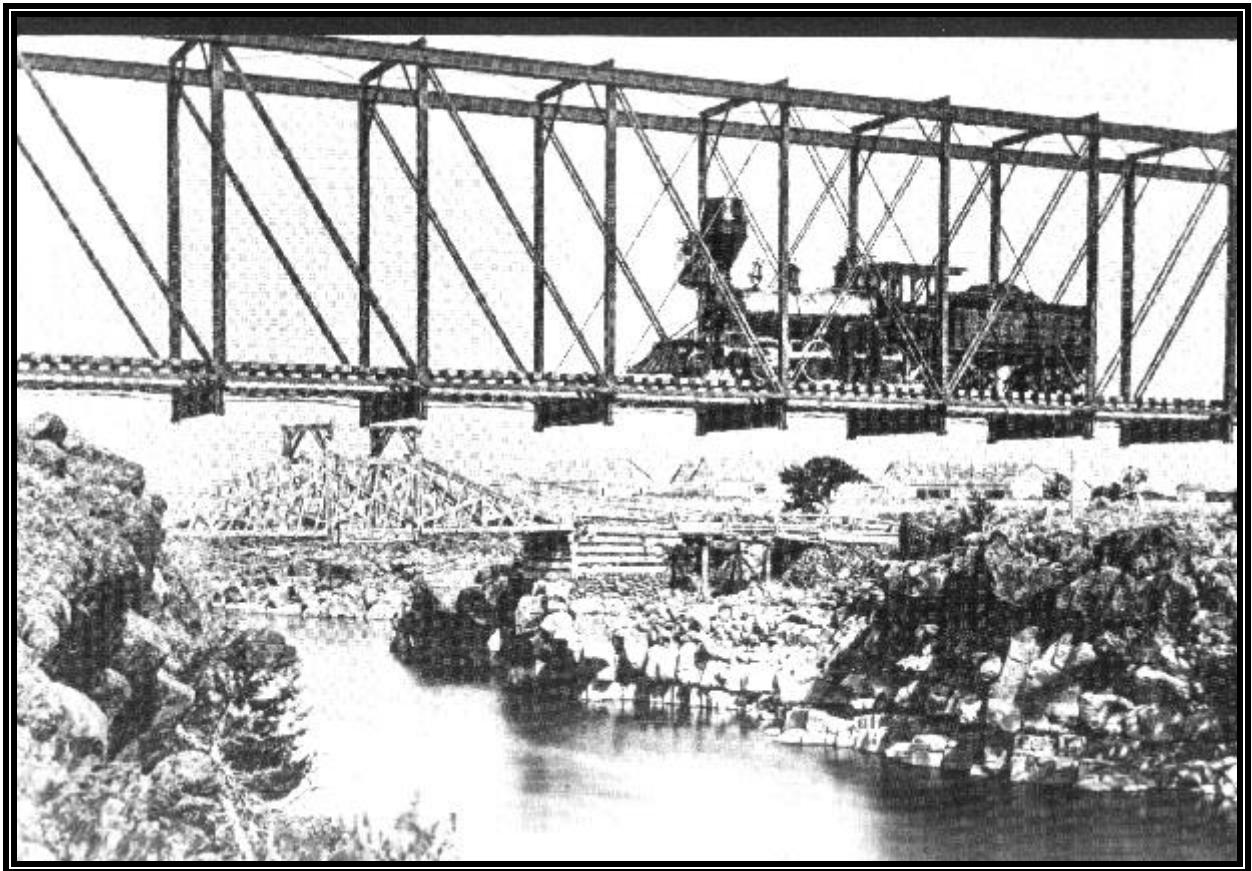


# *IDAHO'S UPPER SNAKE RIVER BASIN*



Eagle Rock's (Idaho Falls) Wooden Taylor Toll Bridge in Background and first Railroad Bridge.

1808, It is believed that the first white man to enter the Upper Snake River Basin was John Colter. He was hired to accompany Lewis and

Clark in their 1808 expedition. A stone, unearthed by a farmer in the Teton Basin, Idaho in 1931, had carved in it his name, John Colter,

with the year 1808. Soon after the Lewis and Clark expedition, most of the Upper Snake River Basin became a trappers paradise and remained so until the early 1840's. Much of what was to become Eastern Idaho, was explored first by the trappers. They encountered some problems with the Indians, but not like the settlers who traveled through the area later.

