvantage of the settlers. The words of a scholar who investigated the chaotic bureaucratic mismanagement in Montana may perhaps apply generally: "The State was greedy for the land but was averse to putting up funds for reclamation."⁵³

Going a step further, the state bureaucracy in Idaho, as perhaps elsewhere, was remarkably reluctant to hold contractors or companies to their terms of agreement with entrymen. Idaho's irrigation law was very specific: (1) an irrigation district could be organized only by petition of the landholders within the district (the district, a form of organization modeled on California's 1887 Wright Act, necessarily presupposed that settlement was already an accomplished fact); (2) the cost of reclamation works shall be paid out of the funds of each district (again, this presupposes that the agricultural base of an area is already firmly established and capable of generating funds); and finally (3) "Nothing in this act shall be construed as authorizing the [State Land] Board to obligate the state to pay for any work, constructed under any contract, or to hold the state in any way responsible to the settlers for the failure of contractors to complete the work according to the terms of their contracts with the State."⁵⁴

⁵³Lesley M. Heathcote, "The Montana Arid Land Grant Commission 1885-1903," Agricultural History, 38 (April 1964), 117.

⁵⁴J. Meredith Neil, "A Forgotten Alternative: Reclamation by the States", Idaho Yesterdays, 9 (Winter 1965-66), 21.

By 1910 it was becoming clear that many Carey Act project contractors and promoters had badly overestimated their own potential or the availability of water resources. No doubt many had gone out of business before this period, but even the more substantially based tracts had begun to feel the effects of ill-conceived colonization or construction. For example, the settlers on the Jerome tract, through their users' organization, petitioned the commissioner of the General Land Office in Washington for a thorough investigation by the Interior Department of the entire system of canals, laterals, and water rights, alleging that the system which served the tract's 500 families had never provided sufficient water. And where prices on the south side project had been a consistent \$25/acre, the lowest prices on the Jerome tract had been \$35; however, half the acreage on the first of the three north side segregations had eventually been raised to a very high \$60/acre.⁵⁵ A Carey Act inspector was subsequently assigned to hold hearings at each of the towns on the Jerome tract. His final report said in substance that the settlers' complaints were mostly groundless. Unusual problems in construction had been encountered which tended to reflect the higher prices, and he went on to suggest that most of the farmers were using more water than

⁵⁵Bureau of Reclamation, Petition of the Board of Directors of the Twin Falls North Side Canal Users' Association to the Commissioner of the General Land Office; Jerome, Idaho, February 8, 1912. Federal Records Depository, Seattle. Accession No. 62A434, Container No. B4396.

their crops needed. Whether the grievances of the settlers were real or imagined, it was becoming increasingly obvious that some form of outside supervision and direction, whether by the state or by an agency of the federal government would eventually be required. An adequate and assured supply of water eventually came only with the intervention of the federal government in raising the height of Jackson Dam and by the federal construction of the huge American Falls works in 1927.

The role of the state, or at least the perception by the settlers of what the state's responsibility towards assistance in reclamation projects should be, was shown very markedly in the case of the Kuhns' Twin Falls Salmon tract. This project, it should be recalled, contemplated the reclamation of 150,000 acres adjoining (on its north side) the Twin Falls south side project and which today contains the small communities of Rogerson and Hollister. This was an acreage over four times greater than that which was eventually reclaimed on the tract (35,000), but even by 1916, eighty thousand acres had already been sold. The impossible attempt to spread the guaranteed water right to this vast amount of land worked extreme hardship on those who had settled on the tract.

In April of 1916 the death of one of the settlers on the Salmon tract provided the opportunity for the leading newspaper of the area, The Twin Falls Times, to lambast the state for what it called "criminal negligence" on the part of the state board of land commissioners:

The man who died Tuesday...having been brought in the same day from his farm on the Salmon tract broken in health, discouraged, despondent and impoverished, died as a result of the failure of the state board of land commissioners to perform its obvious duty towards the particular irrigation project on which this man, lured by worthless promises of the state of Idaho, deceived by the assurance of state officials, attempted to reclaim a small piece of the sage brush desert and to convert it into a farm as prosperous as any of those on the wonderful Twin Falls tract, only two miles north of the scene of this latest tragedy.⁵⁶

The editorial then went on to recount the circumstances of the development of the Salmon tract, and perhaps most importantly made it clear that at least some state and federal commissions were not blind to the difficult conditions which prevailed on the Salmon tract:

...The state board of land commissioners contracted with a promotion company for the reclamation of the lands embraced in the Salmon river segregation. This land board sold lands and permitted the sale of water rights (which it had the authority to supervise) in excess of the supply of water. The federal government early realized the mistake that had been made, and the Secretary of the Interior advised the Idaho land board nearly four years ago that the situation should be corrected immediately...the Secretary's letter was pigeon-holed; so was the report of an engineer of the reclamation service advising that there was water for only 32,000 acres; so was the report of State Engineer Robinson, advising that the tract had a tremendous shortage; so was the report of the [state] Irrigation Commission [which recommended that the tract not exceed 26,000 acres].⁵⁷

⁵⁶"A Crime," The Twin Falls Times, April 27, 1916, 4.

⁵⁷Ibid.

One of the debilitating weaknesses in the settler's position seemed to be lack of effective organization, contrasted with the more efficient organization of promotion and construction companies who were able to establish a united front before the state land board commissioners. It was noted earlier that Idaho's 1895 irrigation law provided for the organization of irrigation districts. But as suggested, such an organization to be operative required at least something of a firm financial base to begin with. In 1915 a state irrigation commission investigation of three troubled Carey Act projects (of which the Salmon tract was one) proposed several plans for helping the projects, or suggested ways in which the projects could help themselves. One proposal suggested by the commission was the formation of an irrigation district. This plan, the commission noted, was strongly opposed by the settlers, because in order to secure funds to complete the projects they would have to issue bonds and pay interest on them.⁵⁸ Few settlers on the Salmon tract were producing enough to maintain family subsistence, much less in the position of being able to create surplus wealth to financially underwrite a bond issue. What might have been seen by the settlers to be advantageous politically seemed financially impossible. Still, the Twin Falls Times, over a course of four years, consistently argued the need for district organization, otherwise

...the Salmon tract will continue to be the dismal failure it is, the heartbreaking evidence of rotten-

⁵⁸"Commission Airs Trouble of Three Idaho Projects," The Twin Falls Times, October 19, 1915, 1.

ness and greed that has brought the name of Idaho to shame, until the acreage is brought under control; and every effort should be exerted, every influence brought into play, and every instrument put into use to effect the earliest reduction of the acreage.⁵⁹

The importuning of the Times was apparently part of (or partially responsible for) a perceptible changing shift in state political opinion regarding the responsibility of state legal and financial resources towards floundering Carey Act enterprises. Most responsible for giving political expression to what was seen to be a rapidly deteriorating situation on Idaho's Carey lands was Moses Alexander. Alexander had been elected to Idaho's governorship in 1914 and brought with him a dynamism and progressive vision which few before him had possessed. Having come from Bavaria in 1868 as a lad of 15 he had been mayor of Boise in 1897 (only six years after his coming to Idaho) and was reelected in 1901. In the gubernatorial election of 1914, this German Jew began a tenure of 4 years as Idaho's wartime governor. In his message of 1917 to the fourteenth session of the Idaho state legislature, he devoted considerable attention to Carey Act problems. The assemblymen responded with "hearty applause" to most of his criticisms and proposals.⁶⁰ He recommended that:

⁵⁹"Irrigation District For the Salmon," The Twin Falls Times, January 9, 1917, 4.

⁶⁰"The Governor, Legislature, and Carey Act Problems," The Twin Falls Times, January 11, 1917.

...every Carey Act project should be organized by law into an irrigation district so that the settlers may have suitable and legal representatives to appear for them in their behalf before the state land board or upon other matters pertaining to their welfare, thus placing the settlers in the protection of their interests upon an equality with the company...⁶¹

Furthermore, the governor argued the possible need for mandatory law suits, and did so in language which suggested far broader state responsibility than any state had hitherto been willing to enforce under the Carey Act:

The attorney general ought also to be required by law to bring all suits that may be required in behalf of the settlers to determine their interests under any contract made by the state and the state should pay the court costs of all such litigation.⁶²

After declaring the state's sovereignty and ownership--the ownership by the people--over the waters of Idaho and the requirement for every corporation operating within the state to provide ample irrigation water to every individual with whom it had contracted for water, and in an amount sufficient enough for the raising of crops, Alexander declared:

Any company that is not able to perform these functions should have no further rights or should have a receiver appointed and the privilege granted to it revoked. The period of

⁶¹"Governor Urges Legislature to be Economical," The Idaho Statesman, January 10, 1917, 4. My emphasis.

⁶²Ibid., My emphasis.

compromising seems to have passed and the hour for action in my opinion is here.⁶³

The governor moved into action. Despite what was by then the obvious miscalculations, if not deliberate malfeasance of the Salmon-tract construction company in 1917, action had been instituted in court by the company against the state land board to compel the board to accept the "completed works" as provided for in the contract between the state and the company--all this despite the constant and pervasive shortage of water for the tract and the consequent misery of the settlers. On the counter-attack, and at Governor Alexander's promptings, the land board and the state attorney general were constituted to employ counsel to any extent needed to fight the suit of the construction company.⁶⁴

Actually, for the previous several years Frederick H. Newell of the U.S. Reclamation Service had been suggesting that state government should take the responsibility for helping to bail out shaky reclamation projects. The Reclamation Service had announced that it would match federal dollar for state dollar in shoring up Carey Act projects. One state, Oregon, had funded \$450,000 for several projects, and the Reclamation Service had done likewise.⁶⁵ By this time the Newlands Act (the National Reclamation Act) was ten years old, and government assistance (or federal sponsorship) in reclama-

⁶³Ibid.

⁶⁴The Idaho Statesman, January 2, 1917, 3.

⁶⁵The Twin Falls News, October 23, 1913, 1.

tion works was viewed more favorably than it had been fifteen or twenty years earlier. Ultimately both federal and state government underwrote the solvency of several Carey projects. At Kings Hill, about sixty miles below Twin Falls, the state government for the first time became the owner of a Carey Act project, the state's agent being the only bidder at the auction. After a period the project was finally taken over completely by the Reclamation Service.

In addressing the topic of state intervention in private enterprise, one must take into account the reform impulse of the period as it affected first the state and then national reform politics. The period under consideration here, roughly 1910-1917, coincided with the progressive movement in Idaho. As Merle Wells has suggested, progressivism in Idaho had to await the demise of the anti-Mormon revival of 1902-1908-- a revival led by Idaho Senator Fred T. Dubois, in control of the Democratic machinery in the state at the time.⁶⁶ With Mormon-baiting out of style by 1909 or 1910, state politics began to resemble the reform pattern fashioned earlier by other states: local option on prohibition; the direct primary; commission form of government; constitutional amendments to provide for the referendum, initiative, and recall; tax reform, etc.

The Fourteenth Session of the Idaho Legislature, meeting in January and February 1917, probably accomplished more in

⁶⁶Beal and Wells, II, 221.

the area of progressive reform than had any previous legislature. Most of the reforms mentioned above were passed in this particular session, as well as woman suffrage, a minimum wage law, workmen's compensation, and a complete overhaul of Idaho reclamation law pertaining to the Carey Act, giving the state the kind of supervisory responsibility over reclamation projects which Governor Alexander sounded in his January address. For students of symmetry it ought to be noted that H.M. Sims, a legislator from Twin Falls County, was the legislative floor manager for the administration. He guided through a bill which gave the state greatly enlarged authority relative to the segregation of lands, construction of water works, and most importantly the drawing and enforcing of contracts between corporations and the state -- the kind of authority Alexander had called for in early January. House Bill No. 70 provided that companies seeking to build irrigation systems first be investigated as to their financial ability to complete the works; this bill was also initiated by legislator H.M. Sims of Twin Falls. House Bill No. 184 was passed to amend laws relating to the Carey Act and provided that streams be measured before contracts were let for construction of irrigation works in order to avoid repetition of the mistakes experienced on the Salmon tract.⁶⁷

⁶⁷"Grist of Bills Passed By Legislature," The Idaho Statesman, March 11, 1917, 6. See also "New Carey Act Law Proposed," The Idaho Statesman, January 21, 1917, 8.

Echoing what some scholars have seen to be a marked emphasis on efficiency and expertise in the Progressive period, an editorial in the state's leading newspaper observed during inaugural week in January 1917 (after Alexander's sweeping address), "...the legislators will do well to heed the suggestions of the experts, even though the experts be of that outcast class called Republican."⁶⁸ Progressive reform in Idaho seemed to be at its high water mark in early 1917 and only gradually between February and April of that year did the press seem to push state politics into the background as America's participation in the Great War seemed ever more imminent.

Though not one of the original "laboratories of democracy," Idaho by 1917 was well set on its political and economic course. Large scale reclamation combined with the timber and mining industries to provide the foundation for continued state economic growth. Moses Alexander was the first Jew in the nation to be elected governor, or indeed to any higher office in the United States, and his election by Idahoans antedated Woodrow Wilson's appointment of Louis Brandeis to the Supreme Court. It was Moses Alexander who in 1917 gave voice to the discontent of so many settlers on reclamation tracts. He was also the catalyst for moving the Idaho legislature that year to long-delayed action in rewriting Idaho's irrigation laws.

⁶⁸"Laws, 1917 Model," The Idaho Statesman, January 7, 1917, 4.

With the noted exception of Theodore Roosevelt's Country Life Commission, grievances of farmers and rural area reform generally tend to be submerged in the historiography of the Progressive period. Problems of the farm area seem to belong to an earlier era of Donnelley, Bryan, populism, and free silver, and farm problems seem to pass into oblivion with the return of prosperity at the turn of the century. Yet, the foregoing discussion has suggested that perhaps this line is too neatly drawn and the distinction too superficial. It is true that progressivism in Idaho resembled in many ways the achievement of reform efforts in other states in bringing government closer to the people. It was also different in the sense that whereas "trust-busting" characterized many aspects of state and national reform, and as urban reform elsewhere was being undertaken exposing the abuses of municipal government and utility franchises, state government in Idaho was beginning to bring corporations to heel where malfeasance had characterized their operations in rural Idaho. Governor Alexander's insistence that corporations shall be made responsible to the people was a particularly progressive sentiment, whether from humid metropolitan east, or from arid rural Idaho. Any account of state authority and private enterprise in Idaho's reclamation projects would be less than complete without noting this political and social climate of Idaho's progressive period.

Reclamation Service spokesman, Frederick H. Newell, ob-

served in 1913 that all Carey Act projects in the state, except the south side Twin Falls tract, had been failures. Presumably he based this overly harsh judgement upon the dependence of so many other projects on subsequent federal development. The Jerome tract and the Aberdeen-Springfield project (bordering the American Falls reservoir on the North) are two Carey Act tracts which depend heavily on storage rights (as opposed to natural flow rights). Keeping this dependence in mind, it is understandable that other projects, less favorably situated in relation to water resources or water appropriation dates, became ultimate failures because of insufficient water.

Another frequent cause of failures on several projects was, as had already been intimated by Idaho's governor in 1917, malfeasance by the irrigation or construction company. At Kings Hill on the Snake and on the Big Lost River project several promoters (who followed each other into receivership) tended to want to accrue profit by compelling settlers to make payments on water contracts before the company put water on the land.⁶⁹ Under the law, adjudicated by the state Supreme Court, settlers were entitled to have every dollar they paid on their water contracts applied to the reclamation system until it was completely serviceable and regardless of the number of transfers of the system. A company would also frequently find itself in similar difficulty by opening the lands for entry too early. Only a few months after the promoter

⁶⁹The Twin Falls Times, January 27, 1914, 1.

entered into a contract with the state, he might apply for permission to sell the water rights.

Another frequent cause of project diminution or failure was the underestimation of the construction costs or the overestimation of water resources. We have noted that on the Jerome tract the price per acre on half of the first segregation was raised from \$35 to \$60 per acre due to an underestimate of construction costs. This particular experience was endlessly repeated on many state projects; in contrast, the south side tract was advertised at \$25 per acre and remained at that price through completion of the project. The Kuhns' Twin Falls Salmon project discussed earlier, is exemplary of the overestimation of water resources, in the end being reduced in size by 80 per cent. Others, still less fortunate, failed completely.

While the list of Carey failures might be imposing -- Thousand Springs, Sailor Creek, Owyhee, Lost River, Lemhi, West End Twin Falls, and so on through most of the other 65 projects initiated in the state, one should not lose sight of the inestimable value which accrued not only to specific localities like Twin Falls but to the state as well.

By 1906, Idaho had reclamation projects totalling about 30 million dollars, of which 17 million represented private investment. At that time the remainder represented investment in two federal projects, one at Boise and the other at Minidoka adjoining the Twin Falls tract on the east.⁷⁰ The Carey Act

⁷⁰Irrigation Age XXI(July, 1906), 269.

Land Commissioner, in a report to the state land board in 1913, noted that the private projects which had been successful, or even partially so, had added 100 million dollars to the agricultural wealth of the state and had been responsible for an increase of 50,000 in population. The population of Twin Falls County more than doubled between 1910 and 1920 (110%) and that of Cassia County wherein is located the southern section of the federal Minidoka project grew 118%, by far the largest percentage increase in the state. These figures contrast favorably with the growth of somewhat older and more established counties: Bannock (43%), and Ada (21%). The favorable demographic impact of reclamation to the state's population is obvious.⁷¹ Eight thousand new farm units had been added in the state and 768,000 new acres were either under cultivation or had water immediately available. In a final remark, and making due allowance for exaggeration, the Carey Act Land Commissioner noted what may be the central clue to the success of reclamation activity in Idaho: There is a more ample supply of water available than "all other states combined."⁷²

A National Conservation Commission making an inquiry into the status of several federal land laws in 1908, felt that as

⁷¹The Idaho Digest and Blue Book (Caldwell, Idaho: Caxton Printers, Ltd., 1935), 85-86.

⁷²The Twin Falls Times, December 23, 1913, 1.

an encouragement to home building and settlement, the Carey Act was fulfilling its purpose.⁷³ From a national or even regional perspective, it is now clear, if it was not in 1908, that this was a slight overstatement. But in Idaho the Carey Act was responsible for the reclamation and settlement of 3/4 million acres, although a total of three million acres had been segregated from the public domain. This reclaimed acreage is a significant portion of the approximately 2,300,000 acres presently watered by the Snake in the upper basin.⁷⁴ In the Twin Falls south side tract alone, more acres were patented to the state than were patented to the second most successful state (Wyoming) under all their projects.⁷⁵ The Carey Act, therefore, despite its weaknesses in perception and implementation, and despite the lack of federal or state responsibility in relation to construction companies, has had a tremendous impact on the settlement and economic growth of those counties in the lower part of the upper Snake basin, and today contributes significantly to the agricultural economic base of the state.

It would be fitting to conclude this part of the narrative with an accounting of the subsequent activities of Ira B. Perrine.

⁷³Roy M. Robbins, Our Landed Heritage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942), 362.

⁷⁴Interview with A.L. Larson, District 36 Watermaster, Idaho Falls; July 5, 1972.

⁷⁵Williams, 65.

It seems only appropriate that Perrine filed on the last and biggest Carey Act project in the state of Idaho. This was the I. B. Perrine project which contemplated reclamation of much of Owyhee County, situated just to the west of Twin Falls County in the area that is frequently referred to as the Bruneau.

The idea of watering the Bruneau was not original with Perrine. Frank Riblett, the early surveyor of Cassia County (which before 1907 also included present Twin Falls County), remarked in his diary, "In 1893, ran lines for the future Salmon Falls River Project, hoping to cover what is now known as the Bruneau."⁷⁶ A corporation had been organized in the 1890's to furnish water to lands in the Bruneau, lands which had previously been entered under the 1877 Desert Land Act. By 1896, their limited success had been such that the Pocatello Tribune featured the project, remarking that a canal had been completed which provided water to 20,000 acres. The article continued: "We hope the company which has had the persistence to carry this big enterprise to completion may be amply rewarded."⁷⁷ Not only was the company not rewarded, but the Bruneau stubbornly resisted all contemporary and future attempts to make it blossom.

Ira Perrine and H. L. Hollister, who with John Hayes had persuaded the Kuhns to undertake the Twin Falls Salmon Creek project, approached the state land board in 1908 with a pro-

⁷⁶Cited in papers of John Hayes, notes #11, 1935, 2.

⁷⁷The Pocatello Tribune, January 25, 1896, 5.

posal to reclaim part of the Bruneau. This was at a time when Perrine could see the end of the south side tract and was becoming increasingly preoccupied with the north side project. The previous Bruneau company had gone into bankruptcy and was mostly bought out at a foreclosure hearing by Perrine and Hollister. After applying for and receiving a segregation of 80,000 acres, the two were forced to back out and no contract was signed with the state; therefore Perrine's first confrontation with the Bruneau had not been encouraging, although he had filed two separate appropriations, one in December of 1907 for 5,000 second-feet of water, and one in March 1908 for 9,000 second feet, both for the Bruneau segregation.⁷⁸

It was reported by the Twin Falls Times News that Perrine had sold the idea to the directors of the Union Pacific Railroad and received their assurance that the road would not only guarantee the necessary bonds but would take them all.⁷⁹

Perrine's plan was to water the Bruneau by the enlargement of the existing Twin Falls high line canal which, in addition, would have been a further spur to the growth of Twin Falls city. Apparently, however, Perrine and Hollister were unable to get completely uncontested rights to the Bruneau in 1908, since they declined to meet the \$6,000,000 price demand by a Twin Falls man who still held his father's interest in a large

⁷⁸Bureau of Reclamation, Report From Carey Act Inspector, George B. Archibald, to the Commissioner, General Land Office, February 23, 1915. Federal Records Depository, Seattle; Accession Number 62A434, Container No. B4396.

⁷⁹The Twin Falls Times-News, October 3, 1943, 2.

part of the old land and water concern.⁸⁰ It should be particularly noted that this effort by Perrine (and subsequent efforts with the Bruneau) was simultaneous with other ongoing projects. The south side project was nearly complete and ready for transfer to the farmer users organization, and the Jerome tract was just getting a good start. Perrine was involved with both of these as well as with others. It is the assessment by one investigator that the greatest hindrance to the development of the Bruneau lands was the withdrawal by the Interior Department of some of the land along the Bruneau River as possible sites for hydroelectric projects.⁸¹ If this is correct, it was certainly not considered so by the syndicates in 1908. For in that year the two eastern syndicates -- the Kuhns and the Milner-Buhl-Kimberley interests -- applied almost simultaneously to the Idaho land board with proposals for development of the Bruneau. There actually seemed to be a race between the two companies to see whose proposal could be submitted and accepted first. In a letter from Milner in Salt Lake to the Twin Falls Land and Water Company he expressed this sense of urgency: "[If the deal goes] Mr. Buhl will want to carry it through himself instead of taking in the Kuhns ... I trust that the maps will all be filed in good shape and before the north side people get theirs in."⁸²

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Williams, 22.

⁸² Letter from A.C. Milner to Fred Voigt, May 26, 1908. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 4.

Between 1908 and 1910, the Buhl-headed Twin Falls Land and Water Company thoroughly considered the Bruneau project, added about 240,000 acres, and sought greater financial support. The papers of the period were replete with rumors of impending success. It was reported that the proposition had been sent to Mrs. E.H. Harriman "whose son has manifested a desire to identify himself with affairs less restricted than those of a railroad system." It was also denied that J.P. Morgan, contrary to an earlier informal announcement, had agreed to underwrite the bonds.⁸³ The Twin Falls News was correct in referring to the Bruneau as the most stupendous irrigation project ever undertaken, approaching as it eventually did, almost 600,000 acres -- three times the size of the original south side tract. As Perrine had proposed, it would be watered by the enlargement of the Milner Dam and the existing south side system to carry the water over the deep canyons west of the Salmon Falls River and onto the Bruneau lands. By 1910, however, the company was considering the staggering feat of using the present American Falls Dam site as the diversion point (instead of Milner Dam) and constructing a 140 mile concrete canal to Owyhee County. The company set up engineering camps near American Falls to make the preliminary surveys, and the Twin Falls News announced that American Falls was now the probable site of the

⁸³The Twin Falls News, December 14, 1911, 1.

Bruneau reservoir.⁸⁴ In the context of the times, what a quantum leap in men's imagination had been inspired by the success of the south side system. Problems, however, developed over water supply. (We have previously noted the difficulties experienced on the Jerome tract where appropriation dates approximated those which Perrine filed for the Bruneau, and also the dependence of the north side tract on storage rights in federal reservoirs). The project was eventually abandoned, and by early 1919 all segregated Bruneau lands had been restored to the public domain. The initial assaults had failed.

A third attempt was made at the Bruneau lands, this time by the North Side Company, whose earlier efforts had been preempted by the south side concern. In 1920 the General Land Office rejected the company's application since the Reclamation Service had withdrawn much of the proposed segregation from entry because of proposed federal development.