In 1832, a man by the name of Benjamin L.A. Bonneville and a Captain in the U.S. Army, had heard of the trapper's paradise in the Snake River Basin. He took a leave of absence from the Army and entered the area to try his hand at trapping. His success at trapping was not too great, but his big impact was the information and maps he gathered. He made enough impact that when Bonneville County was organized, it received his name. Around 1840, the fur animals began to become extinct and from then until the discovery of gold in Montana, in the early part of 1860, most of this land was left to the Indians.

Around 1860, the discovery of gold in Montana brought Gold Prospectors through the Snake River Basin area in great hordes. This, also, created a need to haul freight from Salt Lake City to the gold fields of Montana. There were, also much prospecting going on in Idaho, with some success. The Snake river had to be crossed to get to the Montana gold fields. A couple of men in 1862, by the name of William A. Hickman and Harry Richards, decided to build a Toll Ferry a few miles north of what is now Idaho Falls. It was completed on June 20, 1862 and by then, waiting to go across Snake River that day, were in the excess of 230 people with their goods and transportation. By night fall, this task was completed and it became a very good paying enterprise for these two men over the next few years. This Ferry received the named, Eagle

Rock Ferry. The Snake River had lots of lava rock outcroppings and at this point was a large lava outcrop in the middle of the river, which was a haven for nesting eagles. From this lava outcropping, Eagle Rock Ferry received its name. Also, by 1862, the first Stage Coaches were traveling through the area. Traffic was constantly on the increase.

In 1864, enterprising Matt Taylor decided to build a toll bridge across the Snake River. He chose a point in the river where large lava cropping were fairly close to each other, with the river running between. He located large timbers up Beaver Creek, which was about 80 miles away. They were large and strong enough to expand the river. He hired men with horses and wagons and the task of building the Queen-truss frame bridge was completed in January 1865. Near this structure, he built the first home in what soon became the town of Eagle Rock. From this



Looking North from the Idaho Falls Steel Bridge 1917

start, a thriving city of Idaho Falls was to become.

In 1868, probably the first active irrigation farming in the Snake River Basin was started by three men, Thomas Lauder and two brothers, John and William Adams. These men had earlier been engaged in the freight hauling business. This farming operation took place about 15 miles north of Eagle Rock, on the west side of the

Snake River, in the place that then was called Market Lake. Later, when the railroad chose to come through the town of Market Lake on its way to Montana, its name was changed. The small community, out of appreciation for the railroad coming through their town, voted to change the name to Roberts, it being after the name of the Division Superintendent of the railroad.

In 1879, a narrow gauge railroad was constructed to haul freight to and from Salt Lake City and the gold fields of Montana. Eagle Rock was now a thriving town with many homes, stores and businesses. Irrigation farming was now taking a foothold as a way of life. A railroad bridge was built and completed that same year, it crossing the Snake River just a few hundred feet south of the Taylor Toll Bridge. Also, Eagle Rock was chosen in 1880, to be where the railroad would build its round house and repair shop. Many other communities began to be established in the Upper Snake River Basin about this time.

Many of these were Mormons from Utah, following the council of church leaders to establish new communities in Idaho. Their first settlement was Iona, a community just north of Eagle Rock (Idaho Falls). In 1884, President Wilford Woodruff, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles in the Mormon Church, came to visit the Mormon Settlers in the Snake River Valley. There in Iona he was sensing the discouragement of the Mormon Settlements, he climbed into the back of his wagon box and issued what became known as the "Wagon Box Prophecy". He said "The spirit of the Lord rests on me and I feel to bless you in the name of Jesus Christ. I promise you that the climate will be moderated for your good. I can see these great sagebrush prairies as far as the eye can reach

turned into fertile fields. I bless the land that it shall yield forth in its strength. Flowers and trees and fine homes shall grace the valley from one end to another. Schools and collages of higher learning shall be built to serve you, that you may learn the mysteries of Gods great universe. I see churches and meetinghouses dotting the landscape, where the God of Israel may be worshiped in truth and in spirit."

In the spring of 1885, three Morman men, John F. Shelley, and two brothers, George and James Steele left their homes in American Fork, Utah to explore for a homestead near the farming community of Eagle Rock. Farming now being its biggest industry. As they got about 10 miles south of Eagle Rock, they were impressed with the rich, grass-covered land that they saw, but they were on their way for the small community of Iona, located just a few miles north of Eagle Rock. Several of their friends had located there. There, they selected sites for their homesteads and returned to American Fork to make preparations for their move.