The last Carey Act project started in Idaho was the I.B. Perrine project in 1932. Operating again with H.L. Hollister, Perrine applied for a temporary segregation of 601,000 acres, again in the Bruneau area but further west than the previous efforts had anticipated. Fifty thousand dollars was spent for the preliminary survey and the laying of plans. But Perrine had overreached himself at the most inopportune time in the

⁸⁴The Twin Falls News, April 18, 1912, 1.

century (1932) for trying to fund such a project by floating bond issues. Actually, after 1912 with the failure of Niver-Trowbridge, the biggest and most noted of several irrigation bond houses in Chicago, it became exceedingly difficult to fund private enterprises. Increasingly, reclamation was being seen as a federal responsibility. At the same time Perrine was thinking of watering the Bruneau by private money, Boulder Dam and Grand Coulee were going up under federal sponsorship. Perrine finally acquiesced in what we now see to have been his last and biggest fling with western irrigation. Five years later the Bruneau lands which Perrine had cast a longing gaze upon were withdrawn from public entry for a grazing district under the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934.⁸⁵

It is difficult to overemphasize Perrine's leadership and influence in the building of Magic Valley or the "Twin Falls Empire." Clearly he was not a Stephen or Moses Austin, or a Brigham Young. (Noted for his pronounced self-effacing quality, Perrine did have an opportunity for greater national recognition in the years after World War I. A group of American financiers headed by Ogden Armour wanted Perrine to undertake a reforestation project in ravaged France. Earlier at Chicago, Perrine had presented such a tree-planting program. Armour and his associates agreed to underwrite this good-will plan, but specifically wanted Perrine to direct it. Engaged as he was at the time with the north side people and trying to bring

⁸⁵Williams, 60.

the Bruneau project to realization, Perrine respectfully turned down the offer of the financiers).⁸⁶ Others had presaged Perrine's vision for the Snake River country; others, with luck, probably could have wrought similar success on the south side project which was the model for subsequent reclamation developments in the upper basin as well as in other parts of the west. But the historical moment and circumstances were peculiarly Perrine's.

It is more difficult to account for Perrine's relative obscurity in western or even Idaho history. Several individuals who were prominent in the building of the southern Idaho agricultural empire have at least been remembered in the naming of cities on the several tracts: Buhl, Kimberley, Wendell, Jerome, Filer, Rogerson, Hollister, Murtaugh, Burley, Gooding, Heyburn. But there is no "Perrine City." (There is a memorial bridge in Perrine's name which spans the Snake River chasm). This obscurity is partly due perhaps to the modest nature of Ira Perrine. He reluctantly relented to having the first hotel in Twin Falls named after him, though it no longer exists. One of his early associates, a friendship begun with a traveller through the northwest who greatly admired Perrine, one H. J. Kingsbury, in his reminiscences Bucking the Tide, began a solitary effort to reidentify certain locations in southern Idaho. Though written 40 years after Twin Falls was established and named, Kingsbury's book never refers to "Twin Falls" but

⁸⁶The Twin Falls Times News, October 3, 1943, 2.

only to "Perrine County," "Perrine City," or "The Perrine City Hospital." Unfortunately his crusade never caught on. Although Perrine still has relatives in Twin Falls, a sister-in-law, a son and grandson, they are distinguished mostly by their obscurity in city events and functions. Succeeding generations have failed even to preserve the old homestead. Blue Lakes has not been able to withstand the onslaught of "progress." Though the two water emeralds in the desert canyon still remain, fed by underground springs, the area is wholly unrecognizable from early photographs, [except for a small area where Perrine's grandson still lives]. The ranch has given way to the most exclusive of country clubs, complete with manicured golf course. It is a tragedy of the first order that the city fathers have allowed "developers" to dismantle such a historic natural shrine, and, with highly intimidating warning signs which only the most intrepid dare pass, put the area off-limits to all but the upper crust of Twin Falls society.

After unsuccessfully assaulting the Bruneau for the third time, Perrine lived out his remaining years at his beloved Blue Lakes ranch where it had all started sixty years earlier. At the age of 82, Perrine suffered repetitive strokes and finally passed away on October 2, 1943 after having been moved from Blue Lakes to the Twin Falls hospital. He rests with his wife and a son who died in early childhood, at Blue Lakes, overlooking the Snake River in unattended graves. Kingsbury, tongue-in-cheek, writes of Perrine's final moments:

His great vision remained with him to the end. During his illness he must have overheard one of the nurses when she said it was a little chilly. His lips were seen to be moving, and one of those present bent over him and heard him say in an almost inaudible whisper, "you should pipe the hot water at Yellowstone Park and bring it here. Then you would always be warm."⁸⁷

⁸⁷Kingsbury, 56.

CHAPTER 3

THE ADVENT OF FEDERAL RECLAMATION ON THE UPPER SNAKE RIVER VALLEY

"When tillage begins, other arts follow. The farmers, therefore, are the founders of human civilization."

--Daniel Webster

In an important article which appeared in 1966, and which is representative of a respected school of historiography, William Lilly and Lewis Gould summed up the signal failures of the western irrigation movement and concluded with an appropriate praise of those individuals who were the moving spirits behind the passage of the National Reclamation Act in 1902--Wyoming's Senator Francis Warren, Nevada's Representative Francis G. Newlands, and the political razzle-dazzle of President Theodore Roosevelt who substituted rapier tactics for rough-shod politics in overcoming the final bastion of opposition to the idea of federal reclamation.¹ Lilley and Gould suggest that a very few forward-looking western politicians such as Warren and especially Newlands were convinced of the need to undertake fundamental reforms in the approach

¹William Lilley and Lewis Gould, "The Western Irrigation Movement 1878-1902: A Reappraisal," Gene M. Gressley (ed), The American West: A Reorientation (Laramie: University of Wyoming Press, 1966), 57-74.

to western reclamation. This meant replacing the entrepreneurial, capitalistic approach to problems of reclamation with one in which the general government assumed the greatest responsibility. Furthermore, these necessary fundamental reforms ran contrary to a host of western attitudes which revolved around such concepts as a minimal role of government, western individualism, and the entrepreneurial approach to economic development whether it be reclamation, mining, or timber. Some of these assumptions will be dealt with shortly.

It is not pertinent to this inquiry to trace in detail the movement towards a national reclamation policy. For all the futility of his efforts, Major John W. Powell was the first prominent advocate of a new approach to the settlement and economic development of the arid western region. In the 1870's and 1880's, he had suggested that western agricultural and political development be directed along watershed boundaries instead of the more traditional quadrangular plat. But for all his prescience even he drew back from arguing that the federal government go into the dam building business. Between 1889-1891, Francis G. Newlands, at a considerable financial cost to himself, succeeded in bringing about startling progressive innovations in Nevada irrigation law and practice, only to have successive state legislatures wreck his work. Presaging the Carey Act, Senator Francis Warren of Wyoming introduced an arid lands bill to the Congress in 1892 which proposed the granting of arid public domain to the western states, but leaving to the states the responsibility for supervising the con-

struction, regulating the formation of irrigation districts, etc. The fallacies of the irrigation district idea, patterned after California's 1887 district law (the Wright Act) were discussed in the previous chapter. The Carey Act in 1894 achieved much of what Warren's bill had sought two years earlier.

Even when congressmen seemed, on the surface at least, to be in favor of bold new initiatives, the old restraints of "individualism" and private enterprise nevertheless appeared to prevail. Senator Warren unsuccessfully introduced several bills on irrigation during the period 1896-1901 which had contemplated federal construction of the single most important item of a reclamation project, the dam itself. (He conceived it as only a "pump-priming" device and a spur to private enterprise.) Montana Senator Thomas Carter labelled Warren's thrust as "an entering wedge for a new [irrigation] policy."² A letter from the very capable Paul S.A. Bickel, the chief engineer for the Twin Falls north and south side project to Senator Carter in 1904 reflects perhaps the way at least some westerners perceived the role of the federal government, and after 1902 the newly created Reclamation Service. Bickel, who had worked on reclamation projects in Montana before coming to Idaho, congratulated Carter on a recent Republican victory, thanked him for his role in support of the Carey Act and western reclamation in general and then remarked:

²Ibid. 70.

However, the reclamation service has fallen into, what I call, bad hands, and if you are in a position to rectify the evils that are now coming to light (and I think you are) I beg of you to do some of your old time friends a favor and put a flea in the President's ear.³

Bickel expressed the strong feeling that the Reclamation Service, through Frederick Newell (the Service's first Director) and D. W. Ross (Idaho's State Engineer) was going far beyond the bounds which Bickel believed properly limited the activities of the Reclamation Service: namely, those "propositions which were out of the reach of private capital." Instead, the Reclamation Service was going into the colonizing business itself:

....they interfere and block the way by taking from entry all the lands which private parties wish to put into the Carey Act or other private enterprises ...If any one of them had ever put through a successful irrigation project and knew about it, and would just start one and complete it instead if [sic] using all the money in making surveys, and then let private enterprise forge ahead and not try to block them, the country would advance much faster. Anything you can do to compel the reclamation service to keep their place, fulfill the duties which are assigned them and cease their interference in private enterprises will be appreciated.⁴

In other words--and it ought to be remembered that this advice was from a spokesman of those two highly successful Carey

³Letter from Bickel to Senator T.H. Carter, November 14, 1904. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 7.

⁴Ibid.

projects--the government ought to build the dams, and leave the rest to entrepreneurs. At the National Irrigation Congress meeting in Omaha in 1900, Captain Hiram M. Chittenden, in his paper "Relations of the General Government to Reservoir Construction," proposed that it was absolutely necessary to divorce this problem of storage construction from that of irrigation in general. "It should be well understood that no attempt will be made to involve the government in irrigation work," he remarked.⁵ Thus, even though some were willing to concede the necessity for an increased role of government in the reclamation process, individualism and private enterprise were still seen to be sources of economic strength and growth which carefully limited that role of government.

The National Reclamation Act, passed in 1902 behind the impetus of Nevada's Francis Newlands (who had been financially hurt by projects in his own state), encompassed the entire panorama of reclamation: dams, storage reservoirs, canals, and irrigable land. "With the Newlands act in operation, no possible phase of reclamation remained open to private enterprise."⁶ It is difficult to overestimate the importance to the west and to the nation generally of the immediate and long term consequences of this act. The Missouri River Basin Project, the Lower Yellowstone, Boulder Canyon, Columbia Basin,

⁵The New York Times, November 23, 1900, 2.

⁶Lilley and Gould, 72. See also John T. Gano, "The Origin of a National Reclamation Policy," Mississippi Valley Historical Review, 18 (June 1931), 34-52.

Hungry Horse, Salt River, Minidoka and scores of other projects providing reclamation, hydroelectric power generation, and flood control benefits have remade the physical and demographic map of the 19th century west. As the concluding chapter of this study will suggest, however, this was not accomplished without cost.

It is the position of Lilly and Gould that the Newlands Act was, in essence, a repudiation of a western tradition of individualism and private enterprise. It is one thing to acknowledge the fruits of the Newlands Act and the course of western history, men, and events which gave birth to that act. But it is quite another to suggest that like the national conservation movement the support for federal reclamation was centered east of the Mississippi; that the "west was its own worst enemy," reluctant to have the federal government do in reclamation what could be done more efficiently in the west's highest and best tradition of individualism and free enterprise. This current of historiography is thus neatly summarized:

Almost to a man, Westerners disregarded Newland's position, a fact demonstrated by the federal irrigation policies enacted, always with convincing western support, from 1888 to 1901. Unwilling to support any act which might prove hostile to the traditions of private enterprise Westerners promoted only that kind of legislation which promised to facilitate capitalistic development.⁷

⁷Lilley and Gould, 67. My emphasis.

Because the Newlands bill scorned regional policies and traditions Westerners uniformly viewed it with dislike.⁸

Only the initiative and skill of Newlands and Roosevelt, men free from the burdensome traditions of the West, finally enabled the region to accomplish those ends for which so many irrigation campaigns had been unsuccessfully launched in the West from 1878 to 1902.⁹

It is instructive to note how these so-called "burdensome traditions of the West" were reflected in some local instances, particularly in Idaho. This state, with its early economic foundations in the lumbering and mining industries might be expected to exhibit in the attitudes of its spokesmen the clearest expression of laissez faire capitalism and individualism as any state in the west. In the matter of government-assisted reclamation, however, the attitudes are divided, the issues ambiguous at best, and certainly not drawn as tightly as the Lilly-Gould interpretation suggests.

As early as 1894, one of the members of the Idaho State Commission on Irrigation, F. G. Mills of Pocatello, favored a plan of redemption of western arid lands, particularly those of Idaho, by the "agency of the general government." Unknowingly anticipating the revolving fund concept of the Newlands Act eight years hence, he reckoned that the cost of settling 22,000 families on a government sponsored reclamation tract

⁸ ibid., 73. My emphasis

⁹ ibid., 74. My emphasis.

would cost about 10 million dollars and would be paid back in time.¹⁰ In language with which present day watchdogs of government spending could sympathize, Mills argued that such an undertaking by the national government would cost less than that funded for coast defenses in a single year, and he concluded -- believing perhaps that there were more who shared his view than was probably the case -- that the people in the Arid states would like to see the United States Government undertake western reclamation.¹¹

Between 1893 and 1895 Rees Davis, the publisher of the Caldwell Tribune one of the most vigorous champions of reclamation in Idaho, repeatedly struck blows at unfettered free or private enterprise, although unlike Commissioner Mills noted above, Davis did so from a state rather than national perspective of responsibility, but still a responsibility of government. The central issue of Davis' proposals concerned the formation of irrigation districts, and he argued strongly for the departure of canal companies: "...the welfare of the country demands that water corporations should go, inevitably they will go."¹² Davis saw the issue essentially as one of political control; the corporations will control the people (as he felt they were doing) if the people failed to control the companies. Oddly

¹⁰Pocatello Tribune, March 29, 1894, 1.

¹¹Ibid.

¹²The Caldwell Tribune, September 9, 1893, 4. See also Neil, 18-21.

enough, in precisely the same period the New York Times was in lock step with the Caldwell Tribune, so notorious had the real or imagined control of corporations become by 1894:

They dug ditches and sold water and the stockholders fattened on the unpaid toil of the agriculturists in these oppressed regions. Almost without exception these water or irrigation companies had been the most greedy of all the greedy corporations in our land...One thing is certain--that the period of extortion by irrigation ditch companies is near its close. ¹³

In Davis' view, the state was the only available balance of power for such a situation. By the creation of water districts (even prior to settlement) the state government would fix water rates at the minimum level necessary to retire bonds where works were underway. In other cases, the state would underwrite the cost of works which the users of a district would eventually repay (in effect, a state Newlands Act). But in 1895 the state legislature passed an ineffectual district law patterned after California's Wright Act. Professor J. Meredith Neil is one who therefore concluded:

The Newlands Act of 1902, setting up the reclamation Bureau, probably received as widespread support in the West as it did because it had already been made clear that the states were unwilling to act.¹⁴

Certainly the arguments of a Mills or a Davis in the

¹³"The Nation's Arid Lands," The New York Times, March 4, 1894, 17.

¹⁴Neil, 20. My emphasis.

1890's is not conclusive evidence of a shifting majority opinion in Idaho or the west in favor of increased government aid and responsibility at the expense of private enterprise. But there are other indicators. A student of pre-federal reclamation in the Boise Valley has noted the salutary reception with which canal corporations were initially received in the state.¹⁵ But these corporations soon came to be viewed (even before the turn of the century) as merely another type of trust or monopoly to be confronted. To note again the interpretation introduced at the beginning of this chapter, "that the West was its own worst enemy;" that westerners uniformly viewed the Newlands Act and government aid generally with dislike, I find that the evidence forces my inquiry into the more traditional view. The West along with the Mills' and the Davis' of Idaho, did begin to look to the government for aid, and instead of being "their own worst enemy" actually had to overcome significant eastern opposition to government aid for western projects. As one views the panorama of private reclamation works in the Boise Valley, the conclusion is that the quarter century preceding the passage of the Newlands Act was a time of increasing pressure and demand for the national government to assume responsibility for western reclamation.¹⁶ Nor was this pressure unique to Idaho. In Colorado, as early as 1870, a Denver

¹⁵Paul Lloyd Murphy, "Irrigation in the Boise Valley, 1863-1903: A Study in Pre-Federal Irrigation" (unpublished MA thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1948).

¹⁶Ibid., 126.

irrigation convention called on the federal government for assistance in reclamation projects.¹⁷ Furthermore, this demand ran against fears in the east that farmers there would suffer, that farm prices would be depressed because of added western agricultural tracts--tracts furthermore, which the easterner himself through tax money would aid in building. The fear was also present that newly opened farm projects in the west would serve to drain off farmers from the mid-west and eastern regions. Hence, the suggestion that the principal source of resistance to the movement for a national reclamation policy came not from the west because of its "burdensome traditions," but rather from easterners whose agricultural districts seemingly had far more at stake.

Before the passage of the National Reclamation Act, supporters of the government aid program went to considerable lengths to allay the fears of easterners and southerners. Representative Newlands, three months before the bill which bears his name was passed, suggested that the congressional representatives "from the Eastern, Middle and the humid States of the West," had misunderstood the irrigation question. There would be no "disastrous competition" with the existing farms of the south and east. Just as each successive western frontier had proved advantageous to the older, settled regions of the country, so also would the arid west. In a neo-mercantilist vein, he argued that the arid region "will simply furnish a

¹⁷Shannon, 31.

market for Eastern manufacturers and Eastern products," and would not compete agriculturally because of the different farm products of the arid regions. In this same special article for the eastern press, Newlands twice noted the leadership of the west against the opposition of the other regions.¹⁸

A year later James J. Hill had a somewhat different, though less plausible answer to deflect the fear of eastern farmers concerning the growth of western agricultural regions. At a speech in North Dakota, joking of the heat he had taken as a result of the Northern Securities merger, Hill remarked:

Some of our good friends in the East have opposed National irrigation from a fear that the products of Western farms would be increased and compete with those of the Eastern farmers. The products of the fertile lands of North Dakota, however great they may ever be, however much they may contribute to the prosperity of those who till the soil, will find in the markets of Asia an outlet which will absorb them in all the years to come.¹⁹

Again, it is the easterner who is the principal source of resistance to the national reclamation movement. In an era notably remembered for its laissez-faire qualities, its primacy of private enterprise and individual initiative, the West looked then, as it has many times since, to the government not only for economic aid but for administration as well. When the

¹⁸Francis G. Newlands, "Irrigation in the West," The New York Times, March 2, 1902, 7.

¹⁹"James J. Hill on Irrigation," The New York Times, October 21, 1903, 1.

56th Congress concluded in 1901, it was clear that any reclamation bill that was passed would be marked by a peculiarly western flavor.²⁰ We will now consider the reception of federal reclamation in Idaho and its meaning for the development of the whole upper Snake River Basin.

Like its neighboring Twin Falls enterprises, the federal Minidoka tracts had roots in the late 1800's. The U. S. Geological Survey, investigating many parts of the west for possible reservoir sites and reclamation tracts, put a survey party on the Snake River in the summer of 1889, and in the following year made canal surveys of lands which a decade later would come under government ditches. Also in this period sites were determined for present and perhaps future dams for water storage on the main course of the Snake: Minidoka Rapids, American Falls, Swan Valley, Palisades, Alpine Canyon, and Jackson Lake. Private parties had shown interests in these lands since about 1888, and Carey Act promoters were busy by 1902 in segregating what they could, particularly in the areas adjacent to the Twin Falls and the American Falls. But after passage of the Newlands Act in that year, nearly all the remaining arid lands were withdrawn from public entry by order of the Secretary of the Interior.

The first authorized government project in Idaho was the

²⁰Ganoë, 24.

contemplated reclamation of nearly 120,000 acres on both sides of the river near the Minidoka rapids, about 35 miles above the Milner Dam site. Here, to be neatly juxtaposed, was to be concurrent reclamation developments by a federal agency and by private enterprise. The drama was to exhibit a curious love-hate attitude on the part of the developers and citizens of the Twin Falls area toward what was occurring next door to them, but more shall be said of this later. The Minidoka tract should first be taken for what it was, not what others felt about it at the time.

Authorized in April 1904 as one of the earliest of the federal projects in the United States, the original Minidoka project consisted of three essential features: the storage, diversion, and power dam at Minidoka rapids (10 miles east of the present town of Rupert); the distributing systems on each side of the river (gravity flow on the north side for about 72,000 acres and a series of pumps on the south side to lift the water to lands, about 50,000 acres, inaccessible by gravity flow); and most important, a dam and storage reservoir near the headwaters of the Snake River in Wyoming.

An early Reclamation Service report notes that the lands were rapidly settled when it became generally known that the federal government had undertaken the construction of the project and most of the irrigable area had been entered under the Homestead Act far in advance of the availability of water.²¹

²¹U.S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report (Washington: GPO, 1910),125.

This enthusiasm on the part of prospective settlers is an important aspect of the Minidoka story. The Minidoka Dam was completed in 1906, two years after the project was authorized. The canal and distributing system on the north side (which today includes the towns of Heyburn, Paul, Acequia and Rupert) were completed in 1907 and the first irrigation provided by the Reclamation Service was in that same year. The private Twin Falls South Side project was first watered two years earlier, in 1905, and by 1907 Perrine had turned his attention to the north side development. Here on the Jerome tract the Twin Falls area had provided the enticement to prospective settlers. But settlers had also been attracted with great enthusiasm to the Minidoka south side, the part of the project which encountered very serious difficulty as a result of the need to install pumping stations to provide water to the higher lands. This ultimately rebounded to the great discredit of the Reclamation Service. As a consequence it thereafter became a lightning rod not only for the discontent and privation of those on the south side expecting water, but also for the barbs of the successful capitalists, next door and elsewhere, who continued to feel that the government was encroaching on a traditionally forbidden area of economic enterprise.²² But the denigration of the Reclamation Service was mostly undeserved, for the settlers took up lands in great anticipation, well in advance of when water could reasonably have been expected.

²²"Minidoka Difficulties," Irrigation Age, 21(March, 1906), 135.

The fact that the federal government (and not private financiers) was the agent of construction if anything, seemed to buoy the hopes of those who flocked to both sides of the tract. Even though Twin Falls was an inspiring example (the Twin Falls north side project was also just beginning in 1907), the track record of private reclamation development was not a source of unflagging encouragement, and government to this point was an unknown quantity. This may suggest then, as noted earlier, that many people in the west held high hopes for the role of government in the business of reclamation development.

The government proposed to stay in the reclamation business by the device of the revolving fund feature of the National Reclamation Act. The act authorized the use of receipts from sale and disposal of public lands in thirteen western states and three territories for construction of irrigation works in those areas. The funding idea seemed to show promise in the first few years. In October, 1902, the General Land Commissioner noted that receipts from sales of public lands at the close of the fiscal year had netted \$9.5 millions, and for 1903, he predicted an irrigation fund of \$15 million.²³ Sales that year exceeded his optimistic prediction and at the close of the fiscal year ending in June 1903, the government had \$16 million available for western development.²⁴

²³"Funds For Irrigation," The New York Times, October 23, 1902, 8.

²⁴The New York Times, October 4, 1903, 13.

Five years later, however, the picture had changed considerably. The south side pumping division of the Minidoka project was in trouble because of inherent difficulty in construction, but equally so because of lack of government funds. As a result of this delay in the Burley District, the Reclamation Service was subjected to a mounting tide of criticism, while settlers either drifted away or clung precariously to their waterless homesteads. As a result of the Minidoka experience, some people apparently expected the government to move out of the business altogether. An inquiry from a Nebraska construction firm to the secretary of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company expressed the hope of getting some construction work in Idaho, "now that the Reclamation Service are adverse to spending any more money in Idaho, and will no doubt be friendly to any scheme to water some of that land below American Falls, which they were considering."²⁵ As a measure of the hiatus in construction activity, the Burley pumping district was not fully completed until 1918. It was also about this time (1920-21) that the Bureau of Reclamation removed the lynch pin of southern Idaho reclamation security, the proposed construction of the great American Falls dam. This act was occasioned by lack of funds and the failure of entrymen to pay their contracted costs; but this subject properly belongs to the next chapter.

²⁵Letter to Voigt from Boyd Ehle, Construction Superintendent of the Tri-State Land Company in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, June 21, 1909. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 2.

As the summer tourist stands atop the gates of the Jackson Dam near Moran Junction in Wyoming, he is suddenly brought to the realization that Providence did not provide this lake as a complement to the majesty of the lofty Teton Range which borders the lake on the west. To be sure, there were smaller lakes at the base of the Teton Range before man and concrete intervened, but nothing on the scale of grandeur which Jackson Lake is today. Today's tourist will also notice a sign at the dam which gives a cryptic reference to the fact that the impounded waters have something to do with agricultural prosperity somewhere, though where is not mentioned. It may be perhaps that the increasing number of lodges, marinas, and dude ranches take public relations priority over a weather-beaten, tanned farmer watering spuds and sugar beets 300 miles downstream in southern Idaho. From a less cynical perspective, it is a fact today that vested interests in the recreational uses of Jackson Lake are gathering momentum to force a decreased reliance on Jackson waters for reclamation use. In turn they are pushing for a new dam and reservoir in one of the two remaining canyons where the Snake still runs free.

The Jackson Lake site was selected by the Reclamation Service for the Minidoka project in 1902 after surveys had been made there and at Shoshone, Emma Matilda, Two Ocean, and Jenny Lakes.²⁶ It was anticipated that the first dam would be a temporary structure, but would coincide with the construction of the Minidoka

²⁶U.S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1907, 130.

Dam and canal diversions. Consequently, the Jackson Lake works was begun in June, 1906 and was finally completed after a delay in construction, in October 1907. The temporary timber crib dam raised the surface of the lake 15 feet and provided storage for about 300,000 acre-feet of water.²⁷ It was believed at the time that the works would be sufficient for regulation of the river's flow for the next five years, at which time permanent works were contemplated which would impound from 800,000 to 1,000,000 acre feet (the present impoundment figure is 847,000).

It is important to note the attitudes and activity of the private projects during this period of federal construction. One is left with the impression that the private companies on the one hand were notoriously reluctant to concede the place of government in the reclamation business, but on the other hand they wanted to stay nearby just in case the government's activities could somehow benefit their own tracts. Six months before work commenced on the temporary Jackson Dam, the Twin Falls News editorialized,

...the News will go further and state its belief that the Twin Falls Land and Water Company would gladly join hands with the Reclamation Service in the immediate construction of these works if the methods of the Reclamation Service were such that private capital might risk affiliation. The trouble is that the reclamation officials have been persistently slamming and attempting to discredit private enterprise and have reached the end of their rope.²⁸

²⁷ ibid., 131

²⁸ The Twin Falls News, December 29, 1905, 4.

Ultimately, both the north and south side Twin Falls companies, and another Carey Act project (the American Falls Canal and Power Company) all offered to cooperate with the United States in the construction of Jackson Dam, but the government carried the project itself.

For the Twin Falls south side the matter was not immediately pressing because of their favorable water appropriation right to the natural flow of the river. For the north side, supplementary water was critical and was not ultimately secured until the construction of the American Falls Dam and storage reservoir. It had been anticipated that the north side would be able to store supplementary water in Wilson Lake and Jerome Reservoir, both on the tract itself, but it was found that the Jerome Reservoir would not retain impounded waters because of excessive seepage through the porous rock which undergird the structure.²⁹ Hence, the Twin Falls north side settlers had to look elsewhere, and a temporary solution was found.

The United States concluded a contract with the north side company, in December 1907, which provided that the United States would deliver 140,000 acre feet per year for use on the north side lands.³⁰ The rental contract provided that the company, in turn, would help meet the expenses for storage and operation. No attempt was made to fill the reservoir to full capacity in

²⁹The North Side News, June 20, 1957, 16.

³⁰U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1908, 81.

1907 because all of the Minidoka tract was not yet ready. The government reserved to itself the contractual right to terminate this rental agreement, and as progress was pushed forward on the Minidoka tracts, by 1910 it was deemed necessary by the government to retain the full capacity of Jackson Lake for use on its own Minidoka project. Termination notice was thereupon given the private company. For three years then, the north side company had availed itself of government-stored water. As noted in the previous chapter, any assessment of the success of this private north side development has to take into account the dependence of the company on federal works and upon cooperation by the United States Government. During this three year period, there was a corresponding lack of scorn, as one might expect, for reclamation officials and government enterprise. Instead, those concerned with reclamation works began to trumpet the need for, and the benefits to be gained from, larger government storage projects in the upper basin. One might tentatively consider the time period around 1909 or 1910 as something of a "turning point" in relations between public and private reclamation officials, and an increased respectability accorded the former.

There are two other aspects in the history of Jackson Dam which should be included in this narrative. In the summer of 1911, the temporary timber crib dam became more temporary than had been anticipated. The logs gave way and caused considerable damage by downstream flooding and later a corresponding

lack of water on the Minidoka tract for that irrigation season. During the winter of 1911-12, the government frantically rushed to put up a new dam to catch the 1912 spring runoff and thereby provide water for that season. The successful efforts of the Reclamation Service during that hectic fall and winter are amusingly described in Elliot Paul's Desperate Scenery. Paul, a relatively minor engineering technician was the brother of Charles Paul, the chief engineer of the Minidoka tract after whom the town on that tract was named.

The second point of interest concerning Jackson Dam is the collaboration of private companies with the Reclamation Service in constructing a permanent structure at the Jackson site. Similar earlier efforts had not been consummated as noted above. But in February 1913, the Kuhn interests had contracted with the United States for an enlargement of the Jackson Dam in return for storage rights in that reservoir. The dependence of the Kuhn north side enterprise on federal works is clear. There is no reason to doubt that the Kuhns were the moving force in this contractual arrangement, although the south side company also entered into the contract, but with less obligation and remuneration. The contract estimated that storage capacity could be increased to about 780,000 acre feet by raising the height of the 1912 dam by seventeen feet. The contract stipulated that the cost for such enlargement would be at the expense of the company (the existing dam ensured more than enough storage for the Minidoka tracts) and that the United

States would be kept "harmless from all cost."³¹ The title of the completed works remained with the United States, and the government reserved to itself the first right to a storage capacity equivalent to the capacity of the then existing reservoir, or in other words all of the water which could be stored up to elevation 6752'.³² The contracting companies would receive all in excess of that amount.

It is difficult to overemphasize the significance of the trends developing here, of the gradual marriage between western private enterprise--with all of the clichés of rugged individualism, initiative, and independence which that concept evokes--and public development by the United States Government, and with the former increasingly dependent upon the latter. It is, in a sense, an embryonic manifestation of the "new industrial state" which has a contemporary analogy in the economic health of Lockheed or Boeing depending on the gratuity of the national government. The case of present day Utah is another interesting analogy. Here where suspicion of government related or controlled enterprise has been part of the "pioneer heritage", Utah's life blood is dependent on government spending. When Utah's congressmen announced in June 1973, that a ten-year multi-million dollar contract had been awarded to Thiokol Corporation,

³¹Bureau of Reclamation, Agreement Between the United States of America and the Kuhn Irrigation and Canal Company, February 25, 1913, 3. Federal Records Depository, Seattle. Accession No. 6CA434, FRC Container No. B4397.

³²Ibid., 6.

it was not the hallelujahs of the "western tradition" or western enterprise that were sung, but rather thanks to Uncle Sam for the need of a perfected solid fuel propellant. Such has been the course of much economic progress in the West.

The Kuhn enterprises then, contracted for an estimated 315,000 acre-feet of storage to be gained by raising the Jackson Dam. This contract is dated February 25, 1913. But in July, 1913, as described earlier, the Kuhn enterprises had come to a virtual halt at the most inopportune time for the north side tract. Russell E. Shepherd then walked onto the stage of Idaho reclamation history and was to prove himself one of its brightest luminaries. A New Yorker, Shepherd had practiced law in Minnesota before moving to Idaho in 1914. He had been sent to Jerome as the representative of the bondholders of the north side tract to assume the management of the precarious enterprise.

Among other emergency matters such as the stopping of farm foreclosures, perhaps the most pressing problem was the assurance of a future water supply. At the time Shepherd's committee took charge of the enterprise in 1914, the government had discontinued work on the Jackson site because the Twin Falls North Side Company had defaulted in payments. Only with the greatest of importunings, political and otherwise, did the Reclamation Service relent. In what was to be a preview of the solution to an impasse in the giant American Falls project later, the government agreed to continue construction on condition that the committee pay \$150,000 on account and an equal amount in a surety

bond to insure payment of the balance.³³ Only with great difficulty, and standing at the brink of being thrown into receivership, was the committee able to obtain a surety bond from a New York company.

The United States Reclamation Service, under engineering chief Frank A. Banks, finally completed Jackson Dam in December 1916. The dam itself was raised and the outlet channel dredged to provide the total present capacity of 847,000 acre-feet, being at the time it was finished the fourth largest dam in the United States and fifth in the world. The north side Carey Act project thus gained an assurance of available water it had not had before except during moments of dependence on the federal government as when it leased stored water in Jackson Lake prior to completion of the Minidoka tract.

One must also emphasize that the story was not one of unbridled federal largess to the Shepherd committee or to the north side bondholders. It was not a case of inducing construction by lavish grants as in the case of the transcontinentals in the 1860's. It was a case of financial and building cooperation in which the company paid considerably. Without government help, there seems to be little question but what this ultimately highly successful north side Carey Act tract would either have folded completely or been drastically reduced in area and scope of operation.

³³The North Side News, June 20, 1957, 18.

Although the Jackson Lake works were the most spectacular part of the government's Minidoka project, ranking as it did among the country's largest dams, the works constructed at Minidoka rapids on the Snake River were just as important and in some ways more useful. This Minidoka Dam serves a number of purposes. Besides being a diversion dam (such as that at Milner) which backs up the river thus forcing the water through the north side gravity system and the south side canal with its three pumping stations, the government built the dam nine feet higher than was necessary for diversion purposes. Consequently, on the Minidoka tract itself the dam provides a modest supplementary storage capacity in Lake Walcott of about 96,000 acre-feet. Like the Jerome reservoir mentioned earlier which had to be abandoned because of the porous earth structure, Lake Walcott in its first four years lost nearly 1½ million acre-feet to permanent ground water storage in the adjacent lavas beds. Such a loss rate would have been catastrophic on lesser streams than the Snake. This may be another example of the generosity and the large margin of error which the upper Snake River basin has allowed in the course of its development by man. This is not to say that problems endemic to western irrigated areas such as alkalai formation, soil leaching, or lack of water have not at times been serious on the Snake River, but there nevertheless seems to be a large gratuity in the margin for error. This kind of abundant water supply is unquestionably the greatest and most valued resource of that part of Idaho south of the rugged central wilderness area.

Minidoka Dam also added a new dimension to reclamation works when it was constructed in 1906. Water permit No. 66, filed in March 1903, by D. W. Ross on behalf of the United States government for the Minidoka project appropriated 2,600 second-feet of water for irrigation and 2000 second-feet for power purposes.³⁴ Power generation at the Minidoka site was primarily for the purpose of operating the three lift stations on the south side. Here only a tiny fraction of the land is susceptible to irrigation by gravity flow. Consequently the water is lifted to higher ground three times by power stations and thereby provides water for about 50,000 acres on the Minidoka south side. Frederick H. Newell probably had the Minidoka project in mind when he responded to a New York Times interview in 1903, "It is one of the engineering problems of the Reclamation Service to develop all of the power possible and to utilize this in irrigating the higher lands by means of pumping."³⁵ The production of hydroelectric power was to characterize most future Bureau of Reclamation projects on the Snake River, and these in turn have become a significant part of the northwest power grid under the supervision of the Bonneville Power Administration.

³⁴Bureau of Reclamation, Report From George Archibald, Carey Act Inspector, to the Commissioner of the GLO, February 23, 1915, 33. Federal Records Depository, Seattle. Accession No. 62A434, FRC Container No. B4396.

³⁵Frederick Newell, "What Irrigation Means," The New York Times, October 4, 1903, 13.

But it was much simpler then when the Minidoka plant produced its first hydroelectric power on the first of May, 1909.³⁶ Contrasted with much of rural America, towns and communities on government tracts did not have to wait for the REA or post-World War II rural development. In 1914, the town of Rupert (the center of the north side tract) built the first electrically heated high school in the United States, and by 1920 the Reclamation Service could report that 1100 farms were being supplied with electricity, in addition to large numbers of customers in the towns.³⁷ Again saying something about the quality of rural Idaho farm life on an irrigation tract, the Annual Report noted, "an interesting feature is the great preponderance of appliances of a practical labor-saving character." The list included washing machines, vacuum cleaners, water heaters, sewing machines, hot plates, heater pads, and vibrators.³⁸ It was a far cry from a mere fifteen years earlier when homesteaders grubbed the sage by hand stacking it in huge piles for winter heat.

Consumers were generally supplied power through organizations of farmers who would build their own systems, taking power supplied by the Reclamation Service at several locations. This kind of mutual cooperation in rural America has a well known place in the history of western settlement: threshing

³⁶U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1910, 123.

³⁷U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1919-1920, 155.

³⁸Ibid.

rings, co-op marketing, barn raising, haying and all the rest. Especially has mutual cooperation been a feature of western life in meeting the demands of an irrigated agriculture. The distribution of hydroelectric power is another, somewhat unique cooperative venture to be added to the list. In a sense, an entire new enterprise was thus in the making. These wholesale organizations of farmers would in turn retail the power to members or customers. In addition, contractual arrangements for power were made between the Reclamation Service and the cities on the tract. To show the rapidly increasing use of electricity, from 1919 to 1920 total earnings from power to the Reclamation Service increased by 35% from \$69,000 to \$94,000.³⁹ The sequel to this story, which more properly belongs with a history of the Idaho Power Company, is that Idaho Power quickly absorbed the dozens of smaller power and electric companies which served the several towns on that part of the river.

In another way the existence of Minidoka Dam and the impounded waters of Lake Walcott began to change the nature of the relationship between the various settled areas along the river; between Magic Valley residents and those in the early Mormon communities on the upper river, for example. To be sure, appropriation notices and water rights were in existence which supposedly guaranteed who got what amount of water. But on the Snake, as elsewhere in the irrigated west, when water was scarce

³⁹Ibid.

heads were sometimes broken with irrigation shovels and in one particularly dry year in Idaho, the National Guard was mobilized to head off probable violence over who got what water there was. Two decrees, in 1910 and 1913, in theory adjudicated water rights for canals above and below Blackfoot, respectively. But short water years had a way of injecting into the arguments new rationale born of desperation.

In the contract of February 1913 between the Kuhn syndicate and the United States Government this new relationship which stored water brought to the Snake River Valley becomes clear. In a way, it posed the problem which valley water users were to face in the 1920's, a problem which culminated in the formation of the largest water district in the world and the clearest expression anywhere of the imperatives forced upon civilization by an arid desert environment where water is the literal fountain of stability and growth. But this is to anticipate the American Falls project and the unique "Committee of Nine" to be discussed in the following chapter.

The contract declared that it should be the policy of the government to use Lake Walcott and Jackson reservoirs together. Here for the first time in Snake River history reservoirs take on the quality of giant spigots. Lake Walcott, the contract advised, should be emptied first, turned out on the Minidoka tracts and thereby allow the Snake River to reach its minimum flow. The upper canals (generally those above Blackfoot and in the Menan-Idaho Falls area) were not entitled to a full flow of water at the low stage of the river, a flow which would have

occurred had Jackson Dam been opened before the river had reached its minimum flow. At the minimum flow the waters of Jackson Lake would then be turned out to be used in Magic Valley. At this time then, anyone on the upper canals using the water would be doing so illegally; that is, they would be using the government's stored water. In the words of the contract, "...the canals on the Upper Snake River ... may be staked down under the provision of State law and prevented, as far as possible, from unlawfully diverting the stored water which will thereafter [when Jackson Dam is opened] be flowing in Snake River."⁴⁰ Water law to the layman tends to become almost incomprehensible, but the essential difference here is between natural flow rights and storage rights. In practice, many of the sub-districts and companies on the river have both. It has become the responsibility of the watermaster of this 300 mile long district (with storage rights varying from the Clement Brothers 105 acre-feet to the North Side Canal Company's 826,000 acre-feet) to see that it is equitably distributed. But to reiterate, the problem of stored water rights and natural flow rights is noted here in 1913, and it was a problem which would cry for resolution by the 1920's.

In still another way the 1913 Kuhn contract with the Reclamation Service presaged a mode of river operation which

⁴⁰Bureau of Reclamation, Contract Between the United States of America and the Kuhn Irrigation and Canal Company, February 25, 1913, Item 18. Federal Records Depository, Seattle. Accession No. 62A434, FRC Container No. B4397.

had important meaning in the debate over the desirability of the American Falls project in the 1920's. Kuhn's Twin Falls north side project, by entering into this contract to raise the level of the Jackson Dam by 17 feet, was thereby being assured contractual water storage rights in the government reservoir above elevation 6752'. However, the government in turn reserved to itself the right to provide that water from any federal reservoir (there being in addition to Jackson only Lake Walcott at this time), not necessarily from the dam which the company was actually working on. In this case, where water would be provided through works closer to the Jerome tract, "each acre foot of stored water delivered for the Company from Lake Walcott at the Minidoka Dam, will be accepted as the equivalent of and in lieu of one and one-half acre feet delivered at Jackson Lake,"(the difference due to evaporation and seepage losses between Jackson and Milner Dam).⁴¹ In other words, the company was entitled to federal water storage space irrespective of the location of the government reservoirs. In the next decade the importance of this provision would come to mean that canal companies in the Rexburg or Idaho Falls area could subscribe to shares in the big American Falls project, even though that project was located below them on the river, and then have those rights transferred to another storage project since American Falls would not and could not serve those areas directly. Besides being an ingenious method of merging private with federal interests(which would prove to be of

⁴¹Ibid.

enormous benefit to the entire upper basin) this flexibility in water trade-off might be considered a milestone in the evolution of western irrigation practice. In the total meaning of the impact of government sponsored reclamation, this kind of flexibility in river control and management would seem to be among the greatest benefits.

If the role of the federal government in western reclamation had begun to gain an increasing respectability in the period 1910-1920, it marked a turn-about of popular attitudes which had prevailed in the previous decade. Between the time of the authorization of the Minidoka project in mid-1904, and 1910, several articles appeared in national periodicals on irrigation in the West. Those relating to Idaho also had to deal with the promising Carey Act projects. If there was a journalistic consensus at that time between the relative merit of the two kinds of reclamation development it must be accorded to the presumed superiority of private enterprise and the Carey Act. Few serious investigators, however, questioned the proper role of government in building only the storage works. In exception to this general observation, however, there would be an occasional commentary with overtones of hostility to "big business" which was characteristic of the era nationally. Thus, the Scientific American could note in 1904 that one of the greatest benefits of the Minidoka project was not only the construction of federal storage works, but also in the govern-

ment assuming responsibility for the actual distribution of the water and the settlement of the land:

A promising feature of this project is that practically all the land is now government land; and when the government has provided the water, the homemaker himself will be able to deal directly with the government, rather than through the hands of middlemen.⁴²

In order to appreciate the tenor of the concerns which most investigators at that time found in federal reclamation, note should be made of the terms under which land settlement was to be accomplished on the government tracts. Lands taken up under a federal project were done so under the amended terms of the Homestead Act, a law which required five years residence on the land, with improvements, and a provision that one-half the entered acreage (160 acres maximum) actually be reclaimed before final patent could be issued. As one might expect, the earliest critique of the two avenues of reclamation and settlement came from the Twin Falls tract where in 1904 the Twin Falls News anticipated the essence of the arguments favorable to private enterprise: The Carey Act provided for a shorter residence, one could obtain the land title in a year or less, and only 1/8 of the entered acreage must be actually reclaimed instead of 1/2 under the government plan.⁴³ These were all advantages which the Twin Falls Land and Water Company was

⁴²Guy E. Mitchell, "Government Irrigation Work," Scientific American, 62(June 11, 1904), 23774.

⁴³Twin Falls News, October 28, 1904, 1.

anxious to make clear. In response to an inquiry from a doctor in Nebraska who wanted some farm land (either for speculation or renting) but who wanted to live in the city, the company agent replied, "...requirements as to residence under the Carey Act are very easily complied with, for final proof can be made within six weeks and residence during that period will be sufficient."⁴⁴ And so it was with anyone who had the ready capital to purchase his land outright and get 1/8 of it (5-20 acres) under water and growing.

In other ways, the Twin Falls project was often depicted as a streamlined model of efficiency; it was "the work of liberal private enterprise from start to finish, and its success--the greatest financial success of any irrigation project in the history of the country--has interested the government."⁴⁵ Not only were private companies, in this view, more suitable vehicles in the progress of settlement, but they also found greater support from potential settlers:

The companies back of the Twin Falls work happened to be intelligent and liberal, and the settlers liked their methods ... better than some of the government's methods; and you will not wonder at this when you learn that the government is still granting lands under the ancient Homestead Law ...⁴⁶

⁴⁴Letter from Voigt to J.D. Guttery, Valparaiso, Nebraska; April 9, 1906. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 2.

⁴⁵Louise Morgan Sill, "The Largest Irrigated Tract in the World," Harper's Weekly, 70(October 17, 1908), 11-12.

⁴⁶Ibid.

Thus the argument ran against federal reclamation and settlement under the Homestead Act which, it was widely believed, put the settler and his family at the mercy of the government instead of making him a free-holder. He must live upon his land continuously from date of filing; he is uncertain what his water right will eventually cost until the project is completed; and under the government plan the settler has no credit in emergencies, for he owns nothing until the government grants the title, whereas it is much easier to obtain title and credit under the Carey Act.⁴⁷ But the most common and telling indictment against the government (an unfair one, however) was the charge that the Reclamation Service lured settlers onto its tracts before the water was ready for delivery and thereby caused much suffering and privation:

As settlers under the Carey Act are not compelled to take possession of their land until the water is ready for delivery, there is no heart-breaking struggle on dry lands while waiting for the completion of irrigation, and this is a valuable example for the government to consider. Some local government officials will tell you that when the settlers and their families suffer on desert lands, it is their own fault for going on such lands at all before the water is there. A railroad might as well blame passengers for accidents which the railroad has failed to take precautions against. No, the truth is that the government has not kept pace with the growth of the country, and its system of land allotment and irrigation is still in bad need of sensible development.⁴⁸

⁴⁷E.G. Adams, "America's Greatest Irrigation Enterprise," Pacific Monthly, 22(November 1904), 285. Sill, 11-12.

⁴⁸Sill, 12.

One might, however, more accurately attribute the reason for suffering (which there indeed was) to the premature enthusiasm of many settlers to file an entry under the Homestead Act too far in advance of when water could reasonably be expected. When it became known that the government was sponsoring a reclamation tract at Minidoka, the lands were rapidly entered even before the farm units had been established.⁴⁹ A statistician for the Reclamation Service noted that before water was ready every farm was filed upon and 5,000 people had established homes in the sagebrush.⁵⁰ It may have been possible to have prevented such early entries by more careful attention to the provisions of land entry within the National Reclamation Act itself. But where causes of privation are concerned one might just as easily point to the great anticipation and enthusiasm of hopeful settlers. In fact, the Interior Department Board of Engineers recommended that land be withheld from settlement until actual construction should prove what parts of the tract could definitely be reclaimed. Under the law the Secretary did not have the legal right to do so. Within a decade, however, the law was revised to the advantage of the homesteader:

That all qualified entrymen who have heretofore made bona fide entry upon lands proposed to be irrigated ... may upon application and a showing that they have made substantial improvements,

⁴⁹U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1910, 125.

⁵⁰"Minidoka Difficulties," Irrigation Age, 21(March, 1906), 135. See also Mary Gunnell Lewis, "History of Irrigation Development in Idaho" (unpublished MA thesis, University of Idaho, 1924), 91-92.

and that water is not available for the irrigation of the lands, within the discretion of the Secretary of the Interior, take leave of absence from their entries, until water for irrigation is let into the main irrigation canals from which the land is to be irrigated, Provided, that the period of actual absence under this Act shall not be deducted from the full time of residence required by law.⁵¹

There was probably no government project which exemplified this difficulty of premature entry more than the Minidoka south side tract, one of the most expensive and difficult of the government projects. Lands on both sides were quickly taken up but the north side gravity division received water very quickly after the dam was completed in September, 1906. The north side gravity distribution system was complete in mid-1907, and water was made available for that irrigating season. But on the south side where the three pumping stations were to provide water for most of the tract, the work was considerably slower partly due to lack of government funds. Indeed, it appeared to some even as late as 1909 that the government had abandoned this half of the project.

In 1905, Interior Secretary Hitchcock reassigned one million dollars from the Minidoka project to the Boise-Payette project (another big federal development in Idaho) and at the same time ruled that the Minidoka north side gravity division should be completed before the south side pumping system was started. All this further aggravated the plight of those who had entered

⁵¹U. S. Statutes, Public Law 314, 1910. See also the Congressional Record. 61st Congress, 2d Session, June 25, 1910 (Senate Bill 1874).

lands on the south side. The pumping system, as late as 1910, was still only 2/3 complete,⁵² and public notices by the Reclamation Service that water was ready were not finally posted until November 1915, although some water was available in 1909.⁵³ To underscore the difficulty of the project the Annual Report of the Reclamation Service (1910) notes that:

As the land had been opened to settlement under the reclamation act for several years, all of the farm units had been filed on, settlers were actually residing upon the land and a water users association had been incorporated in the spring of 1908.⁵⁴

Here is another interesting example of aridity imposing organization and mutual cooperation upon a community, this time however, out of desperation. The report continues, that to expedite construction, contracts for work were drawn up between the users organization and the Interior Department for the former to undertake the work of constructing the distribution system singly or in small groups. In succession, each of the three lift canals was finally completed. Instead of cash, certificates were issued for the work, receivable by the United States in reduction of water right charges to the settlers. These certificates eventually amounted to \$202,500 and the Minidoka south side could not be said to have reached a satis-

⁵²U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1910, 117.

⁵³U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1919-1920, 151.

⁵⁴Annual Report, 1910, 124-125.

factory state of completion until 1918.⁵⁵ In the interim, especially between 1904 and 1910, the work of the government in reclamation received very wide criticism, though as suggested, somewhat unfairly.

In addition to this general criticism of government reclamation activities, there developed from time to time an inter-cine dialogue between these twin sisters of private and federal reclamation in Magic Valley. The rhetorical feud was touched off late in 1904, a few months before water was turned in the Twin Falls canal and 2½ years before government water was delivered to the north side Minidoka tract. Frederick Newell, Reclamation Service Director, clumsily commented in an interview for the Omaha Bee, that he did not know of any of the big irrigation schemes which are what might be called "legitimate development enterprises."⁵⁶ In those areas of the West where private reclamation efforts had made notable progress, particularly Idaho and Wyoming, the response to Newell was a broadside salvo. The governor of Wyoming asked for Newell's immediate resignation, noting in the process that private enterprise had been responsible for the proven reclamation of over 166,000 acres in his state. And although by 1904, the Buhl-Perrine interests on the south side had not yet turned the water in, Newell was accused of having "covertly antagonized private enterprise all over the west." He was also a "man of treachery" and of "sly malice;" to sum up Newell's character

⁵⁵Annual Report, 1919-1920, 154.

⁵⁶The Twin Falls News, November 11, 1904, 1.

the News emptied its bag of epithets, characterizing him as "essentially a man of small caliber and brain."⁵⁷

Thereafter, the constant refrain from the Twin Falls tract was the superior virtue and expertise of private as opposed to public enterprise. Recall the letter of Engineer Bickel to Senator Carter cited above: "[the Reclamation Service] interferes and blocks the way by taking from entry all the lands which private parties wish to put into the Carey Act or other private enterprises and tie up all these places which could be made productive and hold them for the red tape of the United States."⁵⁸ The tedious red tape of the Homestead law was a favorite target of those on the Twin Falls development, contrasted with their own "liberality in terms for the settler" and "safety for invested capital."⁵⁹ Before the government first furnished water to its Minidoka system in 1907, those on the Twin Falls tracts could rightly point to the singular fact of the way private capital was developing the economy of the state which, by January 1906, included 122,000 reclaimed acres in the Twin Falls system; 13,000 acres under the American Falls Canal and Power Company; and 13,000 acres under the Canyon Canal Company (in the Emmett-Payette area of Western Idaho).⁶⁰ And of course the plight of the Minidoka south side was always a

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸See note 3 above.