In August, they again left their families and headed to Idaho by wagon. Plans were made for their wives and family to follow later, by train, soon as they received word that the men had arrived at Eagle Rock. As they passed through the area south of Eagle Rock where that spring they saw the tall green grass, it was now dried and parched. They camped at the same spot where the town of Shelley now stands, but were discouraged by what they saw. As James Steele awoke the next morning, he woke his brother, George and John Shelley and told them, "I had a dream. I dreamed that I was standing on top of that hill over yonder and was looking over this whole valley. It was divided into nice farms and there was tall, ripe grain growing all over the

valley." James went on to tell them the rest of the dream. This seemed to reassure and cheer up all three, as they set out for their homesteads in Iona.

On May 22, 1886, a tremendous wind storm swept over Eagle Rock, blowing the roof off the Taylor home and wrecking havoc on the railroad's round house. The decision was made not to rebuild the railroad's round house in Eagle Rock. It was rebuilt 50 miles south, in the town of Pocatello. Pocatello later became the Gate City of Southeastern Idaho. Pocatello's growth soon skyrocketed from just the few buildings that were there before the railroad made the decision to move its roundhouse and repair shop there. The next year, Eagle Rock's population dropped from 2,000 to 400. Eagle Rock was not hurt too long, as it soon became the jumping off point to Yellowstone Park. Many homesteads were taken up for farming, in and around Eagle Rock. Eagle Rock now started to become an important



Eagle Rock's (Idaho Falls) 1<sup>st</sup> Steel Bridge

agricultural community.

In 1887, due to the increase of freight traffic and

larger loads, the narrow gauge railroad tracks were removed and replaced with standard gauge rails. It now could handle much larger and heavier trains. This consisted of 262 miles, from Garrison, Montana to Pocatello, Idaho.

In 1889, after several years of trying unsuccessfully, by some, to get the Taylor Bridge changed to a non toll bridge, increase effort was now made. The Anderson brothers had bought the bridge from Matt Taylor, soon after the railroad bridge was completed, in 1879. The railroad was now hauling most of the freight. There was now a large demand from those who wanted to homestead the west side of the river, where there were thousands of acres of highly productive land for the taking, for a non toll bridge. The County Commissioners finally declared the bridge, then known as the Anderson Bridge, to be taken over and recorded as a public highway. Public reaction was overwhelming in favor and within one month, over 2,000 wagons had crossed over the bridge. By August, the bridge was declared unsafe and a new iron bridge was built to replace the wooden bridge. The old wooden Taylor Bridge had served the travelers well, for over 25 years.

In 1891, a group of land developers from Chicago had their eyes on Eagle Rock. The group consisted of two Holmes brothers, and Willis Emerson, D.W. Higbee and T.W Lee. They knew the cascades in the river could be harnessed to provide power and the rich level valley lands would make good farms. They planned to engineer a land boom, which included plans to start an advertising campaign. The name Eagle Rock had to go. There was opposition from a few, but when it was brought before the voters, on July 22, the count was overwhelming

for the name change, from Eagle Rock to Idaho Falls. Idaho Falls soon took on its own identity.

John Shelley struggled in Iona for seven years, he having started a mercantile business called the Iona Store, but he was never satisfied. He kept remembering the large level area of land near the river, about ten miles south of Idaho Falls. In the spring of 1892, John Shelley took action on an idea that he had earlier to move back to that spot of land he and his friends camped on, in 1885. He was going to start a supply store on the land and invite farmers to come and put the land under cultivation. But he needed lumber to build his store. He arranged with the railroad to stop on its route and unload the lumber. The railroad agreed to make the unscheduled stop, only if Shelley and



G.G. Wright Flour Mill West side of River

some men were waiting there to unload the lumber quickly.

The store was built and did a brisk business. People were moving into the area and a town was beginning to take form. Later the railroad officials put a new siding at the new settlement

and named the siding, "The Shelley Siding," after John Shelley. The community followed and named their town Shelley.

In 1894, a group of land developers, interested in the large undeveloped track of land that was west of Idaho Falls and the Snake River, organized the Great Western Land and Irrigation Company. They bought up a lot of the sagebrush-covered land and established water rights in both the Great Western and Porter Canals. The land was excellent, water was available and now all it needed was people. The four men that headed the Great Western Land and Irrigation Company set out to colonize the area. Coincidentally, they all happened to be Swedish. Also, all four were members of the same church organization, known as the Mission Friends. It was only natural that they should appeal to fellow countrymen to come and occupy the land. Their first task was to send out advertisements through this church group. The news of good land and plenty of water, arrived in the mid-west at the opportune time. Farmers in Nebraska, Iowa and Illinois were having a bad year. A severe drought was threatening to wipe them out. The fresh mountain water in unlimited amounts, was just the thing to get them to move.