⁵⁹Twin Falls News, February 15, 1907, 1.

⁶⁰Twin Falls News, January 19, 1906, 3.

favorite dig of the champions of private enterprise, and in general was of considerable embarrassment to the Reclamation Service: "If the government is not ready to reclaim the lands on the south side within five years, why does it not let go and permit private enterprise to come to the relief of the settlers?"⁶¹

To balance the perspective more accurately, one should make generous allowance for the position of the Twin Falls enterprises before 1910, rightfully heralded at the time as the most expansive work of reclamation anywhere. The work of the Reclamation Service, furthermore, was not centrally focused on Minidoka because federal projects were also being either surveyed or started in Arizona, Colorado, Kansas, Montana, Nevada, North and South Dakota, Wyoming, Washington, Utah and Oregon besides the two federal projects in Idaho.⁶² Additionally, there is evidence that even in Idaho the rhetoric of the Twin Falls people did not reflect a consensus of opinion regarding federal development in that state. Quite the contrary in fact, especially in the Boise area where, according to the 1910 Annual Report, various meetings of citizens and water users associations were held in 1903 and 1904 "to urge upon the Secretary of the Interior the importance of establishing a reclamation project in the valley. Petitions urging the same matter were prepared and forwarded with the signatures of over 1200

⁶¹Twin Falls News, December 22, 1905, 4.

⁶²U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1907.

citizens, owning about 95,000 acres of land."⁶³ The result was the Boise-Payette project, in the lower Snake valley which included the \$5 million dollar Arrowrock Dam, then the highest in the world.⁶⁴

In what was probably the most balanced and perceptive article of that decade, Douglas W. Ross, who himself had taken heat as one of the Reclamation Service engineers (he was supervising engineer in Idaho), assessed the scope of irrigation history in the state. He noted the contributions which three primary agencies had made towards reclaiming Idaho's deserts: (1) associations of land owners who did most of the work themselves in providing works for the reclamation of about 800,000 acres; (2) the state, under the Carey Act and through private construction companies, 400,000 acres; and (3) the Reclamation Service which had (in 1906) begun the work of reclaiming 500,000 acres, had immediate plans for 200,000 more, and perhaps most important in the history of reclamation on the Snake River, which had future plans for construction of a reservoir system to provide an additional water supply for about 600,000 acres.⁶⁵ This article by Ross heralded a day, less than a decade away, when rhetorical axes would be buried and a closer mutuality of interests would prevail among those who depended on the Snake River and its watershed for the sustenance of their lives and investments.

⁶³U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1910, 106.

⁶⁴Beal and Wells, II, 184-185.

⁶⁵D. W. Ross, "Work of the Reclamation Service in Idaho," Pacific Monthly, 16(September 1906), 314-315.

To this point we have sampled contemporary opinion as it was expressed nationally through the periodical literature of the time concerning the work of reclamation enterprise in Idaho. In general, the consensus was less charitable towards the Reclamation Service and the provisions of the act under which it functioned than it was toward private enterprise. In Idaho we have taken note of the special hostility of the Twin Falls area towards government reclamation and settlement under the Homestead law. But the favorable attitude of those in the Boise-Payette area towards a government project (and where there were no Carey Act developments which even approached the scale of the Twin Falls district) suggests that this anti-government position was not shared state wide. What conclusion then can be drawn from this survey of contemporary opinions which prevailed simultaneously with the process of settlement in Magic Valley?

It is clear that there were more liberal provisions in the Carey land law which favored the settler, although within a decade the Homestead Act relating to settlement on government reclamation tracts would be somewhat more liberal than the original provisions. The settler knew at the outset what his water right would cost. Douglas Ross in 1906 estimated the cost of the water right on the Minidoka tracts at \$26, but ultimately it was about \$40. Title to one's land under the Carey Act was much easier to obtain than under the Homestead Law, both in terms of residence and required improvements. Furthermore, the Carey Act was flexible to the extent that a

settler on the Twin Falls tract was able to assign his entry to another individual even before final proof was made. The features of the successful Twin Falls enterprise have already been noted in contrast to many which failed: a good water right and sufficiency of supply; fertile volcanic ash soil; capable management; and a measure of luck. The Jerome tract was ultimately successful too, although through a greater dependence on government-constructed storage works. The apparent line drawn between these two private projects superficially suggests that at some hazy date, 1907 or 1909, the role of private enterprise mystically ran its course and that any further development of arable lands depended on the support of the national government.

Without taking the extreme position advanced by the Twin Falls people, the history of the Minidoka south side project suggests that private enterprise still was capable of fulfilling a large role in reclamation development. In the end, as the 1910 Annual Report noted (p.52), construction of the Minidoka south side distribution works was ultimately accomplished by a water users organization in return for decreased charges on the individual water rights. In a sense, this is still a form of private enterprise. The role of government, however, in building a system of reservoir storage works was never seriously questioned during that period.

What did all this mean in terms of the individual settler on any of the Magic Valley tracts between 1903 and 1910? An

early article heralding the growth of the Idaho irrigated empire, and particularly the work of private enterprise under the Carey Act, referred to that act as a "poor man's opportunity."⁶⁶ The tenor of the promotion, which echoed the sentiments of several other contemporary reports, was that virtually anyone could grab a share of this agricultural paradise with a little push and a small amount of capital which figured to be about \$1000 for an 80 acre homestead. Granting the exceptions, the evidence is that it required considerably more effort and capital than enthusiastic journalists of the time realized. In 1906 an engineer from the Reclamation Service filed a quite detailed report on the conditions of irrigation along the Snake River-- costs to settlers, the best methods of irrigation, depth of planting, etc. He estimated the expenses of settlement for the first year, including the first cost of land and water right, fencing material, plowing, leveling, seeding, and ditching at \$40 per acre.⁶⁷ Even if one conserved financial resources when his own labor could reduce this figure somewhat, the first year costs would still be more than double the journalist's estimate. Even with a good first year harvest, it still took more than was generally conceded to get started in the irrigated country. The Twin Falls Land and Water Company honestly acknowledged as much in response to an inquiry from a woman in Denver: "In all

⁶⁶Adams, 285.

⁶⁷H. G. Raschbacher, Irrigation From Snake River, Idaho (USDA, Office of Experiment Stations--Circular No. 65, 1906), 8.

fairness to you we must say that this is not what is commonly termed a poor man's country. A man must have a little capital and that in cash, otherwise he may find himself in embarrassed circumstances before he is well settled."⁶⁸

The same circumstances seemed to have prevailed on the government tracts as well. There water rights were somewhat higher, though about the same as on the Twin Falls north side tract. Entrymen under the Reclamation Act, however, had ten years (later extended to twenty) at no interest to pay off their land and water costs, whereas those under Carey Act developments had ten years at interest.

There is also an additional quantity which needs to be taken into consideration concerning the difficulty and the odds against getting a successful start in the irrigated country. Annie Pike Greenwood, the wife of a settler who built their farm on the Jerome tract about 1910, and a woman who became quite widely known for her articles on roughing it on the Idaho frontier, remarked on the difficulty which most had experienced in keeping their farms during the Great Depression: "Nearly all ... have lost their farms or are hanging onto them by a mere thread. It did no good that you were an experienced farmer in Illinois, Nebraska, Oklahoma, Missouri, etc. The farmers from Utah became prosperous ahead of all others.

⁶⁸Letter from Voigt to Mrs. A. M. Merritt, Denver; August 3, 1906. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 4.

X stands for the unknown quantity, IRRIGATION."⁶⁹ Mrs. Greenwood's observation is applicable to the earlier years as well, with only slightly less emphasis because of the better economic health of the country in the first two decades of the century. But there is little doubt that on the farm one's own economic well-being was directly related to his knowledge of or prior experience with irrigation.

The general ignorance of the farming population concerning proper irrigation techniques was something well known by those government administrators of the Minidoka tracts, but for too long this kind of education was not considered to be a government responsibility. The 1908 Annual Report noted:

On the other portions of the project good crops have been raised where the land was well leveled and the farm laterals constructed properly. Ignorance or neglect of these two requisites is the cause of most of the failures. There is urgent need of a demonstration farm to give the farmers practical lessons as to what kinds of crops to raise and how to raise them.⁷⁰

Robbins notes that the government had only one function in all of this--to provide water. There was no effort to get "the right kind of farmer," to suggest the crops to be grown, to introduce new techniques of crop rotations or marketing in this new agricultural environment.⁷¹ An interesting contrast should

⁶⁹Annie Pike Greenwood, We Sagebrush Folks (New York: D. Appleton-Century Company, 1934), 453.

⁷⁰U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1908, 85.

⁷¹Roy M. Robbins, Our Landed Heritage (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1942), 332.

be drawn on the way such matters were handled on the Twin Falls tracts.

It may be said, without exaggeration, that the Twin Falls companies not only provided the water and sold town lots as the government did, but they also literally provided the schools, brought religion and industry, provided recreation, promoted agricultural markets, and in other ways helped town dweller and farmer alike to adjust to an arid environment. An experimental farm was laid out in the beginning so that farmers had a visual appreciation of what crops and farming methods were most profitable. The company employed men to specifically instruct in the techniques of irrigated agriculture. By 1910, so gratuitous had the company's reputation become at "priming the pump" that in response to an invitation from a professor of dairying at the University of Idaho that the company donate \$2000 for an experimental project at that school, the company secretary replied "this Company is not making any further subscriptions for any purpose. We feel that we have done enough. The farmers are making by far more money than we are."⁷²

The Twin Falls companies also set aside town blocks for schools, and in some instances advanced funds for the construction of the school buildings. In October 1904, six months before water was turned into the south side canals for the first time, the school had been built and by December sixty students

⁷²Letter from Voigt to J. H. Frandson, March 30, 1910. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 3.

were enrolled.⁷³ The company also made it known that it would donate building sites for any churches, although by 1910 (the year the system was turned over to the user's association) this gratuity seems to have ended. By then the company was politely but persistently badgering the pastor of the Methodist Episcopal Church in Buhl for past due payments on two lots. The pastor, in defense, advised that he had been away for some time and that "collections are very slow at present."⁷⁴ In other ways, sometimes by outright land grants and at other times by very favorable terms, the companies induced settlement and growth--beet factories, elevators, mercantile companies, and mills are examples of firms induced to contribute to the development of the tracts.

Thus, when one leaves consideration of the advantages or disadvantages of land laws and different agencies of water-works construction, and instead considers the actual process of settling arid terrain and schooling people (especially farmers) in adapting to the requirements of that environment, and in other ways makes life more pleasant, the role of these private construction and settlement companies is far greater than hitherto emphasized. At that time perhaps only private enterprise was capable of fulfilling such a role. On the other hand, such activities doubtless rebounded to the profit of the company--

⁷³A Folk History of Twin Falls County, Territorial Centennial (Twin Falls: Standard Printing Company, 1962), 107.

⁷⁴Letter from pastor to the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, September 7, 1910. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 1.

or as James J. Hill put it on another occasion, "Before you can get the traffic, you must make it."

The record of public land policy in promoting the goal of settlement and avoiding the abuses of speculation or land accumulation is a spotted one. In the twentieth century these two reclamation land laws proved to be only slightly less vulnerable to the abuse which had followed previous land laws. The clear intent of both the Carey Act and the National Reclamation Act was to provide for the settlement of the land in small homesteads. Frederick Newell wrote in 1903 concerning the 160 acre limitation of the Reclamation Act:

Great care is being taken to have this feature of the law enforced in such a way as to require continuous residence and cultivation of the land...the chief purpose being to bring about immediately a dense settlement on small, self-sustaining farms.

Whenever a project for reclamation of Government land is declared to be feasible public lands under it are immediately taken up under the terms of the homestead law, and by the time the works are completed the land is all in private ownership.⁷⁵

The intent is thus clear although in the second paragraph Newell apparently could not envisage the difficulties which would beset the Minidoka south side. In a way his statement is also internally inconsistent for there was no way to obtain private ownership of the land (which required residence and

⁷⁵Frederick Newell, "What Irrigation Means," The New York Times, October 4, 1903, 13.

reclamation improvement) before the water works were completed. But nevertheless the objective was small free homesteads and an absence of speculation or accumulation of land parcels. Interior Secretary Lane remarked in 1914 concerning the 160 acre limitation of the Newlands Act, "By every measure with which I am familiar, I can find no justification for a farm unit greater than 80 acres on any reclamation project, even under the least favorable climatic conditions...Every man to whom 160 acres is given deprives some other man of a home."⁷⁶ John W. Powell had said the same thing 40 years early. But there was no one around to listen.

This same intent in the settlement process is apparent in the private internal communications between officers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company. As it was, the size of farm units on the tract seemed to be consistent with the professed goal of settlement. In response to an inquiry from David Burley, Oregon Short Line agent, the company secretary remarked that the average farming unit on the tract in 1909 was around 45 or 50 acres, down significantly from the 70 or 80 acres they had been in the early years of development.⁷⁷

Several years earlier the company secretary had been advised by the company's Salt Lake law firm that they found nothing in the Carey statute itself which expressly precluded

⁷⁶Twin Falls Times, February 20, 1914, 1.

⁷⁷Letter from Burley to Voigt, October 29, 1909. Letter from Voigt to Burley, November 5, 1909. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 1.

an individual from making an entry of lands, afterward assign it to someone else, and subsequently make another entry. But they felt it ought to be objected to and that a contest brought if necessary. They were arguing, however, on the basis of the 160 acre limitation of other land laws--undoubtedly the Homestead Act--and by analogy they felt that the same rule should hold. The attorney then closed with a benevolent expression of what the company's intent ought to be:

Besides that to adopt any other rule would be to give an unfair advantage to persons who desired to speculate upon lands in different localities. A man might take up one parcel, find an opportunity to sell out his right at an advance, and then take up another and so continue for a period of years.⁷⁸

Like the long history of public land policy before it, the National Reclamation Act was just as vulnerable whenever it appeared that speculation might reap handsome profits. A Reclamation Service report in 1907 acknowledged that many individuals were using the Newlands Act in ways other than for the purpose it was enacted:

Many of the claims under the project are held purely for speculation, the holder having made no attempt to prepare the land for cultivation and absolutely refusing to contribute either labor or money toward construction of the ditches which they will be obliged to use in common with their neighbors; consequently the bona fide settler who was desirous of using water this season

⁷⁸Letter to M. B. DeLong from Edward Critchlow, September 21, 1904. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 1.

[the first season water was available] was obliged to do more than his share of ditch building.⁷⁹

By the time of the Wilson administration, however, terms of settlement on federal reclamation tracts had begun to favor the settler. In the face of arguments that the government must either extend relief to settlers or see them pushed off the tracts, a measure passed Congress in 1914 which allowed the settler twenty years instead of ten (as provided in the Newlands Act) to meet his contractual water payments with the government, and this at no interest. It also provided that the first annual installment would not fall due until five years after the initial payment, thus allowing the settler, as under the Carey Act, to raise crops to help pay off his investment.⁸⁰ As a further dampener to speculation and consequently an inducement to permanent settlement there was also a requirement by 1915 that no application for water would be received from any owner who lived more than 50 miles from the land to which the water was to be applied.⁸¹

There was also land speculation inherent in the operation of the Carey Act despite the disclaimers and good intentions of the Salt Lake law firm cited earlier. In a petition to the General Land Office from the board of directors of the Twin Falls North Side Company in February 1912, among the grievances

⁷⁹U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1907, 85-86.

⁸⁰Robbins, 384.

⁸¹Gunnell, 95.

was the assertion that "a large portion of the segregation is being held by speculators who are not occupying or improving said lands, and on which no good faith effort is being made to beneficially apply the water and reclaim the land."⁸² The petition also noted that the price of water rights for lands adjacent to or near to the rail line had been graduated higher than other lands without reference being made to either the quality of the land or the quantity of water available. This situation on the Jerome tract with the previously noted liberality of the law as applied by the Twin Falls companies, seems consistent with the general observation drawn by Robbins that the Carey Act was an open invitation to speculation.⁸³

However, it is difficult to assess the degree of speculation against those whose primary interest was settlement and the establishment of a permanent home. Beyond doubt, one's initial investment in the desert lands and water rights (whether provided by a company or by the government) was repaid many fold in prolific crops and rapidly increasing land values. Such a promising prospect was unquestionably custom-made for speculative purposes. However, this is not so significant in the long view as Vernon Carstensen notes;

⁸²Bureau of Reclamation, Petition of the Board of Directors of the Twin Falls North Side Canal Users Association to the Commissioner of the General Land Office; Jerome, Idaho, February 8, 1912. Federal Records Depository, Seattle. Accession No. 62A434, FRC Container No. B4396.

⁸³Robbins, 383.

The land grabs, the water grabs, the mineral grabs, the timber grabs all excite great interest and bring forth lamentations. This represents a melancholy part of the story, but it is not the whole story...The part of the story that involves the vast number of land seekers who got their land without violating either the spirit or the letter of the law is in a way the least exciting part...It was about this aspect that Eugene Davenport, then Dean of the College of Agriculture of Illinois, might have been thinking when in 1915 he discussed briefly the distribution and use of the public domain. Waste and abuse there had been in abundance, 'but we have these farms, these cities, these railroads, and this civilization to show for it, and they are worth what they cost.'⁸⁴

What was there to show on the Minidoka tracts after a decade? With the south side pumping system still slightly less than complete in 1917 (ten years after water had first been turned onto the north side gravity system), the Minidoka tracts could boast of a crop yield worth \$2.8 millions, with the value of livestock adding an additional million dollars.⁸⁵ The average yield of potatoes was \$150 per acre, more than twice the value of any other crop. Alfalfa, however, represented 45% of the total valuation and was indicative of the importance which livestock production had come to have on the tracts. Few would dispute the observation that a decade later it had been worth the cost. On the private and federal tracts combined, over a dozen reasonably prosperous communities had

⁸⁴Vernon Carstensen (ed), The Public Lands: Studies in the History of the Public Domain (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1968), xxvi.

⁸⁵The Idaho Statesman, February 17, 1917, 6.

grown up. Over a half-million acres had been reclaimed from desert wastes which each year added increasing wealth to their own districts and to the general economy of the state.

This chapter began with an assessment of the support and opposition which the National Reclamation Act received in the West as opposed to other regions of the United States. In Idaho the debate over whether reclamation was more advantageously accomplished by the federal government or by private enterprise came to be focused on the Minidoka project with its primary storage facility at Jackson Lake in Wyoming, and a secondary storage and diversion dam at Minidoka, 300 miles downstream on the Snake River. Finally, a contrast or comparison was made between this first federal project in Idaho and the adjacent Twin Falls Carey Act developments, in terms of the operation of the respective land laws and the actual process of settlement on the tracts. Special note was taken of what appeared to be, between 1904 and 1909, the denigration of federal reclamation efforts. This came from Idaho sources as well as from an important segment of national journalism. For the Idaho experience particularly, this was mostly due to the plight of the federal south side system and of those who had eaked out a bare subsistence on the tract, each year believing that government water would soon be provided.

It was also during the latter part of this five year period that the future course of Idaho reclamation was foreshadowed. The Twin Falls north side development, directed and financed by

the Kuhn syndicate, seemed to be totally dependent upon water storage space in the government reservoirs. At first, water in the reservoir which was not needed on the still-developing Minidoka tracts was leased by the north side company. As the federal project was nearing completion, the north side people lost their leasing rights and in 1913 contracted with the government for an enlargement of Jackson Dam in return for contractual storage space in the federal reservoirs.

It was suggested earlier that one may consider the period around 1910 or 1911 as representing something of a turning point in the way private enterprise and state officials came to perceive federal reclamation and the Reclamation Service. The rhetorical war which had earlier characterized these relations had abated, and instead, all of those in Idaho who were concerned with matters of reclamation came to look upon the federal government not only as a full-fledged partner in the business of reclamation, but in many instances as a savior.

This turnabout in attitudes was expressly manifest in the dealings of the north side company with the government after 1908. It was confirmed in legal terms by the passage of the so-called Warren Bill in 1911 (it had been defeated in 1910) which marked a new phase in western reclamation. The bill provided that whenever storage or carrying capacity of federal works was in excess of that required by federal project lands the excess could be contracted to "individual corporations, associations, and irrigation districts" organized for the purposes of reclamation. Furthermore, the Secretary of the

Interior was authorized to cooperate with users associations, corporations, and water districts for the construction and use of reservoirs and distributing systems provided "that water shall not be furnished from any such reservoir or delivered through any such canal or ditch to any one landowner in excess of an amount sufficient to irrigate one hundred and sixty acres."⁸⁶ Thus, not only did the Warren Act formally open a new era of federal cooperation in the reclamation business, but it also again affirmed the intention of the two primary reclamation measures to settle the western arid country in relatively small farm units. The Warren Act was to achieve its fullest meaning in the American Falls development then still over a decade away.

The period after 1910, in addition to being characterized by federal partnership in Idaho reclamation, was also a period when private companies and state reclamation officials began to lean rather heavily on the beneficence and superior resources of the United States government and the Reclamation Service. This dependence was very early foreseen by an eastern newspaper, the Boston Transcript, which warily wrote in October 1905:

....investors in the east should be warned against irrigation investments...few of these irrigation schemes have been successful. The passage of the reclamation act...has been the signal for a determined effort...to get relief from the past mistakes by disposing of the bankrupt properties to the government.⁸⁷

⁸⁶36 Stat. 925, February 21, 1911.

⁸⁷Cited in The Twin Falls News, December 17, 1905, 7.

This observation by an eastern newspaper concerning the worth of private western irrigation projects appeared a year after Frederick Newell offered similar sentiments which marked him, according to the Twin Falls News, as "essentially a man of small caliber and brain." South Idahoans took this occasion to castigate the Boston Transcript, Mr. Newell again, and those of similar mind.⁸⁸

In fact, however, the Reclamation Act was a saving vehicle for many private company projects in Idaho, even before the era of the giant federal works at American Falls and Palisades. The difficulties on certain projects which had become glaringly visible by 1913 or 1914 were noted in the previous chapter. The King Hill irrigation projects are probably most demonstrative of the kind of responsibility the federal government was coming to assume in western reclamation during the second decade of this century. These projects, about sixty miles below Twin Falls, anticipated the reclamation of 26,000 acres at an estimated cost of one million dollars. Due to poor construction and management, as well as to over-estimation of available water, the developing company was thrown into bankruptcy. On appeal to the Reclamation Service by the State of Idaho requesting that the government save the faltering enterprise, the United States agreed to take over the project when a local irrigation district should be formed. President Woodrow Wilson approved Interior Secretary Lane's recommendation that an

⁸⁸Ibid.

initial \$200,000 be funded for the project as urged by Idaho's congressman Addison T. Smith.⁸⁹ Ultimately, only about 13,000 acres were patented at a cost to the original company of one million dollars plus bankruptcy, over \$80,000 by the State of Idaho, and almost \$2,000,000 by the federal government.⁹⁰

Similar federal intervention had been urged to save the Twin Falls Salmon tract which was also discussed in the last chapter. It is significant too that by this time the Twin Falls area was adamant in its insistence that the resources of the federal government be galvanized to rectify the kinds of mistakes which the Boston Transcript, a decade earlier, had drawn attention to. One of the smaller Twin Falls enterprises, the West End project (adjacent to the southwest corner of the big parent tract) had appealed directly to the governor urging his cooperation with the company to induce the United States to complete the project through the Reclamation Service.⁹¹

These examples are indicative then of a wholesale revolution in attitudes towards the place of government in Idaho reclamation, a state in which private enterprise had initially shown the way in reclaiming the arid lands. Within the space of ten years the government's most vocal adversary (speaking collectively of the Twin Falls area) had become one of the strongest proponents of the need for government partnership,

⁸⁹The Idaho Statesman, January 7, 1917, 1.

⁹⁰Williams, 50.

⁹¹The Twin Falls Times, January 2, 1914, 1.

not only in helping to bail out faltering enterprises in the state, but also in helping to ensure the continued economic stability of projects already completed and productive. Going a step further, Russell E. Shepherd, who had come to the chairmanship of the north side bondholders committee following the failure of the Kuhn syndicate in 1913, anticipated the future needs of the upper Snake River basin. At a state engineers meeting in Boise early in 1917, Shepherd noted the millions of acre feet of water which annually had to be turned out to the Pacific. He strongly urged the consolidation and unity of all government, Carey Act, and irrigation district projects for the purpose of conserving this water, and then suggested the passage of some law urging this consolidation.⁹² The road to the giant American Falls works and the consolidation of Water District Number 36 was thus foreshadowed.

⁹²"Engineers of State Convene," The Idaho Statesman, January 17, 1918, 8.

CHAPTER 4

AMERICAN FALLS: IT'S A LONG, LONG TRAIL TO WASHINGTON (*)

"The desert is 'the last frontier' in more senses than one. It was last because it was reached latest; ...It brings man up against his limitations, turns him in upon himself and suggests values which more indulgent regions minimize."

--Joseph Wood Krutch, The Voice of the Desert

In October of 1905, a settler on the Twin Falls tract was approached by one of his neighbors for help in extending a ditch lateral to a corner of the neighbor's homestead. With the cooperation of still other settlers the lateral was extended, but in the process it barely cut across the corner of a tract owned by James A. Young, ruining perhaps a half acre of Young's land. Young had been present during the time the lateral was being extended and was described as "always pleasant and ready to advise." The next spring, however, Young's mood had apparently changed and he refused the compensation for the half-acre which the others had offered, but instead demanded a far higher price. At this point it was suggested by Young's neighbors that the question be submitted to a three man arbitra-

(*) Title of a reclamation rally song by Ethelyn Glasser, Assistant Secretary of the Idaho Reclamation Association. Popularized by the Pocatello Tribune, July 31, 1919, 4.

tion panel to work out an equitable compensation. This too Young spurned, and instead informed his neighbors of an impending law suit which he was initiating for recovery of his losses. At this point the Twin Falls Land and Water Company interposed itself into the dispute (which it really had no authority to do) and succinctly posed the essence of social relations which an arid geography demands if land settlement is to ultimately mature into a harmonious civilization. The company official suggested that before Young proceeded with such litigation:

...you come in and talk to us about it and see if the matter cannot be adjusted without trouble. In irrigated countries, more than any others, neighbors are called upon to give and take a great deal and unless a farmer is of more or less an obliging nature he is likely to have difficulty with his neighbors...It is not the intention of the company to interfere in this matter but only assist in settling the controversy, and to that end would be glad to hear your side of the question.¹

Here in microcosm, in a neighborly dispute, was the essence of so much difficulty, litigation, and violence in the irrigated west. The fact that an irrigated economy required a greater degree of cooperation than did more humid areas of the United States is not too startling a revelation. Mid-twentieth century residents of many towns in the arid west still water their lawns and gardens according to cooperative

¹Letter from J.B. Ellsworth to the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, June 25, 1906. Letter from the Company to James A. Young, July 6, 1906. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 2.

time schedules administered by a watermaster. The city-dwelling owner of one share in a Logan, Utah water company still may be required to take his hour and a half of water at 2:00 a.m. if he wants it for his garden and lawn that day. But to enlarge this neighborly sense of cooperation into a huge reclamation project which for success required the mutual cooperation of thirty water districts and forty or so irrigation companies along a 300 mile stretch of river, is an achievement without parallel in the history of western settlement. In a way, it is even a more striking achievement than the cooperative settlement of northern Utah by the Mormons, for here on the Snake River communities didn't function under a theocracy and an all-encompassing priesthood line of authority in which each individual knew his place. Rather it resulted from the ultimate recognition on the part of a majority of citizens that on the hinge of a secular, cooperative project hung the fate of the budding civilization and agricultural empire of the upper Snake River Valley.

The project of course was the giant American Falls Dam, 25 miles west of Pocatello on the main course of the Snake River. Its ultimate completion guaranteed the stability of the many private, federal, and joint reclamation enterprises between Jackson, Wyoming and Magic Valley. Its failure would have meant a tenuous existence with cities and farms directly dependent upon seasonal whims of nature characteristic today

of the High Plains.² The meaning of American Falls is not to be found in the entrepreneurship of a single man or syndicate as in the manner of Twin Falls, nor is it to be found in the application of new and untried land laws. Rather, the real meaning of this largest reclamation feature of the upper valley is to be found in the gradual awareness of people that those living in the early Mormon settlements, for example, had a crucial community of interest with the distant residents of Magic Valley, and that those on privately developed reclamation tracts shared a common denominator with those who had homesteaded federal projects. Here, in American Falls and the ultimate formation of Water District Number 36 and its administration by an "irrigation democracy" was the triumph of community, the hope which the west seemed to offer as it was viewed by John W. Powell, William E. Smythe, Francis Newlands, and Elwood Mead.

The site of the American Falls on the Snake River had long before been noted as one of the prime locations for a storage reservoir. It had figured in the calculations of early surveyors such as Riblett and Hansen. In 1889 men of the U. S. Geologic Survey had noted the location of several good potential reservoir sites: Alpine Canyon, Swan Valley, The Teton River, and American Falls. Addison T. Smith, Idaho's congressional

²Carl Kraenzel's fine book, The Great Plains in Transition (University of Oklahoma Press, 1955) is the story of the failure of men and institutions to adjust to the demands of the Plains environment.

representative from the 2nd District from 1913-1933 and one of the West's foremost spokesman for reclamation, asserted in 1943 that American Falls Dam was the brain child of Ira B. Perrine.³ Here, as in the earlier instance, allowance must be made for over-statement. It had long been believed that American Falls would be the diversion site for water to reclaim lands further down on the south side of the river. The Pocatello Tribune noted as early as 1897 "a score of teams and two miles of ditch on the west bank of the [American] Falls, and [they] are still going on down the valley, their object point being the Minidoka Valley, twenty-eight miles distant."⁴ Little else is known of this very early effort to "develop" the American Falls site.

A decade later, however, the private developing companies were talking in very specific terms about using a reservoir at American Falls to water the lower lands. Especially was this so when the companies first began thinking about reclaiming the large Bruneau tract.⁵ American Falls, even as late as 1926, was widely discussed as the probable site of the Bruneau reservoir. The Bruneau project came to be so taken for granted that from time to time the Twin Falls construction company would receive bids for sub-contract work, personal inquiries for engineering and survey jobs, and requests for literature.

³Twin Falls Times News, October 3, 1943, 2

⁴Pocatello Tribune, December 18, 1897, 1.

⁵Twin Falls News, December 14, 1911, 1; April 18, 1912, 1.
For a discussion of the Bruneau lands see Chapter 2, p. 98+.

The residents of the town of American Falls caught the gleam of a bonanza and offered to furnish the company with everything from teams to hotels.⁶

Well might they have been so encouraged. The Twin Falls Land and Water Company had been sending engineering survey teams into the American Falls site. The trouble they met with the Bannock-Shoshone Indians was a cause for wide publicity, since much of the acreage around the Falls was tribal land. The company finally had to appeal to Idaho's Senator Borah to intercede with the Bureau of Indian Affairs to allow company teams on the site. In a letter to Borah, the company gratefully acknowledged his assistance, but concluded:

...We have no object at the present time except to ascertain storage capacity and therefore cannot see any harm from the privilege of making these surveys on the reservation. When the time comes, we shall have to deal with the government in acquiring lands to be flooded.⁷

So work on the dam was acknowledged to be still in the future, but the idea of a reservoir at the Falls was omnipresent.

⁶"We have no information to give you relative to the Bruneau project... We have completed all of the preliminary surveys; have made all the necessary land, water, and reservoir filings, and are trying to form the project; but it is so large and the times have been so hard and unpromising for the promoting of such a large scheme, that we have been unable to get it started..."; Letter from the Company to W. T. Oliver of American Falls, February 25, 1911. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 4.

⁷Letter from Voigt to Borah, May 9, 1910. Papers of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company, Box 2.

This idea was probably best expressed by an individual who was intimately involved with the history of the dam, Irvin E. Rockwell.⁸ He remarked that the storage dam was "a composite idea," that "no individual or group has appeared in the record as solely responsible for its initiation. Like Topsy, it seemed to just grow."⁹ With the years of speculation concerning the dam and its probable primary function (watering the Bruneau), no one believed that the dam would not sometime be built. Particularly was this so as the highly successful reclamation projects in Magic Valley continued apace. As the Minidoka project manager contemplated the possibilities of further federal reclamation in Magic Valley, surveys indicated that over 100,000 additional acres could be reached in an area northwest of the parent federal project, in what is today known as the North Side Pumping Division, and in the Gooding Division which is today served by a federally-constructed canal from the diversion dam at Milner to the Gooding district. Early in 1919, a decade before these lands would finally be opened, the Minidoka manager sent engineers in to make preliminary surveys of these areas, and noted

⁸Rockwell, a close friend of Senator Borah, was a well known figure in Idaho circles. He had been extensively involved in Idaho mining, power works, banking and was state senator for 14 years. His Saga of American Falls Dam (New York, 1947) is an entertaining "insiders" account of the project, its apparent demise, and final completion.

⁹Irvin E. Rockwell, Saga of American Falls Dam (New York: Hobson Book Press, 1947), 10.

the vast opportunity for both employment and homesteading for returning servicemen.¹⁰ The project manager, Barry Dibble, could only remark that water "could be secured from the American Falls reservoir, when completed". Thus, American Falls remained an idea, awaiting only its inevitable time.

The year 1919 is pivotal in Idaho reclamation history. If the American Falls project was an idea awaiting only its time, that time was considerably hastened by a growing movement throughout southern and eastern Idaho for consolidation. The growing alliance after about 1910, between private enterprise and the Reclamation Service (discussed in the last chapter) seemed to serve as a necessary base for subsequent efforts at consolidation. In January of 1919, irrigation groups in the Blackfoot area began an aborted effort to secure a large government loan to develop all the reservoir sites on the Snake River from Jackson to American Falls. They proposed to use the stored water to reclaim all the lands along the river between the Wyoming and Oregon borders. As they envisioned it the many different projects would thus become one great system (as the Minidoka system did eventually become, embracing the river and all its tributaries from Jackson to Milner). No one could accuse the people of Blackfoot of setting their goals too low. A contemporary account dutifully noted, "For the first time in the history of the state we find men acting on a plan big

¹⁰Twin Falls Daily News, January 4, 1919, 5.

enough and broad enough to take in all Southern Idaho, each for all and all for each."¹¹

Even though the objective in this case was too ambitious, the money unavailable, and political support lacking, the notion of consolidation, though not without its critics, was nevertheless a persistent theme throughout the valley from that time forward. A valley editorial was not too greatly in error when it said proudly:

The objective is to combine all irrigation projects into one great drive, political, industrial, and commercial and from now on let it be said that Idaho asked for more than was ever asked before, presented a solid front in the asking, presented a solid front in its accomplishment, and set an example for cooperation and booster spirit never before witnessed in an irrigation enterprise.¹²

John Wesley Powell would have cheered mightily.

Besides the Blackfoot group, organization was taking place up and down the river. A group led by the Twin Falls people had organized to form the Idaho Irrigation Congress. In February 1919, a mass meeting of Idaho Falls farmers and businessmen was called to promote a project called the Dubois Project which contemplated the reclamation of 300,000 acres between Dubois, Idaho (north of Idaho Falls) on the west side of the Snake at Aberdeen. This group, the Snake River Plains Develop-

¹¹Pocatello Tribune, February 10, 1919, 3. See also the Twin Falls Daily News, January 20, 1919, 2.

¹²The Pocatello Tribune, February 20, 1919, 1.

ment Association, nominated a lobbyist to represent their interests in the national Congress and hoped to be able to send a car load of Idaho potatoes to Washington in a proclaimed "Idaho Potato Day" to demonstrate to easterners the agricultural fertility of the Snake Basin. Several assistants were also appointed to interest farm groups west of Idaho Falls in the work of the Association.¹³

Out of this drumming for cooperation and boosterism early in 1919, an organization was born which would carry the hopes of Idaho reclamationists for the next few years. At the initiative of the Pocatello Commercial Club, invitations were extended to the counties of the state for delegations to meet in Pocatello on February 21, 1919. At this meeting of 300 delegates representing 21 counties the Idaho Reclamation Association was organized to further the work of reclamation throughout the state -- not only on the Snake River as the Blackfoot group had envisioned. The immediate objective of the Association was to show a united base of support for a bill proposed by Interior Secretary Franklin Lane appropriating \$100,000,000 for the reclamation of arid land and swamp lands. The Association was not only in support of the Lane bill, but was also anxious that Idaho should get her share of the appropriation. The resolution of support was sent to Secretary Lane, Idaho Congressman Addison T. Smith and the Idaho legislature.¹⁴

¹³"Dubois Project is Attracting Attention," Idaho Register, February 18, 1919, 1.

¹⁴Twin Falls Daily News, February 22, 1919, 8.

The overall objective of the Association was to assist financially and politically in the reclamation of all of Idaho's lands, including the swamps and cut-over areas in the northern part of the state. The Association secretary, Major Fred Reed, estimated that five million acres of Idaho land awaited reclamation, and that to achieve this "will add to the population of the state more than 3,600,000 people."¹⁵ Besides showing support for such measures as the Lane bill, the Association also planned to conduct a campaign of education among those congressmen who, it was believed, were most hostile to western reclamation; namely, those from the east and south. It may be easy to exaggerate the importance of this organization. The officers had initially hoped for a membership of 100,000 but two years later the membership roll was only 15,000 each of whom paid one dollar in annual dues, hardly enough to be financially or politically intimidating. Rockwell inferentially discounted the importance of the organization and noted its dearth of achievements, but he underestimated the influence of so dynamic a leader as Fred Reed of Boise who served as its executive secretary until his death in March 1921.

One of the first results of the Idaho Reclamation Association was to form a point of merger for the several other budding organizations along the river. In an article modestly entitled "Idaho Original Garden of Eden," the Idaho Falls Idaho Register

¹⁵Address to Twin Falls County organization of the Idaho Reclamation Association, Twin Falls Daily News, April 18, 1919, 4.

urged citizens in that area to join the IRA, even though only two months earlier they had formed the Snake River Plains Development Association. The rationale was that when a reclamation bill was passed for the western states, Idaho could secure her share only through the early cooperation and support of every farmer of the state. The question, it was suggested, was "not where, or on what particular project this money will be spent, but the big idea is for everyone to put his or her shoulder to the wheel and assist in securing this appropriation."¹⁶ Thus the IRA became a rallying point for river organization and people were again being conditioned for the "big" idea or the "big district."¹⁷

During those two years Reed crossed the state with whirlwind intensity, helping to establish county organizations, promoting the cause of unity, and providing an example to other states of what local reclamation organization was all about. At a conclave in Burley, for example, some 200 representatives of canal districts in the counties of Cassia, Gooding, Minidoka, Jerome, Lincoln, Twin Falls and Power, met to listen to the best of western boosterism:

The time is rapidly approaching when the mistaken notion of many representatives in both houses that the far west is only the home of the cow puncher, the gun-fighter, the fiction writer, and the outlaw will be exploded.

¹⁶Idaho Register, April 8, 1919, 3.

¹⁷Ibid.

By all the far west sticking together and working for one thing--reclamation--we are going to be properly introduced to the people of the east ...if we stick together the first thing we know, instead of our having to go to them, they will be coming out here to us.¹⁸

Reed, who was the only salaried officer in the organization, took the somewhat cumbersome approach that instead of pushing for a single reclamation project here and there, all efforts should be funneled into a statewide "league of irrigation." Though quite unworkable, given the process of government appropriations, Reed's scheme nevertheless had the educational effect of encouraging people and districts of people in Idaho to think beyond their own provincial boundaries and to contribute money and effort to something larger than themselves for the presumed greater good of all. To be sure, the water shortage of 1919 provided a powerful stimulus to that effort anyway. But at least for the upper Snake River Valley, the efforts of Reed and the organization of this association was a testing ground for the formation of the "Big District" a few years later. Reed himself believed for the first time since the Idaho Reclamation Association was formed "that the big idea of reclamation on broad constructive lines was thoroughly absorbed by the people."¹⁹ Boy Scout troops, citizen

¹⁸"Reclamation Booster Urges Hard Struggle For Irrigation," Twin Falls Daily News, January 19, 1920, 8. Other forays by Reed are covered by the same paper, June 12, 1920, 8; March 15, 1920, 8.

¹⁹Cited in the Pocatello Tribune, January 12, 1920, 3.

groups, chambers of commerce and commercial clubs were all at various times engaged in raising money for the activities of the Idaho Reclamation Association. Idaho's special friend of reclamation, Representative Smith, on one occasion remarked concerning the work of the Association:

There can be no question but that the work of the Idaho Reclamation Association formed to further the Lane Plan, is both desirable and effective...the knowledge that the people at home are united and active in the interests of the measure is bound to be a considerable factor. It is the case in this, as in most matters presented for the attention of Congress, that the fellow who crowds the hardest gets results first.²⁰

The Idaho Reclamation Association did crowd harder and shortly it became the embryo for a much larger federation of thirteen far western states. This organization which met in Salt Lake City in November 1919 appropriately elected by unanimous vote Idaho's governor David W. Davis (who had called the conference) as permanent chairman of the Western States Reclamation Association.²¹ A conference resolution was forwarded to the national capitol, reminding Congress that fifty-seven years earlier in order to strengthen the Union (and besides being a sound national policy) Abraham Lincoln had fostered the building of the transcontinentals with land grants and

²⁰Twin Falls Daily News, May 13, 1919, 6.

²¹This organization consisted of representatives from California, Oregon, Washington, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Montana, Wyoming, Colorado, Nebraska, Texas, and Idaho. Cited in the Pocatello Tribune, November 21, 1919, 1.

generous national credit. The reclamation of several million acres of western lands was thought to be an appropriate analogy, and therefore the conference asked that a fund of \$250,000,000 be set aside for use under the National Reclamation Act. Perhaps more important was Davis' proposal that the executive committee meet soon in Washington D. C. with the congressional representatives of the western states. Shortly thereafter, Governor Davis appeared with Arizona's Governor Campbell, in direct hearings before the House Ways and Means Committee to urge a congressional appropriation of \$250,000,000 for extensive western reclamation in which former service men would have a preference right to settle the land. Ten other western states were represented before the committee in support of the Davis-Campbell proposal.²² This appropriation proposal was eventually given embodiment in a bill sponsored by Oregon Senator McNary.

Western regional organization was also proceeding apace in another direction during this time. The League of the Southwest, representing eight southwestern states--California, Arizona, New Mexico, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Oklahoma and Texas--convened in April, 1920 to formulate a plan for the development of the entire Colorado River basin. Irrigation congresses had met before, and the suggestion here is not that these meetings in 1919 and 1920 were something new, but they were conducted at higher levels of leadership, oftentimes with the assistance

²²"Western Men Hold Out For Reclamation," Twin Falls Daily News, January 20, 1920, 5.

or advice of the Reclamation Service, and represented broader groups and more precise direction than did the irrigation congresses of the 1890's and later.²³

The real importance of all this organizing activity was not clearly apparent until election time in 1920, when both major political parties played for the western vote and did so in terms of reclamation. Fred Reed could appropriately remark of the significance of this regional alliance of states:

This is the first time in the history of the western states that a unity of action has been demonstrated, and with the power of the thirteen states and six million people...it looks as though the demands and requirements of the western states along lines of constructive development are well on their way.²⁴

Thus, the first way the Idaho Reclamation Association proved to be profitable to those in the Snake River Basin was in the repetitive "booster-style" message that mutual organization would be of benefit to all. It may be suggested perhaps, that the IRA was at least a helpful forerunner for those proponents of the "big district" idea a few years later. The ideological ground was being prepared. There is also a direct line from the formation of this association to the subsequent organization of western states later in 1919.

Besides effecting organization, an intense program of education was launched to reach skeptics and doubters in Congress,

²³"Plan Aims at Reclamation of Huge Area," Twin Falls Daily News, March 3, 1920, 2.

²⁴Pocatello Tribune, January 12, 1920, 3.

convert them to the needs of the western states, and thereby secure the necessary appropriations. In Idaho it was strongly felt that recalcitrant eastern congressmen were responsible for the delay in getting the big projects underway--the Bruneau and American Falls:

[the] Attitude of the south and east against the big irrigation projects for the west has been of long standing and is regularly persistent. The present congress is no exception... Some of the erudite brethren of the south and east should consider that sagebrush will not always be the decorative portion of western scenery. The east has forgotten its bush days, and the south its tanglewood and skunkbush. Both have rain but neither understands irrigation nor conservation of water. They know that it will float a steamboat and is reasonably fair for baptismal purposes, but they don't comprehend canning it for crops.²⁵

This editorial then urged affiliation with organizations such as the Idaho Reclamation Association as a vehicle for driving this kind of sentiment home to members of congress.

Part of this opposition to western reclamation came from unexpected quarters. In mid-1919, the expectations of western reclamationists were fired again by another reclamation bill sponsored by Representative Mondell of Wyoming and Senator Reed Smoot from Utah, and supported by Secretary Lane. Granting liberal terms to soldiers, the bill proposed the setting aside of \$500,000,000 for reclamation throughout the west.²⁶

²⁵"No Narrowness to West," Pocatello Tribune, July 12, 1919, 4.

²⁶Deference to soldiers in 1919 and 1920 was almost a necessity if such a bill was to even have a fair hearing. The reclamation associations also courted endorsement by the American Legion.

The Idaho Reclamation Association, endorsed now by the International Rotary, the Idaho State Bankers, and the Boise Trades and Labor Council, prepared a delegation to go to Washington to lobby for the bill and for Idaho's share. But western farmers were probably a bit surprised when the National Grange expressed its opposition to the Mondell bill, again on the basis of a theme developed in the preceding chapter.

The Grange president held to the view that passage of the legislation would result in disastrous competition and the consequent lowering of farm prices nationwide. One prominent National Granger sounded the tone of the opposition when he remarked, "The arid lands of the West, even when irrigated are unfit for cultivation...If soldiers want farms they can buy lands already improved in sections where the success of farming has already been proven and not have to try unsuccessful experiments."²⁷ Several agricultural periodicals picked up the theme and advised against supporting the Mondell bill. Most of these journals, the Pocatello Tribune noted, were in the middle west and southwest.²⁸ In this confrontation between the west and representatives from other regions--much of it undoubtedly real and some imagined--two themes are recurrent: the need to "educate" the east as suggested earlier; but more important for the present purposes is the fact that this

²⁷Idaho Register, June 13, 1919, 1.

²⁸"Grange Makes Opposition to Mondell Bill," The Pocatello Tribune, June 26, 1919, 1.

opposition to the west generated its own western regional counterforce which itself was a precipitant of a greater awareness that the good of each was somehow bound up with the welfare of the region. The Twin Falls Daily News probably put it best, "Politics have temporarily been put aside in Idaho while the state organized as a whole to secure a fair proportion of the half-billion dollars provided for in the Mondell bill..."²⁹ Fred Reed suggested that for everyone--not only farmers--the fate of the Mondell bill would mean feast or famine for all, and urged that commercial people and business organizations "use every intelligent influence at their command" to convert their eastern correspondents to the cause of reclamation.³⁰

The year 1919 was earlier suggested as being pivotal in Idaho reclamation history and in the history of the upper Snake River basin. Organization became a dominant theme and one that was sharpened by tempting congressional appropriation bills which met with strong outside opposition and none of which to this point had passed. The opposition, it was widely felt, could be abated or won over to the western point of view. But 1919 left its mark in other ways than associations and appropriations bills, for 1919 was the driest year in the history of Idaho.

²⁹"Mondell Arid Lands Bill is Before Party, "Twin Falls Daily News, August 31, 1919, 2.

³⁰Ibid.

In his comprehensive work on Idaho History, Merle Wells has noted the impact of droughts on irrigation policy in the Snake River basin.³¹ To be sure, severe droughts had occurred in Idaho before 1919. In 1905, the Snake River below Blackfoot was bone-dry for ten miles or so. To avert violence a district judge was forced to close all the headgates and to adjudicate water rights of all the water districts above Blackfoot. A similar experience a decade later forced an adjudication of rights on all the canals below Blackfoot to Magic Valley. But in each case the sequence was always one of imminent disaster, then reaction. Even though companies and districts might know that they had an uncertain water supply, it took the sight of dry ditches to compel action.

The board of directors of the Twin Falls Canal Company met with Reclamation Service officials in February 1919, though it is hard to know if by then they were already anticipating the trials of the coming irrigation season. If they were, there were others on the river who were not. Although January had been a dry month, a record breaking snow fall occurred in February. The meteorologist in charge of the Boise weather bureau assured the river water users of an abundance of water for the 1919 season--an optimistic prediction which was shattered by the subsequent course of events.³² In what may be an exception

³¹Merrill D. Beal and Merle W. Wells, History of Idaho, 3 vols (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Company, 1959), II, 161.

³²"Plenty of Water For Crops This Season," The Idaho Register, March 18, 1919, 1.

to the general sequence of disaster-then-reaction noted in the previous paragraph, the Twin Falls board of directors made it known that the company, in spite of its superior water rights, required additional water storage space. It should be noted that this was the relatively independent company (compared to most other projects) whose early water rights had made it the most stable big project in the upper basin. Now in 1919 it was not quite so self-sufficient as in the earlier years. In fact, the board noted that water had been insufficient for complete crop maturation in 1905, 1910, and 1915. Here in early 1919 the company directors informed the Reclamation Service that they would cooperate in the development of a storage site wherein the company could be assured an additional 100,000 acre-feet for security against low-water years.³³ If the south side Twin Falls tract was becoming more dependent on storage rights, the growing dependence of the other projects was all the greater.

As winter turned into spring, 1919, the valley newspapers began to reflect the anxiety of approaching trouble. It had been a very cold spring, and what snow the great Snake River watershed had accumulated over the storage season of 1918-19 was late in melting. The rainfall in June was the lowest ever recorded in that month; it was also the second month in succes-

³³"More Storage is Favored By Canal Board," The Twin Falls Daily News, February 25, 1919, 5. The Company today owns 151,000 acre feet in American Falls Reservoir and 97,000 in Jackson Lake.

sion with the lowest precipitation on record. The secretary of the Twin Falls Canal Company noted that they would be able to furnish only 30% of the normal supply of water for some time to come, and remarked that he had "never encountered a situation similar to this."³⁴

Altercation was rife along the river. Governor Davis issued a proclamation calling on the people of the districts to obey the law and refrain from violence. Personal representatives of the governor were sent to the more rebellious districts. The Idaho Register noted:

The farmers of the district are desperate and threats of violence are being made and in one instant after warning had been given, the lock from a headgate was broken, the gate released and water illegally used...farmers are making illegal use of water at night...and vigilante committees have been organized.³⁵

The Annual Report for 1919-20 notes that because of the dry spring and summer, it became necessary to draw upon stored water as early as June 5th (a month or 6 weeks earlier than normal) and that the supply of water owned by several companies was exhausted before the middle of July. The Jackson reservoir was emptied on August 21.³⁶ An article which appeared in the Twin Falls Daily News in late August put the situation in more starkly human terms:

³⁴Twin Falls Daily News, July 1, 1919, 3.