That same year, 1894, the first group of Swedish farmers began to arrive. They quickly named their new settlement, New Sweden. Nothing but hard work lay before them. The new land was very fertile and they were hard workers and that was what it took to make the land productive. They were not without problems. Often new families had to live in dugouts, while they built their ditches and developed their land. Water dried up in the Great Western Canal in the winter and the New Sweden residents were forced to

carry water from the river, or melt snow.

But even though things were not all smooth sailing, perseverance was one of the Swedish



Broadway 1909

settler's most outstanding characteristics. After relationships between those administrating the canal system and the farmers deteriorated, the farmers decide to form a co-op themselves. After their good friend, Judge McCutcheon helped pass a law legalizing the formation of irrigation districts, the group now was legally able to work together. They collectively petitioned the legislature for the right to form an irrigation district.

So the New Sweden Irrigation District, the first irrigation district in the upper Snake River Valley, was established in January, 1900. They were now able to boast of having some of the best farms in the state and made New Sweden one of the richest and productive farming areas in Idaho.

In 1907, the steel bridge that was built to replace the old Taylor wood bridge was now being replaced by a wider and better built steel bridge. The County Commissioners then sold the first steel bridge to the community of Woodville. It gave Woodville access across the Snake River to

Shelley. The community of Woodville was established in 1888 and was about 10 miles south west of Idaho Falls and about 3 & 1/2 miles north west of Shelley.

In 1911, Mayor Bowen Curley of Idaho Falls, brought in an engineer from Portland, Oregon to tackle the job of building a dam over the Snake River's ragged and swirling lava rock out cropping that created the rapids just north of the soon to be built Broadway Bridge.



George Brunt in Idaho Falls, 1904

The growing Idaho Falls was needing the dam to force the water into the north channel for their new powerhouse. The engineer soon finished the long retaining wall above the rapids, but couldn't build a successful dam. Every effort made was washed out. He threw his hands up in despair, declaring that the river could not be dammed at that point.

City Councilman, Brazil Clark, wasn't about to give up and he approached a friend, W.W. Keefer with the problem and asked him if he could solve the problem. Bill Keefer's answer was yes. Councilman Clark asked him why he didn't come forward before and his only answer was, "I wasn't asked." Under Bill Keefer's direction, a crib dam, twelve feet high, was built.

Bill Keefer's ingeniously constructed a large anchor and attached a barge to the anchor. By using the barge as a platform from which to work, the men could position the dam material and keep the river from washing it away, as the dam was being built.

About 1918, the 1907 steel bridge was moved and relocated upstream at Johns Hole and a much larger and wider concrete bridge was built and it was called the Broadway Bridge.

The dam worked well for many years, with only minor repairs being made and it was replaced with a new dam in the 1980's. By the end of the Century, the Dam, Falls and the Green Belt that has been built on both sides of the Snake River, as it runs through Idaho Falls, has become one of the most beautiful scenic spots in all Idaho.

The Upper Snake River Basin still remains one of the most productive agriculture areas in the Nation. Even though agriculture still is the leading industry in this area, other non agriculture industries continue to come in. The one that made the most impact was when the Atomic Energy Commission built their Atomic Test Reactors on the west desert near Arco, Idaho, starting in 1950. They made Idaho Falls its headquarters for their main offices. Through all these years there is a steady growth continually going on.

Potatoes, hay, and grain are the leading cash crops being raised. Sugar beet production was among these crops for many years, but discontinued when the Sugar Companies started to lose money and then closed down about 1978. This area is the largest potato producing area in Idaho and has played a big part in promoting and marketing the World Famous Idaho Russet. Large fresh potato sheds and processing plants,



Idaho Falls L. D. S. Temple

producing flakes, granular and frozen products, are built up and down this valley. Potato storage sheds are now built to hold potatoes year round, which brings a more even distribution.

Livestock production plays a big part in the valley with auction yards and meat processing plants. Dairy farming and milk and cheeses production plays a big part, also. One cannot drive through the Snake River Valley and not notice the large sprinkler systems that now water most of the land. Most farms now consist of large tracks of land. Agriculture has become big business. The Freeway System (I-15, started in 1957) now runs through the Valley and trucks and trains thrive in keeping the produce moving.

Probably the most stabling part of the Snake River Valley are due to the religious climate of the people. Many churches are established up and down the valley. Most major faiths and

religions are represented. Religion has been a leading factor in the Valleys development, from the time the first people began to settle the area.