³⁵"Call Governor in the Water Controversy," The Idaho Register, March 18, 1919, 1.

³⁶U.S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1919-1920, 157.

If it is humanly possible for the farmers of the South Side to spare enough water to make possible a five or ten day domestic run for the benefit of the people on the North Side segregation, this should by all means be done.

Explaining that the only way to do this was for a farmer to inform the company that he would concede a certain allotment to be diverted into the north side canals, the plea continued:

The farmers of the North Side are not asking for water for irrigation purposes but for the necessities of life. Today on dozens of North Side farms stock is not receiving enough water, chickens are sickening and dying, and children are forced to drink and make use of water which has been hauled for miles...cisterns are empty and there is no means of filling them.
If enough farmers can spare enough water, even at the cost of some degree of loss and inconvenience to themselves, the thanks of their neighbors on the North Side will follow them for many a day. In the name of humanity, it should be done.³⁷

Thus again were revealed the stark demands of an arid environment and the necessity for community. Rarely had such mutual dependence been so dramatically in evidence. Succeeding issues of the newspaper noted the favorable response of many south side farmers. Up and down the valley that year ranchers and farmers suffered a 25 million dollar crop loss, although the loss to the basin economy as a whole was much greater when the impact on service industries and business loss is considered.

Conservation and hoarding became the guiding philosophy

³⁷"North Side Ranchers Must Have Water or Suffer Real Hardship," Twin Falls Daily News, August 29, 1919, 1.

of most of the upper basin residents for 1919 and for subsequent years as well. "Get Water First then Peddle It," was an exhortation of the Pocatello Tribune in 1919. Being pleased, for the moment at least, to bypass the details of distribution, it was urged that the main thing was the conservation of the water supply. By this time, and in contrast to the Minidoka project, even the propriety of the federal government in the distribution of water supplies was conceded. This attitude marked a progression from attitudes before 1910 when the proper activity of government was felt by most to be only in the construction of storage facilities but not in distribution or actual settlement of land. "Store the water and peddle it through government aid if we can. But store it first. It can't be stored without dams, and dams can't be built without government aid. That aid cannot be secured without solid participation by all counties."³⁸

Fred Reed, in his excursions for the IRA, constantly hit upon the necessity for hoarding, which in the circumstances was a virtue. Lamenting the fact that millions of acre feet of water annually passed Milner to be lost to the Pacific, he insisted that federally built reservoirs were the solution. Even if the government did not build the irrigation system Reed believed that sufficient money could be raised from private sources provided that government-built reservoirs ensured the security.

³⁸Pocatello Tribune, June 4, 1919, 1.

The drought affected the discipline of those even outside the farming districts. "Save the water" was an editorial cry of the Pocatello Tribune in 1919. In restricting the hours of domestic water use, the city's authorities issued a stern edict resembling a military order, "every resident will obey implicitly the rules created for the emergency...Otherwise no kick should arise if a violator has his supply entirely cut off. It is for the benefit of the community at large."³⁹ Ten days later the paper noted that seventeen violators had had their water shut off completely.

A parenthetical observation might be in order here. In Idaho, today as in 1919, as water resources became the object of more intense competition and assumed increasing priority--for further reclamation, for the use of more and larger cities, and as an aid to industry--the fact of aridity has gradually come to make itself known to more and more people. The resources have been unquestionably limited. This division of a limited resource will eventually have to force a reordering of priorities among the mountain states and the desert southwest. Well manicured and brilliant green lawns, for example, may some day have to give way to natural landscaping or even "astro turf."⁴⁰

³⁹"Save the Water," The Pocatello Tribune, July 18, 1919, 4. My emphasis.

⁴⁰The present and future problems of water resource allocation and priorities is explored in Carle Hodge (ed), Aridity and Man (Washington, AAAS, 1963).

In February 1919, the director of the Twin Falls Land and Water Company had indicated a desire to cooperate with the Reclamation Service in the development of a storage site in return for an additional 100,000 acre-feet of storage. By the end of the year so acute had been the drought, the canal stockholders turned out in what was the largest vote in the history of the corporation. Expression of the stockholders was near unanimous in favor of cooperating with the Reclamation Service in the development of the American Falls site. One farmer at the meeting probably expressed the sentiments of most, and appropriately noted that as a result of the crop loss of that year, his entire losses were considerably in excess of what his proportionate share of building the American Falls project would have been. He added, "I consider that an extra assessment of something like 85 cents an acre for this purpose would be mighty cheap insurance against subsequent losses from water shortage."⁴¹ Estimating the season's financial loss at \$40 million, the Idaho Register also sounded the same theme of insuring against further losses. But in addition, the paper for the first time also hinted at a budding organizational movement which would ultimately become the famed "committee of nine," the kernel of Idaho's irrigation democracy:

It has been suggested that a meeting of all the interests of the upper valley be called at Idaho Falls...for the purpose of taking up the matter and of making preliminary plans for an organiza-

⁴¹"Canal Stockholders Favor American Falls Reservoir," Twin Falls Daily News, December 10, 1919, 5.

tion which will have for its objective the building of storage reservoirs to insure against future crop loss from water shortage.⁴²

Again, the signpost to the American Falls project was clearly indicated; such had been the tremendous impact of the drought of 1919.

Pockets of resistance along the way had already been noticed, however, as early as 1919, but would not become full blown for a few more years. Even in the face of the opposition of the National Grange to the Mondell bill, Fred Reed noted that the affairs of the Idaho Reclamation Association were in good shape and that it was ready to lobby for the bill. But he also noted in passing that "a little more pep could be exercised by communities in eastern Idaho."⁴³ Fred Reed was again referring to this section of the state when he noted that, "A little spirit of jealousy and antagonism has crept out in some communities."⁴⁴ Eventually, in this portion of the upper basin less than ten per cent of the irrigation districts would vote for the big consolidated district. The remainder joined only when the American Falls project was assured and tangible benefits were obvious.

The Pocatello Tribune likewise scored the apathy of some of the upper irrigation districts. In its theme of hoarding

⁴²The Idaho Register, July 8, 1919, 1.

⁴³The Pocatello Tribune, June 26, 1919, 1.

⁴⁴"A Reservoir of Water is Money in a Bank," The Idaho Register, November 21, 1919, 1.

and conservation during 1919 it remarked that "In the game of bottling up the waste water for future use on a thirsty desert there should be full cooperation, especially on the part of the farm sections most interested." Then more directly, "Some of the communities haven't shown their mettle. They are located in farming sections that are vitally interested in the success --or failure--of the reclamation plans."⁴⁵

The apparent unanimity of the Twin Falls area cited above may be somewhat misleading. There was an apparent schism between the farmers' association and the businessmen of the community concerning the need for a new government storage reservoir at American Falls. Irvin Rockwell noted a rather strong current of opposition to the American Falls project in the Twin Falls area led by prominent "white collared brokers and money lenders." The apparent feeling of many residents of Twin Falls was, "We have got too much debt now to undertake a proportionate financing of the Falls project," obviously not recognizing a line of direct relationship from the prosperity of the farmers of the district to the well-being of the merchant class. Rockwell called them "isolationists," fearing cooperation, and noted that the Chamber of Commerce in Twin Falls "was innoculated with the doctrine."⁴⁶ Thus, the lines were being drawn in 1919 over the merits of mutual organization into a

⁴⁵"Get Water First Then Peddle It Is Solid Project," The Pocatello Tribune, June 4, 1919, 1.

⁴⁶Rockwell, 16.

district which would compel the loyalty and cooperation--and money--of the thirty-one other separate districts.

During the year following the severe drought the propagandizing activities of the Idaho Reclamation Association and the Western States Association reached new heights. Not only was it a presidential election year, but it was also a year in which important congressional committees, concerned with what the public monies were accomplishing in the West, took extensive tours of the agricultural districts of Idaho usually while enroute to Yellowstone Park. The visit of the important House Appropriations Committee in July 1920 greatly buoyed the hopes of Idaho reclamationists. Though the Committee was taken on a whirlwind junket of two days in which to cover all the projects between Boise and American Falls, the local feeling was that the Committee was greatly impressed with the substance and potential of the state. "Congressmen Pledge Aid..." was a typical press refrain as a result of the visit by the Committee. And given the exigencies of politics more aid was undoubtedly promised than delivered. At Twin Falls each member of the delegation expressed surprise at the phenomenal development which had taken place in only fifteen years. At a banquet in Boise with Governor Davis committeemen from Iowa, New Jersey, Michigan, and Indiana each made addresses and gave their assurances that their visit had given them sympathy with western reclamationists. They then expressed their intent to work for and

cooperate in plans to develop storage projects on western rivers.⁴⁷

This is exactly what Fred Reed felt the west needed--more direct exposure to eastern and southern congressmen in order for them to appreciate the potential of federally-supported reclamation in the basin. Reed proposed that through the Rotary Clubs of the state, or even through state appropriations, a special fund should be established in order to bring the entire Congress to the west, ninety per cent of whom had never been to the arid region. "Show the people what is right and they will support it," was probably at the core of Reed's philosophy, or as the Pocatello Tribune put it during the occasion of the House Committee visit, "what we want them to do is to get acquainted with us, and know our needs, and realize that the west has something to offer besides schemes."⁴⁸

Certainly it is difficult to gauge the impact of such congressional sorties. The ultimate success of the American Falls project owed at least as much to the personal relationship between William Borah and Albert Bacon Fall as to any congressional groundswell of feeling for the well-being of western farmers. The Idaho Reclamation Association, however, clearly believed that their efforts in showing the basin had brought action, and so did the valley newspapers. In a moment

⁴⁷"Hopeful Signs are Observed in Committee's Call Here," Twin Falls Daily News, July 19, 1920, 8.

⁴⁸The Pocatello Tribune, July 13, 1920, 4.

of exaggeration, one editorialized that the easterners of the touring committees "had become converts to reclamation" and hoped, as Fred Reed did, that it might be possible to bring the entire American Congress out west to show them the developments and potential of southern Idaho:

....There is many an individual living in foreign lands who know more of western America than the great majority of our representatives in congress...

It is probably a hard commentary and a severe slam at hard-headed Americanism, but it happens to be a fact. It is a simple matter to get funds for the education of the foreigners, pass laws for his betterment, create measures for his welfare and enlightenment, but about the most dense and stubborn lump of mortal clay we have to educate is the average eastern and southern senator or congressman.⁴⁹

In the presidential election year of 1920, reclamation was again nationalized in the same manner as it had been taken up by both parties in 1900. In a 1920 speech to a conclave of western republican governors at his porch in Marion, Ohio, Senator Warren G. Harding portrayed himself as the point man in the phalanx of the reclamation movement. Invoking the identification of one of the West's great national friends of reclamation, Theodore Roosevelt, Harding stood on record as supporting much greater federal aid in reclaiming the arid west, a program he believed had been neglected by the Wilson administration. His message carried a double-barreled effect. Besides

⁴⁹"Western Visit An Eye Opener," Pocatello Tribune, July 21, 1920, 4.

identifying his objectives with those of Roosevelt, he spoke in glowing terms of the ability of America's war veterans to make the land productive as they had done after the Civil War under the Homestead Act. He implicitly repudiated, furthermore, the position taken earlier by the National Grange that western agricultural tracts would be counterproductive, that they would come into direct competition with the agricultural districts of the east (including Ohio), and thereby depress agriculture nationally. To the contrary, Harding told the westerners that intensive industrial development and growing population centers could not occur "unless we have an expansion of the food supply upon which they depend for sustenance."⁵⁰

Harding's politics was consistently front page stuff in Idaho. What greater reassurance could westerners expect, particularly after a killing drought the year before. Governor Davis and Idaho's entire congressional delegation threw rhetorical roses in Harding's path assuring him in separate telegrams that thousands of Harding zealots in the western country come November would remember him for his friendliness towards the west and for inaugurating a new era in the development of the region.⁵¹ Harding, like Roosevelt, had visited the west and presumably had become a convert to the needs of the west just

⁵⁰"Harding Outspoken Friend of West," The Pocatello Tribune, August 31, 1920, 1. Other valley newspapers headlined the same speech.

⁵¹"Harding Stand on Reclamation Pleases Idaho," The Twin Falls Daily News, September 2, 1920, 2.

as the appropriation committee before him had done. "He has visited it, has heard its voice, has seen and knows its need. With him in the president's chair the west would have a solid friend."⁵² Senator Borah, Idaho's political beacon, predicted not only an overwhelming republican success in 1920, but he also believed that republican success was the surest way to liberal government aid for western development: "Harding, in my opinion, is thoroughly determined to give us not only a genuine program of development for our arid lands, but such legislation as will protect our farm markets and livestock industries, both of which as you know, are now being murdered."⁵³

Governor Cox also threw some political crumbs to the arid west, but did so less effectively than Harding and in terms with which the average westerner probably had some difficulty in identifying. Cox tried to relate, somewhat tenuously, the success of the League of Nations albatross which he had inherited to the growth of the arid regions of the west. During a speech at Helena he noted that the cost of one battleship would reclaim two million acres of land (the connection between the League and battleships was not made clear). "Multiply this by forty-eight, (one ship for each state) and you have a staggering total." This "peace dividend," as another generation would

⁵²Ibid.

⁵³Letter from Borah to Fred Reed; cited in the Twin Falls Daily News, October 29, 1920, 2.

call it, was the answer to problems of housing in the cities and the means of producing for an ever increasing population. "The expenditure," Cox claimed, "would reclaim 150,000 square miles of waste. It would build ten permanently paved arteries entirely across the United States."⁵⁴ After Cox lamented the state of "our present ill-considered system of reclamation projects," he added that "what we need is a definite program fitted into a definite business administration."⁵⁵ He no doubt failed to anticipate how accurate his prescription would be. Much to the chagrin of southern Idaho farmers, Albert Fall would run reclamation projects--especially American Falls--just like a business administration and with a well documented ledger.

Well into 1921 the image of future Republican gratuity persisted. Fred Reed felt that the west was finally coming into its own with a president in the White House friendly to the west, "with a secretary of the interior who is a practical western man, a man of affairs and pronounced ability along constructive lines..."⁵⁶ By the late summer of 1921, however, Harding was strongly opposing any appropriations for further reclamation development such as the reclamation bill sponsored by Oregon Senator McNary for \$250,000,000 which had been favorably reported out of the Senate Arid Lands Committee. And in

⁵⁴"Cox Follows on Reclamation," The Pocatello Tribune, September 9, 1920, 2.

⁵⁵Ibid., My emphasis.

⁵⁶The Pocatello Tribune, March 14, 1921, 2.

December 1921, only two weeks before Secretary Albert Fall guillotined the budding American Falls project, Idahoans were still singing the praises of Warren Harding. The Tribune still believed that his attitudes on reclamation (as expressed to the Congress) were "gratifying to everyone interested in this subject, and especially to residents of this section of the state, as the reclaiming of waste land is the largest problem confronting Idaho at the present time."⁵⁷

The big American Falls project had begun to assume some direction by the spring of 1921 (and by the end of that year it appeared that the project had been merely another dream of visionaries). By March 1921, the Reclamation Service had a corps of about 25 families living in the town of American Falls. Under the leadership of Minidoka project manager Barry Dibble and engineer Frank Banks, the Reclamation Service had begun the pre-construction phase of the project, a phase which was exceeded by few other federal projects in degree of difficulty and complexity. In order to build the storage dam at the proposed site it became necessary to relocate the entire town of American Falls (in essence buying a rural town for about \$3 million) since its existing location would be submerged by the reservoir. It was also necessary for the United

⁵⁷"Citizens Pleased With Stand On Reclamation Outlined by President," The Pocatello Tribune, December 8, 1921, 6.

States to acquire title to about 70,000 acres of land, over half of which belonged to the Bannock-Shoshone tribe on the Fort Hall Indian Reservation. Construction of the dam also meant rebuilding three miles of Union Pacific trackage and raising the height of the road bed and bridge across the river. Finally, it also meant making satisfactory arrangements (about one million dollars worth) with the Idaho Power Company whose generating plant was at the base of the falls.

As a result of the optimism which surrounded the American Falls proposal, and finally with the existence of a Reclamation Service contingent in American Falls, Fred Reed was besieged by dozens of people seeking to know the status of the work, trying for jobs, contracts, etc. This typified the activity in American Falls ever since it was first rumored that the site might be the storage facility for the giant Bruneau project. With this preliminary work by the Reclamation Service Reed could pronounce with a bit more certainty, "With the construction of the American Falls reservoir now a fact ... the people of Idaho have every reason to take fresh heart and feel that the time has come now when their hopes, long deferred, are going to assume material form." Reed went on to extoll the work of the Idaho Reclamation Association in helping to bring together into one united effort all the divergent impulses for development up and down the basin. It was one week later, after this latest and somewhat premature boost for the IRA, that Major Fred Reed passed away in his hotel room, apparently about ready to retire, with a magazine in his hands and spectacles on. The

one time cowboy, poet, and western reclamationist transplanted from New Jersey could justly claim only a week before his death, concerning American Falls, "I feel proud and happy that I have been able in a small way to have been connected with an effort that is now crystalizing into tangible form and on its way."⁵⁸

No one knew better than Fred Reed that the ultimate completion of this work involved a huge financial undertaking, one which necessarily involved more than the passive support by people in the basin. Most of his work with the Reclamation Association had been directed towards getting people and groups of people to see their own well-being in the prosperity of basin unity. From now on they would be called upon for even more.

We should note here a couple of important developments which helped to contribute to the difficulty in the progress of the preliminary and subsequent work just noted at American Falls in early 1921. In practice the revolving fund feature of the Natural Reclamation Act was to be self-liquidating; that is, the sale of federal lands would provide the financial assets for the continuing construction of reclamation works all over the west. And for a time it worked. But as we have noted in this chapter the system began to break down, and reclamationists were seeking direct congressional appropriation through the

⁵⁸"Major Reed Gives Inside Light On Big Dam Project," The Pocatello Tribune, March 14, 1921, 2.

several congressional bills mentioned earlier involving general tax monies which had always generated opposition among eastern interests. Alternatively, westerners sought diversion of funds from such sources as oil leases into the reclamation fund. This lack of funds was due to two reasons--the non-payment (or delays in payment) by settlers presently on federal projects, and the progressive decline in the receipts of sales of public lands. It was obvious to the Reclamation Service, or at least to higher officials in the Interior Department, that it was in no condition to undertake new projects such as that contemplated at American Falls.⁵⁹ And on the other hand, 1920 was a barren year for direct congressional appropriations for reclamation activity in the west.

The Reclamation Service report for 1920-21 addressed this problem of deferred payment or non-payment by the settlers. It acknowledged that the time consumed in construction of the water works plus the time necessary for settlement of the land and production of crops tended to make payments a more distant proposition. The report further suggested that "anyone desirous of escaping or reducing his payments is tempted to discredit the work and argue that it was unwisely planned or executed without proper economy and efficiency."⁶⁰ This problem with the settlers' payments was one for which Senator Borah, in late 1921, would seek remedial legislation (in the form of repudiation),

⁵⁹U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1919-1920, 43.

⁶⁰U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1920-21, 11.

but it also put him on a collision course with Albert Bacon Fall. The primary cause for the settlers inability to meet payment schedules, however, is more directly attributable to an unfavorable market for farm commodities in the 1920's.

During the war years the rapid currency inflation caused steep advances in the cost of labor and machinery which were not offset even by the relatively good prices obtained for farm products. The real gains to the farmer, therefore, were to a degree offset by the demands of the industrial sector and the general inflationary conditions of the period. Commenting on the depressed state of agriculture immediately after the war, a Reclamation Service report commented, "...the settlers on the government projects were caught with a crop produced with high-priced labor and machinery during the early months of 1920, which was necessarily thrown on a demoralized market in the autumn of that year. The result was that many of the farm staples either found no market at all or had to be sold at prices far below the cost of production."⁶¹ Thus were the whims of the market and of nature, recounted in endless repetition in the history of post-Civil War American agriculture. In 1919 there was no water for crops, at least in the quantities anticipated. In 1920 the crops were prolific, but prices were below the cost of hauling them to market. With the farm recession in 1921 and through the decade, many settlers on the

⁶¹U. S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1920-1921, 11-12.

irrigation projects suffered serious financial difficulties requiring a series of leniency acts to relieve those on federal tracts of monthly payments to the government. These moratoriums in turn prejudiced not only the American Falls project but the whole future of reclamation which was already under attack in the 1920's because of mounting agricultural surpluses. And through it all was a tight-fisted Reclamation Service.

It was noted above that in lamenting the projected financial loss to the basin economy as a result of the drought of 1919, one valley newspaper also addressed the need for "plans for an organization which will have for its objective the building of storage reservoirs to insure against future crop loss from water shortage." Here is the genesis of one of the two really significant permanent valley organizations--the Committee of Nine. (The other, to be discussed below, was the big consolidated district.)

The Committee of Nine had its origins in the difficulties of 1919. At a meeting held in the district court room in Idaho Falls on August 2nd of that year, water users from Magic Valley and the upper basin met to listen to the assessments of IRA Secretary Fred Reed and Engineer Frank Banks of the Reclamation Service concerning the immediate and long term prospects of the basin water supply. After several hours of discussion a local attorney, Clency St. Clair, proposed that a committee be appointed to "devise ways and means" of securing a permanent supply of water. The seven initial appointments to this "storage commit-

tee" were made by the chair and included one representative from Magic Valley, four from counties above American Falls, Attorney St. Clair, and reclamation engineer Banks, who during the meeting had talked in the most urgent terms of the need for a facility at either American Falls or Swan Valley (just below the present Palisades project) to provide for the basin's storage needs.⁶²

Three months later the committee had finished its initial task, and the chairman then issued a call for all water users in southern and eastern Idaho to meet in Idaho Falls on November 24th to receive the committee report. The report was as remarkable for the problem areas it unknowingly anticipated as it was for revealing public sentiment and suggesting proposals to meet future storage needs. To the 500 people representing the entire basin above the Twin Falls area, chairman John W. Hart stated that the committee recommended the construction of a storage dam at the American Falls site. Part of the committee's work had been to ascertain the anticipated storage requirements of all districts and companies on the river. By studying informal applications for water use the committee had estimated a total storage requirement of about 744,000 acre feet. Applicants for over 90 per cent of the storage expressed a preference for having the work handled by the U. S. Reclama-

⁶²"Steps Taken To Insure Water," The Idaho Register, August 5, 1919, p. 1.

tion Service.⁶³ The Service in turn had replied that it would construct the works on condition that funds were advanced from the users. The report then recommended that each organization enter into a contract with the Reclamation Service for storage capacity, agreeing to advance the funds. Each canal company or water district, in other words, would make its own arrangements for independent financing for its proportionate share of the reservoir. Congress would be asked to appropriate money under the Reclamation Act to provide for supplemental storage for the federal projects and for other irrigable lands still in public ownership.⁶⁴ From the government's point of view then, this meant that the American Falls works (and the government's participation in the project) rested on the good will and performance of over thirty separate entities on the river. As cumbersome as this proposition seems in perspective, it was apparently not viewed so by the men of 1919.

Finally, the report said that the contracts of those organizations above American Falls (who would not be directly served by that project) would provide for capacity in Jackson Lake to be made available as rapidly as exchange storage could be created at American Falls.⁶⁵ It was these upper basin organ-

⁶³Report of Reservoir Committee to Water Users in the Snake River Valley, Idaho Falls, November 24, 1919. Reprinted in the Idaho Register, November 25, 1919, 1; 4.

⁶⁴Ibid.

⁶⁵Ibid.

izations who would eventually press for a storage facility at Swan Valley by which they could be immediately served, rather than rely on what must have been seen by many to be less secure exchange storage rights at American Falls.

The device by which the committee hoped to see its 1919 recommendations effected was in the form of individual contracts drawn up between separate districts or companies and the Reclamation Service. The November meeting of water users also authorized the committee to negotiate a standard form of contract with the Reclamation Service. By the end of 1919 a joint meeting of district, state, and national reclamation officers which included the chief engineer of the Reclamation Service, Frank Weymouth, authorized the statement that enough water had already been contracted for by the several canal companies to justify the construction of the dam. On this basis south Idahoans confidently predicted that the reservoir would be in operation for the season of 1923, a date which actually preceded by four years the first filling of the reservoir.

These series of meetings in Idaho Falls in late 1919-- attended as they were not only by water users, but by Governor Davis, Reclamation Service people, and others from the Interior Department--elicited widespread enthusiasm throughout the southern and eastern sections of the state. With the bad year having just ended, plans were being prepared to avoid future water shortages and in a manner (individual financing) which seemed to leave with each district a maximum degree of autonomy. Trying

to paper over differences of opinion, but not quite succeeding, one editorial summed up the meeting in these words:

The spirit of tolerance was shown on the part of those who have "first rights" and no disposition was shown to "sleep on those rights," but to cooperate and merge interests so that the whole community..may be served. ...The opposition which showed itself was the last disparing gasp of those who have failed to see the light and who would cling to old ways and old customs, which good as they were, have served their purposes, but are not in accord with progress and must give way before the onward march which cannot be stayed by over conservatism.⁶⁶

Over the years the Committee of Nine has become in effect the Supreme Court of Snake River waters though interestingly enough it has no authority founded in law. Beginning in 1923 the members of the committee have been elected each spring by the water users of the major divisions of Water District 36 and its functions and prestige have steadily grown. A district watermaster, Lynn Crandall, once suggested that the absence of legal authority formally vested in the committee has, in practice, probably been an advantage because it has been compelled "to reach decisions based upon facts and fair consideration of each others viewpoints."⁶⁷ It would be difficult to point to a more pure expression of grass roots democracy where the interests of people over a wide area are so consistently expressed as through

⁶⁶"Idaho Falls' Big Part," The Idaho Register, November 25, 1919, 4.

⁶⁷Lynn Crandall, "Snake River", Address to foreign irrigation specialists, Idaho Falls, July 1958.

their representatives on the committee. It is true that one's voice in the choice of representatives on the committee is proportional to the shares of water he subscribes, but the longevity of the committee and its high esteem in the basin communities has been a testament to the performance of its mediation efforts in the problems of river regulation and segregation between normal flow and storage deliveries.

The two year period of 1920 and 1921 following the flurry of contractual arrangements between the Reclamation Service and individual canal companies was the calm before the storm. It was a period of halting progress on the project, of economic paradox for the farm districts, impending failure of the long hoped for project, and by the end of 1921 the dreams of Idaho reclamationists seemed shattered beyond repair. The Annual Report for this period notes the large amount of preliminary work done on surveys, wells and soils tests, and acquisitions of land for the dam and reservoir site. A tract of land was purchased as a site for the new town of American Falls to replace the site to be submerged, and contracts amounting to over \$200,000 were concluded for town property.⁶⁸

The factors converging to put an economic squeeze on western farmers were discussed above. Between the short water years of 1919 and 1924, agricultural production in the Snake River basin boomed. In 1922 the farm districts harvested the second largest potato crop in their history. As if to underscore the

⁶⁸U.S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1920-1921, 157.

agricultural bounty of these years a farmer on the Twin Falls tract established a world's record for production of sugar beets on a single acre of land. The acre produced 40 tons of beets, 50 tons of by-product in tops, pulp, and syrup; and the beets yielded 11,200 pounds of sugar.⁶⁹ However, the paradox was that during these years of agricultural bounty there occurred the shattering collapse of farm income that would not end until 1940. Idaho suffered probably as much as any state in the Union from the depression of 1921, and Idaho's recovery from that depression not only was slow but in fact never did take place. The average prices paid Idaho farmers for three principal crops were as follows: from 1919 to 1929, wheat went from \$2.50 per bushel to \$1.30, sugar beets from \$22 per ton to \$15, and from 1919 to 1922 potatoes fell from \$1.51 per bushel to 31¢ for the second largest harvest in history. During the 1920's, Idaho ranked second only to Montana in net loss of population through migration. For the major western farm states then, the "prosperity decade" had another meaning.⁷⁰ Even in the 1930's an economic survey of Idaho emphasized that agriculture was over three times as important to the economic health

⁶⁹"Twin Falls County Land Makes World Record for Beet Yield," Twin Falls Daily News, July 23, 1921, 8.

⁷⁰Leonard J. Arrington, "Idaho and the Great Depression," Idaho Yesterdays, 13(Summer 1969), 3. See also Arrington's, "The New Deal in the West: A Preliminary Statistical Inquiry," Pacific Historical Review, 38(August 1969), 311-316.

of the state as it was to the nation. Even though lumbering and mining were important industries, the food processing industry was of increasing importance, and it fluctuated with the fortunes of agriculture in the state.⁷¹ It is within this context of acute farm depression in the 1920's that the near failure and ultimate triumph of the American Falls project should be considered. When so viewed, the eventual success of the project seems all the more remarkable.

In the spring of 1921 the newspapers of the upper basin were carrying reports of the inability of farm districts to meet their payments on schedule as called for by the contracts. The manager of the Twin Falls Canal Company proposed to have Fred Banks, regional commissioner of the Reclamation Service, proceed to Washington in the hope of obtaining financial relief and a twelve month suspension of contract payments. The report of this proposal optimistically concluded, "If this arrangement can be made all subscribers to the project will be able to remain in the scheme."⁷² Although the initial pledges from each water district were satisfactory, because of the economic squeeze put on the farmer (a situation which was frequently characterized as "local conditions"), only one out of thirty-five subscribers

⁷¹Idaho State Planning Board, An Economic Survey of the State of Idaho, Part I, The Economy of Southeastern Idaho with Reference to Irrigation Development (Boise: Syms-York Company, 1940).

⁷²"Would Urge Delay of Year in Building American Falls Dam," Twin Falls Daily News, February 5, 1921, 8.

made the payment due in February, 1921.

On the other side of the financial picture, the revolving fund feature of the Reclamation Act was economically crippled. Farm depression had drastically cut into the revenues of the reclamation fund. A year after the proposal by the private tract for a twelve month suspension of contract payments, towns on the federal Minidoka tract appealed for a blanket extension of time for payments on all irrigation projects. It was during these gloomy days that Albert Bacon Fall came to Idaho.

After touring reclamation projects in several western states and the federal Arrowrock project on the Boise River, Secretary Fall came to the American Falls site following that well-trod route which led through Yellowstone Park. The contrasts between American Falls and Arrowrock in the lower Snake basin could not have been more stark. Arrowrock was one of the very early federal projects, lying in picturesque country and serving already highly productive agricultural districts. The American Falls site on the other hand was on that broad expanse of desolation which is the Snake River Plain. If the juxtaposition of the two project sites was not enough by itself to make the Secretary skeptical about pouring vast sums of federal appropriations into the American Falls development, then the problems attendant to it were.

After a whirlwind tour of all the other reclamation projects on the river the Secretary at last reached American Falls. The itinerary was certainly not calculated to lift his spirits.

The dust-clogged, grinding journey on the sagebrush flats, over 170 miles of the project boundary was most likely to feed whatever latent objectives the Secretary may have had towards the project.⁷³ Especially was this so when the special problems of the American Falls project were discussed: the moving of a town, acquisition of Indian land titles, and purchasing of the Idaho Power Company's rights on the river.

The valley press was not able to catch the Secretary's deep misgiving; nor for that matter were many of those accompanying Fall. After the visit, state reclamation commissioner Warren G. Swendsen commented that "Secretary Fall is in hearty sympathy with the reclamation program...He realizes the need of reclamation by irrigation and feels that the objectives raised by the north and middlewest are unfounded."⁷⁴ Swendsen seemed pleased with the visit of Secretary Fall and just as pleased with the knowledge that Fall "was a western man, knows the west and its needs."⁷⁵

Fall withheld axing the project, and in fact had given it at least a grudging assent as late as October 1921. But a week before Christmas 1921, Frank Weymouth, chief construction engineer of the Reclamation Service, was giving instructions to two of the principals on the American Falls project: Barry Dibble, the project manager, and Frank Banks, regional commissioner of

⁷³Beal and Wells, II, 165.

⁷⁴The Pocatello Tribune, September 13, 1921, 8.

⁷⁵The Times Register, September 9, 1921, 1.

the Reclamation Service. "All work will then be abandoned here, Dibble will return to Burley and Frank will be assigned to the Truckee-Carson.." ⁷⁶ Albert Fall was letting the project die by default. The chosen instrument was an unsigned contract with the Idaho Power Company which had been negotiated three years earlier wherein the government had agreed to purchase the company's rights at the project site within the stipulated period. The unsigned, unexecuted agreement with Idaho Power would expire on January 13, 1922. Without the agreement the project could not go on. As State Senator Irvin Rockwell put it, "the Idaho Power agreement governs and energizes the project." ⁷⁷

Had Fall felt as strong about western reclamation as the valley press suggested he did he easily could have taken matters into his hands. The fact that he did not is attributable primarily to two circumstances. The first is the defaulted contract payments in 1921 of those organizations which had subscribed for storage space. The second is that Senator Borah, throughout late 1921, was sponsoring a repudiation bill for the settlers on the federal Minidoka Project. The payments from that project were about \$600,000 in arrears, and Borah's action, together with the inaction of the several contracting companies was not calculated to impress Fall with the solvency of Idaho irrigation projects. Because of his legislation Borah acknowledged

⁷⁶Rockwell, 5.

⁷⁷Rockwell, 43.

responsibility for the closing of the project.⁷⁸ Over \$400,000 had already been spent on preliminary work at the site, and even during the Idaho inspection Fall expressed his reluctance about pouring more money down the seemingly endless hole: "I am damned sure if you were not in so deep I wouldn't let you go and I am not sure that I will anyway. I have about made up my mind to let those ---- -- ----- stew in their own juice, and Borah can continue to play with 'em!" was his remark to the project manager.⁷⁹ Thus the situation at the end of 1921. With the Idaho Power contract awaiting his signature Albert Fall slipped off to his New Mexico ranch with his friend Edward Doheny where he remained literally sealed off from outside intrusion except for responses to the President for most of the next six weeks.

In Idaho meanwhile the scene was one of almost pathetic impotence. Guy Flenner, who had assumed Freed Reed's role as the spokesman for the Idaho Reclamation Association, importuned the canal companies to make some sign of good faith on their contracts with the Reclamation Service, warning that the project hung in the balance. Even as Fall was secluding himself in New Mexico district representatives were again meeting in Idaho Falls to try to figure out what could be done.

In instance after instance representatives, expressing the will of their districts, remarked on their desire to have the

⁷⁸Rockwell, 26-27.

⁷⁹Rockwell, 23. Beal and Wells, II, 165.

water they had contracted for and to have the work done by the Reclamation Service, but "did not see how they could afford it now", or "couldn't take on anything else right now that would increase our debt."⁸⁰ The thought was encouraged that somehow if the people would at least pledge their support in a petition to Secretary Fall, affirming that they would take care of their expenses when they could, then the Interior Department might look with favor upon continuing the project. Buoying hopes on faith instead of works, one resolution from the basin water users to Fall appealed:

....your petitioner expects and intends to make payments insofar as humanly possible... and further humbly represents that any failure on its part to make full payments when due is not through lack of interest in the project or through a lack of desire to obtain the benefits of storage water, but is entirely due to present financial conditions. ...Wherefore, your petitioner prays that in the event it cannot make the payments required under the present provisions of the said contract, that an extension of time be granted under such conditions as will not impair the force or validity of the said contract.⁸¹

State Commissioner Swendsen took with him to Washington not only this petition to lay before Secretary Fall, but also separate resolutions from the stockholders of some of the larger canal companies as well as endorsements from the Idaho State Federation of Labor and the American Legion. But Fall would insist

⁸⁰"Water Users Ask That American Falls Dam be Built," The Times Register, December 30, 1921, 10.

⁸¹Ibid.

on works, not expressions of faith.

The story of resuscitating the big project provides the basis of Irvin Rockwell's interesting book, The Saga of American Falls Dam. One of the most prominent actors was Sidney Z. Mitchell, a man of great magnanimity who in the face of opposition from others in the governing circles of Idaho Power, affirmed his intention to support the project and consented to a delayed execution of the government contract on the company's rights at American Falls. Since Borah's repudiation bill had been among the circumstances which caused Fall to look with increasing disfavor on American Falls it is only fitting that in the revival of the project Borah should play the key role. Rockwell at the time noted that "no one but Borah can qualify with the Secretary in this emergency."⁸² With his great prestige Borah was able to prevail upon the assistant secretary for a contract extension until Fall should return. Borah maintained a virtual stake-out on Fall's Washington residence awaiting for his return. Within twenty-four hours after Fall had concluded his western vacation Borah was able to wring a conditional concession from the secretary, though not without difficulty. Fall first refused and spoke of the need to get away from the idea of what he called a "Santa Claus government". Loosening somewhat he said he would first have to see Idaho's share of

⁸²Rockwell, 44, 51.

the money. Finally the two struck a compromise on money and time. Fall agreed to the government taking the project over if the Snake River districts would deposit in the reclamation fund the amount due for the settlers' part of the project, upwards of three million dollars, by November 1, 1924. Speaking for the hard pressed farmers (and undoubtedly not underestimating the difficulty of raising the staggering sum, especially considering the crippling economic problems in farm areas) Borah concluded, "All right, Mr. Secretary, we'll get busy right away".⁸³ It is doubtful whether anyone but Borah with his long familiarity with Fall and the prestige he enjoyed in the Congress could have wrung this concession from Fall, especially given the latter's unpleasant experience with the Idaho reclamation districts.

Within ten days after the gauntlet had been thrown down in Washington the upper basin press was running announcements of a meeting to be held in Pocatello on February 10, 1922 to consider plans that would make it possible to insure the reality of the American Falls project. The meeting was called by the IRA and the Western States Reclamation Association. Governor Davis, his attorney general, and state reclamation commissioner Swendsen announced their intention to participate. What was then occurring in Idaho seemed to have far broader consequences than just for Idaho, but the west generally seemed to have a

⁸³Rockwell, 61. Beal and Wells, II, 166.

stake in the success or failure of the big Idaho project. If it failed then western reclamation generally would have much tougher going.

Merle Wells credits Ben E. Stoutemeyer, legal counsel for the Reclamation Service, for the plan which eventually evolved from the meeting. It envisioned a giant consolidated district embracing the thirty-one separate operating companies on the river for the purpose of financing their part of the dam. If the plan was Stoutemeyer's, it was the Idaho Reclamation Association--that earliest and most successful consolidation effort of 1919--prodded by Governor Davis, which was again the organizational force which brought people together that month in 1922. Following an afternoon of discussion the committee on resolutions crystallized the sentiments of the delegates who believed they were then confronting the "gravest crisis in the history of Idaho" and proposed the formation of a blanket district covering the whole basin above Twin Falls.⁸⁴ Sensitive perhaps to the kind of opposition which would eventually surface it was emphasized that the sole purpose of such a broad district, unprecedented in western history, was for financing only, and that the big district would in no way interfere with the operations of each constituent organization.

It was Governor Davis' role at the meeting to sell the delegates on the idea of floating a large district bond issue in the amount of 2.7 million dollars to pay for their entire

⁸⁴"Blanket Irrigation District Result of Conference," The Pocatello Tribune, February 11, 1922, 1.

share of the dam. The contemporary success of Liberty Bond sales seemed to auger well for district irrigation bonds, especially when the bonds represented a large unified district and provided tax shelters for investors. Stoutemeyer made an analogy between the proposed irrigation district and municipal corporations or school districts insofar as district bonding was concerned. And like the latter a two-thirds majority was needed for ratification.

Finally, as part of the conference it was obvious that a massive educational campaign was necessary to put the plan across and upon Governor Davis' motion that assignment was given to the only organization with the needed broad valley support and representation, the Idaho Reclamation Association and its managing director, Guy Flenner. The delegates were all aware that Washington was looking on as telegrams of support arrived from Reclamation Director Arthur P. Davis and Idaho's congressional delegation.

Within the next month the IRA launched an intensive campaign of town meetings, literature mailings, and news articles primarily to sell the project but also to raise money for its own campaign. The principal arguments became evident quite early. The project would be sold on the basis of operating independence, economy, as a cure for unemployment and soldier relief, and on the basis of the proven success of the federal Arrowrock project.

There was probably no phrase quite so repetitious as that which assured people that the proposed district would not inter-

ferre with the operation and maintenance of the individual canal companies. Ever since the early meetings in Idaho Falls during 1919 accusations had been made by some that the meetings were controlled by the "lower valley (Twin Falls) interests". And whereas voting for the proposed district would be restricted only to those with water shares, many in the upper basin were suspicious of the wisdom in joining an organization where the Twin Falls Canal Company alone constituted about two-fifths of the voting power of the proposed district. These assurances of operating autonomy, therefore, were necessarily a vital part of the IRA's selling campaign, particularly as organizational efforts moved into the upper basin.

Reclamation as a partial cure for national unemployment had long been a main argument of those pushing western reclamation projects. Even as the American Falls project was apparently on the edge of collapse in 1921 Senator Borah was urging the unemployment argument on Commerce Secretary Hoover, probably trying to swing his support behind the project at a critical moment. In an article originally intended for an eastern audience the IRA neatly blended the unemployment issue with the plight of America's war veterans, and suggested that reclamation was the "first aid" for both:

...with his feet on his own domain, his heart rooted in the soil, the soldier-farmer has become a national bulwark.

We can no longer stop our ears to the grim inarticulate, half smothered tragedy of the unemployed soldier who is drifting from all his mental, moral and religious moorings; whose soul, losing faith in self, in country, humanity and

God, is being sapped by an insidious poison far more deadly than mustard gas.

The best of these men revolt from taking assistance in any form... What they want is not a handout... They want jobs and homes, where they can continue to be men, whole in mind, if not altogether so in body.⁸⁵

There was another side to reclamation and employment with which the eastern businessman could readily relate. The IRA article noted above described the alleged comments of a member of a congressional appropriations committee from Detroit as he viewed reclamation development near Sunnyside, Washington. Picturing the congressman almost as a Moses returning from the Burning Bush, the article related, "He came back as a man who had seen something... He had. And he said, 'Fellows I saw \$200,000 worth of automobiles, at least, sent to this little city from my home state of Michigan. I guess I'm for reclamation.'"⁸⁶

As the Twin Falls south side project had earlier been a talking-point for those pushing other developments on the river, so also now was the federal Arrowrock Dam on the Boise River. The watermaster of that river was enlisted in the cause and proclaimed that since completion of the Arrowrock Dam, short water situations which seemed to bedevil the upper basin about once every five years had been eliminated. His admonition to the upper valley water users was that, "If you do not have the

⁸⁵"U.S.R.S.--First Aid For Unemployment," The Pocatello Tribune, February 11, 1922, 1.

⁸⁶Ibid.

American Falls reservoir you will give three times the amount it costs when the next water shortage occurs."⁸⁷

In a comprehensive statement prepared by the Idaho Reclamation Association flamboyantly entitled "The American Falls Project: To Be or Not to Be, That is the Question," all the arguments for the project were neatly summarized and sold in terms of economics and received wide publicity in the largest valley newspapers. The purpose for a single large district was presented as a vehicle by which the voices of small companies and property owners could mean something. Additionally, the proposed district securities could be floated at considerably less rate of interest than bonds of smaller districts, and would undoubtedly have a higher priority from investors than would bonds representing smaller districts. The proposed district merger was spoken of not in terms of increased indebtedness, but rather as an investment--the same as for farm machinery, seed, or dairy stock bought on twenty years credit at 6 per cent interest. Putting the proposition in terms with which the typical farmer could easily relate, "It is estimated that one extra bushel of wheat a year per acre, grown by virtue of an ample, insured water supply, will pay all interest and principal."⁸⁸ In time, whatever else the project proved to be in the way of "first aid" for certain problems it did prove to be an

⁸⁷"Blanket Irrigation District Result of Conference," The Pocatello Tribune, February 11, 1922, 1.

⁸⁸Twin Falls Daily News, March 7, 1922, 4. The Pocatello Tribune, March 4, 1922, 7.

enormous investment. Those who entered only cautiously or not at all were soon to regret it. These arguments, therefore, of individual company autonomy, economy, unemployment and soldier relief, and the success of Arrowrock constituted the burden of the IRA's propaganda thrust in 1922.

By the end of March, 1922, lines had already been drawn. As was to be expected, two of the bigger districts which would be served directly from the project voted overwhelmingly in a straw poll to enter the district. Twin Falls stockholders on the south side voted 7 to 1 in favor, and the Aberdeen district (northeast of the present American Falls dam) voted 3 to 1. The Aberdeen-Springfield vote is significant in that it was considerably less than the Twin Falls vote and seemed to mark the upper geographical limit of those willing to merge into a consolidated district.

Interestingly enough, the primary opposition came from absentee land owners. Fourteen thousand, three hundred shares voting against the proposition came from Salt Lake City.⁸⁹ Governor Davis, reclamation counsel Stoutemeyer, engineer Banks, Warren Swendsen, and Guy Flenner were all engaged in drumming up support for this early show of strength for the big district.

Simultaneously with this straw vote in the lower valley, two of the comparatively larger companies in the upper basin which had for some time been organized as irrigation districts

⁸⁹The Pocatello Tribune, April 25, 1922, 2.

(as opposed to canal companies or users organizations) and would not therefore be included in the big district organization, were bonding themselves to meet their own obligation to the government. These districts (The New Sweden District and the Snake River Irrigation District), however, declined to move ahead on their own financing until the big district did. In other words, they would follow in the less turbulent and more secure financial wake of the big organization.

And so it was generally with most of the upper basin. Contemporary with the votes of approval by the Aberdeen and Twin Falls people, meetings throughout the upper basin were voting down the big district proposition. Despite the importunings and assurances of friends of the project such as the governor, Banks, John Hart, Flenner, and Stoutemeyer, the upper basin meetings conceded the good which the dam would bring to Idaho and even approved the general plan of construction. They fully realized that the water they received in 1919 was only about 58 per cent as much as the average for 1920 and 1921. But even in this knowledge, and almost without exception, the belief still was that a canal company should keep its finances in its own hands and not delegate them to a big district management. Flenner remarked that the Idaho Falls meeting was the first to discourage the plan, but he still felt sure that enough would be interested to create the district and regretted that the upper valley was not more interested. This core of resistance is described by Merle Wells:

They doubted the wisdom of entering a gigantic water pool wherein the "Johnny-come-lately's" of the lower valley would be on an equal footing with those who had used water for fifty years. Many old pioneers emulated John Dickin-son by writing Letters From A Farmer, in which the watch word was "Beware!"⁹⁰ Away up in Teton County, farmer Dennis posed the question, "Should we go into the Big Irrigation district, or should we organize our own for our own protection and the development of our lands for our posterity? Remember the Arab and the Camel?"⁹⁰

It is difficult to account for this fear of the lower valley users on the part of those in the upper basin unless one takes into account the cultural factor. Certainly one can appreciate the reluctance of those in the upper basin to support a project which would not directly serve them. But the principle and practice of transferring storage rights already had had a decade of tradition. The wording of the contracts with the government left no doubt that American Falls subscriptions would be transferred to Jackson Lake stor-
age. But those communities above Blackfoot were then, and remain today, heavily Mormon with cultural roots mainly in Utah. The settlements in the Twin Falls and Minidoka districts, on the other hand, are much more heterogeneous with roots in the east, midwest, and Pacific Northwest. The latent fear of the "gentile"--so prominent a theme in Mormon history--may have operated here in this widespread disinclination of those in the upper basin to merge their interests with the districts below

⁹⁰Beal and Wells, II, 166-167.

American Falls. Most of their other arguments seem easily circumvented.

The year long campaign for selling the idea of the big district was fought out largely on the terms just described. The exhortation that this was "the last chance" lent a note of emergency to those supporting the project; unless the people came through this time, it was said, the center of government reclamation work would shift elsewhere. Reclamation officials added their plea: "Let's not make it so easy for the government to leave Idaho," estimating that the project would directly bring over twenty million dollars to the state and three thousand people to southern Idaho as permanent homemakers.⁹¹ The IRA argued that there were no alternatives to the proposed plan, noting that there was not the slightest chance of securing private money for the project and that investors would not consider the securities or private reservoir bonds of small irrigation companies. This all turned out to be a bit of demagoguery, for several of the upper canal companies were able to bond themselves quite successfully. However, they still waited for the action of the big district. Finally, in a futile effort to deflect criticism and to rally support for the project, the two big Twin Falls companies gave their assurance in a joint resolution that "upon the request of any landowner that his land be

⁹¹"Success of Huge Project Means Much to Idaho," Pocatello Tribune, January 6, 1923, 2.

excluded from said district, the boards of directors...will recommend that the county commissioners exclude said land from the district."⁹² But the upper valley did not rise to the bait.

No protestation of good will by the Twin Falls area could crack the resolve of the upper basin to keep their financial matters in their own hands. A Farmers Protective Irrigation Association was formed in the summer of 1922 for the purposes indicated in its title. An intensely anti-Twin Falls organization, it encouraged all those who needed more water to secure it, but by any means short of an alliance with the lower valley interests. They suggested raising revenue by direct taxation, by mortgaging the individual canal systems, by forming a district out of a canal company, or by forming a large irrigation district to encompass the part of the valley above Blackfoot (the heavily Mormon area). In a more self-interested vein, one upper valley spokesman from Rigby commented, "We need more water and we believe we should have it first, leaving what remains for those who are down in the valley."⁹³

If this kind of feeling was reflective of the opinions of a majority of people in the upper basin, it would have been interesting to see what the outcome of the district organization would have been had those in the lower valley also had their roots in the Utah heritage, or were prominent Mormon

⁹²"Coercion Not Part of Plan for Reservoir," Twin Falls Daily News, August 17, 1922, 1.

⁹³Pocatello Tribune, May 18, 1922, 1.

bishops or stake presidents. Mormons have a well established tradition of rallying against the outsider--whether against Johnson's army, "gentile" railroad crews, speculative irrigation companies in the Sevier Desert, or, as I am suggesting in this case, against the lower Snake River valley irrigation interests. But in this instance their record of uniting with others for a greater common good is less dramatic.

While the upper basin-Magic Valley suspicions outlined above generally reflect the direction of the struggle in 1922, this narrative would not be complete without reference to an opposition group in Magic Valley and a rather unusual "deal" by which they were neutralized by friends of the project. In contrast to the sentiments of most of the farmers of the district (as expressed in the straw poll), powerful opposition to the consolidated district did emerge. Their leading spokesmen included the most prominent banker in Twin Falls, and also the secretary-manager of the influential businessmen's Commercial Club. This opposition group, the Landholders Protective Association, was able to swing hard enough politically to get two of their members elected to the board of directors of the Twin Falls Canal Company just days before the district election.

The opposition seemed so intimidating that Frank Weymouth asked state senator Irvin Rockwell to concentrate his major effort in the Twin Falls area. Oddly enough, it was here where it seemed that most farmers were in favor of the project that the IRA had to work most intensely to deflect the influence of

the business interests. The arguments of the Twin Falls business opposition were not all that different from the farmers opposition in the upper valley. They also spoke of "entangling alliances" (so impressive had been the Versailles Treaty debate) and objected to bonding themselves, as they believed, for the security of the north side project. Feeling secure in the early water rights of their own district, they felt it to be the wiser course--as did the majority in the upper valley--to finance themselves independently. At one meeting, as Frank Banks was arguing the wisdom of relieving the Twin Falls country of the necessity of "bringing water past dozens of hostile headgates," one woman raised stern objections to Banks even being present at the meeting because he was not a stockholder in the canal system.⁹⁴

Here in Twin Falls, from where 40 per cent of the votes would come, the friends of the project had justifiable concern. After the first few months following the February meeting in Pocatello the loss of the upper valley support was grudgingly conceded and now everything seemed to hinge on Twin Falls. The tract which had at one time been the inspiration for all subsequent development in the upper Snake River basin now had the responsibility of ensuring approval of the one project which would guarantee the future security and financial solvency of not only Magic Valley but of the early pioneer developments as well.

⁹⁴"Reservoir Dominates Canal Meet," Twin Falls Daily News, January 10, 1923, 1.

In mid-September of that year, 1922, the opposition minority in Twin Falls filed a suit in federal district court to enjoin the county commissioners from holding the big district election. To this last, somewhat desperate bid of the opposition, friends of the project proved more than equal to the task. Not only was the opposition effectively neutralized, but one might say they were "loved" into support for American Falls.

The ploy became discernable in early January, 1923. In one of the last meetings called to discuss the matter of American Falls one of the project supporters remarked, "American Falls will mean a number of important things to us...besides water insurance. Yes, I mean a railroad south."⁹⁵

For some time previous, farm and business leaders in Twin Falls had been trying to sell the Union Pacific on the merit of a hundred mile cut-off line linking Twin Falls with the California main line route at Wells, Nevada. But from the railroad's point of view the proposition was economically unsound. Eighty-five per cent of Magic Valley's traffic was shipped to the east and southwest California points via Pocatello and Ogden.⁹⁶ But a direct outlet to California markets, 500 miles shorter than the existing route was a dream shared by all people in Twin Falls, and all of Magic Valley for that matter. Suffice it to say that

⁹⁵"Big District's Friends," Twin Falls Daily News, January 16, 1923, 1, 8.

⁹⁶Rockwell, 125.

the influence of Sidney Z. Mitchell, having been decisive once earlier in the matter of the Idaho Power contract with the Interior Department, once again was brought to bear in his evident concern for southeastern Idaho and the American Falls project. Mitchell, through another appeal by Rockwell, exerted his considerable influence on the board chairman of the Union Pacific Railroad. And even though Rockwell was uncertain of the exact sequence of events, or at least was reluctant to discuss them, road officials from New York, Omaha, and Salt Lake were soon in Twin Falls sampling opinion which gave some indication at least of a relationship, hazy though it may be, between approval of the American Falls project and the Wells cut-off.

While this proposed cut-off (which did become a reality) may have been viewed by the railroad as uneconomical, the opening up of new public lands which the American Falls project would make possible (besides making already established districts more consistently productive) would be an important compensation in terms of increased freight traffic. J. J. Hill's dictum of "making the traffic" was at work again.

Rockwell's narrative says of the coup de grace achieved by the supporters of the project:

In the right places it was clearly indicated that when American Falls Dam was an accomplished fact, a renewed application for the Twin Falls-Wells cut-off would receive consideration. The imagination can conjure well enough the reaction of that community as the news spread like wildfire...The [lawsuit] sickened and died in due course...We had Twin Falls "in the bag."⁹⁷

⁹⁷Rockwell, 127.

Further up the valley Pocatello was gearing up for the election, and in its own special way exhibiting the best of American boosterism. One week before the district election the Chamber of Commerce, American Legion, the Rotary and Kiwanis Clubs met jointly to coordinate ways of getting out the vote. Sensing that their own prosperity would be greatly enhanced by the successful completion of the project--as apparently many in Twin Falls could not do until a railroad tantalized them--Pocatelloans played a role analogous to a helpful onlooker at the Boston Marathon. One account remarked of this city-wide organization effort:

Since Pocatello citizens cannot vote directly, we have been asked [by the IRA] to furnish workers, cars, and funds...

...it is a tremendous undertaking to take three or four hundred people from 25 to 100 miles across country to the polls.

Special train service has been engaged to reduce so far as possible the storm risk. Cold, hungry voters will be served sandwiches and hot coffee.⁹⁸

The object of the Pocatello effort was to help swing the election on the Aberdeen-Springfield tract which is adjacent to the north side of the present reservoir. The tract was at that time the eastern-most point on the river where the district election was taking place. The rest of the entire upper basin remained only interested observers.

⁹⁸"Joint Meeting in Interest of American Falls Project," Pocatello Tribune, January 9, 1923, 3.

Weymouth, Rockwell, Banks, Shepherd, Flenner, the IRA and the Union Pacific had all done their work well. The valley press of January 17, 1923 revealed the extent to which the idea of organization and cooperation had carried the day. With a two-thirds affirmative vote required for district consolidation, the lowest returns were from Twin Falls--and the vote there was 5 to 1 for the big district. With this vote, the American Falls Reservoir District was created.

And though the big district consisted of only five entities--the Twin Falls south and north side companies, the Aberdeen area, and two other comparatively tiny canal companies--its creation ensured not only the sale of its own 2.7 million dollar bond issue, but also made possible the various financing schemes of the 26 other companies. These had avoided merger with the big district and instead purchased their water from the government after the reservoir was constructed.

Even the Annual Report for 1923 and 1924 commented on the snowballing effect of the district formation and subsequent bond election (May 1923) as several companies made individual payments for storage space in the American Falls reservoir.⁹⁹ In mid-1925 the Union Trust Company of Spokane ran a notice commenting on the ease with which they had been able to sell the bonds of the upper valley canal companies. The trust company by then had sold the bonds of six canal companies valued at over \$300,000. The formation of the American Falls Reservoir District had triggered the highest prices which irrigation bonds

⁹⁹U.S. Reclamation Service, Annual Report, 1923-1924, 54.

had commanded in over 15 years.¹⁰⁰ The comment, however, of one long time watermaster on the Snake River is instructive on the attitudes of people, especially in the upper basin, in 1923 and again twenty years later:

At the time American Falls Reservoir was being built the canal companies on the river could only be persuaded to take about half the reservoir space...the other half of the reservoir was paid for by the government...

...They borrowed the money at six per cent interest to buy the water and now within twenty years, the borrowed money plus interest, has all been paid off. Their only present regret is that they did not buy more water when they had the chance.¹⁰¹

As provided for in the Fall-Borah compromise of early 1922, Russell E. Shepherd who had been elected director of the American Falls Reservoir District, deposited 1.5 million dollars on the desk of Interior Secretary Dr. Hubert Work only two weeks before the deadline of November 1, 1924. The additional payments of private companies were then sufficient to release the monies which Congress had earlier appropriated for the American Falls project. Since 1922, Congress had appropriated money each year for the American Falls project, but did so conditionally. In 1922, a \$1.2 million appropriation was made but could be apportioned only as that same amount accrued to the reclamation

¹⁰⁰Times Register, July 31, 1925, 1.

¹⁰¹Lynn Crandall, "History of Irrigation Development in Snake River Valley," address to Snake River Water Users, Idaho Falls, 1946.

fund. In 1923 one million dollars was appropriated and in 1924 a half million was also appropriated, but each time conditional on the sale of \$1½ million in district irrigation bonds. It was this amount which, in November 1924, Shepherd deposited with the Interior Department which allowed the work to commence on the project. It was not until late 1926 that the full bond issue of 2.7 millions had been disposed of. This amount represented the total bond issue of the American Falls Reservoir District. When combined with the separate bond sales of some of the smaller canal companies, the total private financing amounted to slightly over three million dollars.

On the day Shepherd was depositing the district's funds with the Interior Department a contract for construction of the dam was let to the Utah Construction Company, then of Ogden, Utah, the lowest bidder on the project.

The following summer, on July 13, 1925 more than 20,000 people witnessed one of the largest and happiest celebrations in Idaho's history at the newly relocated community of American Falls, population 1500, the "Best Town by a Damsite." The occasion was the laying of the cornerstone of the big dam. All those individuals who had labored for the project since those dark days of 1919 and 1920 received their just accolades. Secretary Work commented that the event "marks the beginning of a new era in a greater conservation than the people of this country had ever known." He then read a congratulatory message from President Coolidge. There followed in succession Dr. Elwood Mead (who had succeeded Arthur P. Davis as director of the

Reclamation Service) and Frank Banks, the chief construction engineer on the dam. Russell E. Shepherd who had done so much in bringing the project to fruition including disposing of the district's bonds to a firm in Chicago (again, the "mother of irrigation") was undoubtedly the most popular speaker of the day. As he was introduced by Dr. Mead Shepherd pointedly remarked only the words "Money Talks" to the great applause of the audience.¹⁰²

When the speeches had concluded, the stunt fliers and bands and rodeoers had all contributed to the festivities, the day shift of Utah Construction workers retired to make way for the 500 man night crew.

For a little over two years an average of 400 men worked around-the-clock shifts on the project. Finally on October 31, 1926 the gates of the great dam were lowered into place and the impounding of water began in the huge facility two months ahead of schedule. On July 1, 1927 at a most opportune time in the irrigation season for farmers to draw on stored water the reservoir filled to its maximum capacity of 1,700,000 acre feet. By late September, near the end of the irrigating season, it was clear that the reservoir would have a carry over of about 1,400,000 acre feet of storage for the 1928 season. Never had the water accounts of Snake River farm districts been so affluent. The back water of the reservoir extended up the Snake River for more than twenty-five miles inundating 61,000 acres

¹⁰²Rockwell, 160.

of land over an area of 88 square miles.¹⁰³ Ironically, it was this acreage which, in 1921 during Secretary Fall's visit to the American Falls site, had seemed the most productive. Its inundation for the sake of the surrounding sagebrush wastes then hardly seemed a trade-off worth the expense.

The reservoir directly provided for the reclamation of 115,000 additional acres of public land lying to the north and west of the parent Minidoka project, and is today known as the Gooding Division. This new tract of land had been the government's primary concern in the project. Additionally, the American Falls reservoir provided supplemental water for over one million acres both above and below the facility. The versatility of the combined federal works on the river was demonstrated in the case of one participant who exchanged his American Falls rights for Jackson Lake storage, which in turn he exchanged for storage in the Blackfoot reservoir owned by the Fort Hall project of the Bureau of Indian Affairs.¹⁰⁴ Although the decade of the 1920's was a difficult period for the agricultural districts of Idaho, and even more trying times were but a few years away, never had the communities of the upper Snake River basin enjoyed the sense of security and accomplishment as they did on that day in 1926 when the American Falls gates were slipped into place.

¹⁰³"American Falls Dam is Completed," American Falls Press, September 22, 1927, II, 1. In the average year the agricultural districts normally do not have to draw on stored water before July 1. In very dry years, however, the process may begin in late April or May. By the first part of October the irrigation demand just about equals the natural flow of the river, and by mid-October the reservoirs begin storing water for the next season. Interview with Snake River Watermaster A.L. Larson, Idaho Falls, July 25, 1974.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., 5.

CONCLUSION

It had all started a half century earlier as hardy Mormon pioneers had ventured into the area above American Falls and commenced irrigation projects once the abatement of Indian threats made permanent settlement possible. It had received forceful impetus from the Hoosier youngster, Ira Perrine, as he trailed his mobile dairy over the sagebrush plain, contemplating ways in which the Snake River could be harnessed to serve the needs of civilization. The latitude of his vision, as well as that of other pioneer surveyors, settled on the American Falls as the most likely site for the development of lands downstream, including such massive undertakings as the Bruneau.

This spirit of western adventurism struck a happy marriage with eastern financiers and bonding houses which underwrote the initial projects. These in turn showed the way for subsequent private and federal development. The episodic hostility between the early Mormon regions and the "Johnny-come-latelys" of Magic Valley demonstrated that some permanent plan of river regulation and an assured supply of water was absolutely necessary to avoid constant and expensive litigation or violence at the head-gates. The successful formation of the American Falls Reservoir District was in some ways a turning point in relations between the two sections on the Snake River.

Not only did the plan for the formation of this big district constitute a precedent in western reclamation history and

establish a new benchmark in existing water law, but it also ensured completion of the long-dreamed-of project at American Falls. It likewise acted as a catalyst by which other independent irrigation companies could buy their own way into the American Falls project.

This mutuality of interests which the American Falls reservoir was both a symptom and a cause seemed to make for more amicable relations after 1923 between the Mormon upper valley and Magic Valley. In 1924 another difficult short water year had hit the valley which, trying as it was, must have been felt by many to be some vindication of their efforts to assure the ultimate completion of the big storage facility. Again, as in 1919, it was the north side people who were hardest hit by the shortage in 1924. Many families left their farms. Russell Shepherd appealed to the upper valley users, if at all possible, to spare some of their water for late season maturation of the north side crops. The "pool committee" formed for this emergency gave the north side district an eight day run of upper valley water which was sufficient to avert total calamity in that district. The Jerome people were as grateful to the Mormon upper valley in 1924 as they had been earlier to the Twin Falls farmers for a desperately needed run of water in 1919.

Though the American Falls Reservoir District included only five companies with about half the total acreage in the entire upper Snake River valley, all the companies and districts became part of Water District Number 36 with headquarters at Idaho Falls. By 1923, after the big district had been voted for financing the

dam, individual operators on the river apparently began to feel their interests best served in a representative organization (the elected Committee of Nine) which would reflect their separate interests and help avoid antagonisms in the basin communities. At the February 1923 meeting it was decided that the Committee would be constituted by two representatives of the far eastern part of the basin, four from the middle zone, and three from Magic Valley. The Committee, elected each year by the water users, was empowered "to select some engineer impartial to questions involved to make investigations on the river."¹ In practice, this engineer has been the regional engineer of the U.S. Geologic Survey. An official of the Bureau of Reclamation also sits as an advisory member of the Committee.

American Falls also meant something else in the course of western development. There have been many proclaimed "last frontiers" in American history, some even mentioned today. Wherever there is open desert or wilderness there will probably always be a "last frontier." Without arguing the relative place of southern Idaho in this succession of frontiers, it is important to note that at the turn of the century the only dots of civilization between the railroad center at Pocatello and the state capital at Boise, were a few scattered cattle ranches along the southern rim of the Snake River Plain. To the critical observer, it is clear that the string of prosperous communities

¹"Report of the Meeting of Water District No. 36," cited in the Times Register, February 6, 1923, 2.

along that route now were not settled by the agency of rugged, frontier individualism. It was a community movement throughout. Farms were platted; towns built; schools, churches, and parks provided; demonstration farms laid out either by a corporation or by the federal government. Furthermore, the ventures and successes of private entrepreneurs came more and more to depend upon the crutch of government support.

Yet the point should be emphasized that in the case of American Falls neither was success the result of unrestrained government largess, the "Santa Claus government" about which Albert Fall spoke. Private capital was the catalyst of the project and represented the biggest portion of the cost of the dam itself, excluding corollary expenses of moving a town, raising the railroad right of way, etc. And the private capital itself was, as we have seen, the result of the idea of community. What is even more striking was that this triumph of community was able to prevail in the most extreme circumstances of agricultural economic distress.

It would not be an excess of rhetorical license to conclude that the realization of the big American Falls project marked the end of an era in Snake River reclamation history. Merle Wells suggests the same thought in these words:

...farmers were convinced that prudence now demanded the development of much more water storage capacity. Their thinking had completed a cycle from the concept of natural flow adequacy at the turn of the century to the need for sufficient storage to hold water over from wet to dry years.²

²Beal and Wells, II, 170.

The north side Twin Falls project especially, before 1927, had limped along since its development, borrowing water from whomever it could during the cyclic short water years. This 200,000 acre tract never was really secure prior to their subscription for an adequate water supply in American Falls, as the exodus from many of its farms attested. It was appropriate therefore, that in its Golden Jubilee celebration in 1957, the Jerome press singled out the importance of the work at American Falls, and attributed the final stability of the north side communities to the successful completion of the reservoir.³

What was true for the north side was also only slightly less true for the other lower valley projects. With the passage of time they each became more and more dependent on stored water in federally constructed reservoirs. It is difficult to disagree with the proclamation of the Mayor of American Falls in September 1927, "We have just witnessed the completion of the American Falls Dam and Reservoir, the key to the irrigation system of the whole Snake River Valley, which completion marks an epoch in the agricultural and industrial development of all Southern Idaho."⁴

During the first storage season of the new reservoir, 1926-27, the state department of reclamation released figures showing just how important this irrigation system of the Snake

³"American Falls Reservoir Stabilized North Side," The North Side News, June 20, 1957, 27.

⁴American Falls Press, September 22, 1927, 1. My emphasis.

River was to the state. The money tied up in reclamation systems--most all of which were south of the Salmon River and included the Boise Valley--was \$90,000,000. The systems carried water to 2,500,000 acres of land. One half of Idaho's population was supported directly or indirectly by irrigation. Of the state's total taxable wealth of about \$390,000,000 the irrigation systems of the state amounted to \$260,000,000.⁵ The great contribution of American Falls to these figures was yet to be assessed.

The grandeur of the American Falls project was widely heralded upon its completion. It was generally assumed to rank as the third largest project for irrigation purposes in the world, trailing only the storage facilities on the Euphrates and the Nile. Whatever may have been its relative comparison, it was clearly an achievement of national and international reputation. Yet, its completion did not mark the millennium of water security for the entire upper Snake River. As Wells' remark above suggested, upper basin thinking came to be riveted to the further development of storage space.

Four factors seem to have been at work which produced this "revolution of thinking." The first is the simple human propensity to decide that once something good is obtained, acquisition

⁵Report of the State Department of Reclamation, Boise, October 1926. Cited in the Times Register, November 12, 1926, 1.

begets further desire for more of the same. Second, the upper valley canals once having subscribed to fractional storage space in the American Falls reservoir, decided at length that they really needed more--that storage space was more than just a luxury but a necessity. Third, the general nature of irrigation itself requires that over the years more water will be necessary to grow crops which earlier could have been matured with less water. Also, in the early days on most of the tracts the two principal crops were hay and grain which supported a relatively large livestock industry. With the press of more recent times, farmers have turned increasingly to crops yielding a greater cash surplus. Potatoes, sugar beets, and beans all require water later in the season than did the early crops, and at a more constant rate. Additionally, as a result of soil leaching caused by many years of irrigation, the land now requires much more water as well as fertilizer than it did in the early years. The net result is that all irrigated agricultural tracts have felt a need for an increased water supply available only through additional storage space.⁶

Finally, the construction of American Falls did not change the weather. There were still droughts and short water years, especially throughout the depression decade of the 1930's. The years 1934 and 1936 were perhaps the worst, although the runoff from the Snake River watershed was far below normal throughout

⁶Lynn Crandall, "Irrigation Development on the Upper Snake River," Office of Water District No. 36, Idaho Falls, Idaho, June, 1964.

the entire decade. Crop losses were still sustained even after American Falls was a reality. In 1935 the loss was estimated at \$7,000,000 due to water shortage but never did it approach the losses of 1924 and especially 1919. To this extent then American Falls did serve as a beneficent governor of more consistent agricultural production. It is true that many farm families were driven from their homesteads in the 1930's. But it was generally not due to a lack of water and consequent decreased production, but rather to low prices for farm commodities.⁷

The shortage of runoff in the 1930's hit particularly hard at the upper basin canal companies, those with very early natural flow rights. These systems until then had felt relatively secure in their early appropriations on the natural flow. Two federally sponsored reservoirs of relatively small capacity were authorized and constructed in the late 1930's: Grassy Lake Reservoir on the Fall River near the southwest corner of Yellowstone Park (15,000 acre feet capacity), and Island Park Reservoir on Henry's Fork of the Snake River (capacity 125,000 acre feet). Until very recent times these facilities satisfied the most pressing needs of the canal systems above the Rexburg area on Henry's Fork.

Additionally, surveys were begun in the early 1930's for a large multipurpose facility in the Palisades area on the Snake,

⁷Annie Pike Greenwood's We Sagebrush Folks (New York: D. Appleton-Century, 1934) is a highly entertaining and readable account of one family's homesteading experience on an irrigated tract in southern Idaho.

near the Idaho-Wyoming line. After a delay in construction caused by the war, the Palisades Reservoir filled for the first time in 1959 with a capacity only slightly below that of American Falls, 1.2 million acre-feet. Thus by 1960 the total storage capacity on the Snake River and its principal tributaries in the upper basin amounted to about 4.3 million acre-feet. But the question was now, where to go from here.

Reclamationists--which included most farmers, the Corps of Engineers, the Bureau of Reclamation, powerful water interests in the state--had had pretty much their own say in river development as the 1960's dawned. And in high runoff years such as 1972 when four million acre feet had to be turned out to the Pacific (an amount which equals the total combined capacity of all the reservoirs), reclamationists pushed even harder for more efforts at water conservation.⁸ But this time they encountered opposition. New battle lines were being drawn as they had been once before in the 1920's, but this time not over the merits of one kind of reclamation project or financing as opposed to another, but rather over reclamation itself. Strong segments of public opinion were seriously wondering if reclamation had not reached the point of no return. Agricultural surpluses mounted as people contemplated the wisdom of opening new lands for production or paying farmers out of general tax monies not to

⁸There is an annual average of one million acre-feet of Snake River water "going to waste," according to Al Peters, Manager of the Twin Falls Canal Company; interview, August 11, 1972.

produce. As an example of this growing concern, Congress established a National Water Commission which, in November, 1972, issued a report proposing a moratorium on new irrigation projects until the year 2000. However, reclamation interests all over the west responded vigorously. The Idaho Water Users Association not only repudiated the Commission's findings, but argued strongly for two new projects--one on the Teton River and another in Swan Valley, just below the present Palisades reservoir.⁹ As an indication of where the locus of power was still centered the reclamation interests carried the day, and in Idaho the Morrison-Knudson Company began construction of the controversial Teton Dam, much to the disappointment of conservation and environmental interests everywhere.

There is another dimension to the apparently insatiable quest of the northwest states for reclamation works. There has been increasing discussion over the last several years on the proposition of exporting water from the Columbia and Snake River basins for use in the water-short states of the southwest. One of the most frequently mentioned plans suggests the diversion of water from a point just below American Falls to join the Colorado River in southeastern Utah. There are few regional issues which raise so much concern and mutual distrust. Though at present the states of the northwest could probably afford to export water, they argue that their future industrial growth

⁹"Water Users Ask for Time on Report That May Put Federal Government Out of Dam Construction," the Idaho State Journal, December 3, 1972, D-1.

depends upon the retention of their water resources. In that view one can understand the rush of northwest water and power interests to build more and more dams. Thus, in an editorial aptly entitled "Use it or Lose it," the Salt Lake Tribune took note of the efforts of Idaho Senator Frank Church in trying to secure a large appropriation for the largest development project of any desert area in the west, the Southwest Idaho Water Development Project. After commenting on the industrial, agricultural, and recreational benefits which would accrue to Idaho, the editorial noted "exportation of its surpluses to other river basins is rapidly approaching."¹⁰ Thus, the objectives of the Bureau of Reclamation and of northwest water and hydroelectric power interests neatly coincide in a plan which, in the view of southwestern states, smacks of utter greediness.

As metropolitan areas have grown at an increasing rate in the relatively sparsely settled areas of the west, the priorities in the use of the limited water resources are for the first time seriously questioned. Should irrigated agricultural tracts be cut back in favor of using the limited water for industrial and municipal use? Irrigation is by far the least efficient use of water among all possible alternatives. Yet, there is a powerful

¹⁰Salt Lake Tribune, September 12, 1965, 8A-1. This project contemplates the reclamation of over 300,000 acres in the area between Mountain Home and Boise. The Bureau of Reclamation conducted a feasibility study in 1967. The project, however, has not as yet received funding.

ingrained reluctance to condemn agricultural lands in order to obtain water for other uses, especially in a state which has a strong agrarian tradition. Utah Governor George D. Clyde probably expressed the sentiment of most people in the arid west when he addressed the Idaho State Bureau of Reclamation and suggested ordering water priorities thus: (1) direct human consumption, (2) irrigation, (3) industrial uses, (4) nonconsumptive use such as power generation and recreation.¹¹ On the other hand, one senses a desire on the part of many state leaders who believe that in the interests of growth it is necessary to divert water from irrigation (which is frequently found to command 90% of a state's total water use) to municipal or industrial use. This problem is especially acute for the southwestern United States where growing cities such as Albuquerque, Tucson, and Phoenix are presently head to head with this problem. And finally, among all the social costs of reclamation how does one take into account the aesthetic dimension? Are further reclamation and hydro-electric power facilities worth the costs of the destruction of wild animal sanctuaries, feed ranges and spawning grounds, the inundation of the few remaining spectacular canyons on the Snake River, the destruction of valuable timber lands? Even as these questions are being debated, the National Park Service, the bureaucratic high priest of preservation, is arguing the need for a reservoir on the Snake River in the beautiful

¹¹The Salt Lake Tribune, September 26, 1961, 6.

Alpine Canyon in western Wyoming as a means of stabilizing the level of Jackson Lake, so important has that body of water become to the Teton Park tourist industry.

Has the Bureau of Reclamation outlived its usefulness, as some contend?¹² The answer to that question will not be resolved by an objective assessment of the issues. Bureaucratic momentum has an almost frictionless inertia of its own, and opposition groups have not only the difficulty of uniting together themselves, but also of swaying a considerable segment of public opinion to their cause which only then may have a reasonable chance of being translated into political action. In a state such as Idaho where agriculture and food processing industries play such a dominant role in the regional economy and has such a strong tradition in the state's history, opponents of further reclamation face a formidable task indeed.

¹²Volumes of literature are being produced on this topic in the present ecology-conscious climate of public opinion. The following three are provocative and provide the challenging questions to the reclamationist point of view: T.H. Watkins, The Water Hustlers (San Francisco: The Sierra Club, 1971); Richard Berkman and W. Kip Viscusi, Damming the West: Ralph Nader's Study Group Report on the Bureau of Reclamation (New York: Grossman, 1973); Arthur E. Morgan, Dams and Other Disasters (Boston: Porter Sargent, 1971).

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