

TETON ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Ricks College
Idaho State Historical Society
History Department, Utah State University

TETON DAM DISASTER

Douglas S. Kauer

Interviewed by

Mary Ann Beck

June 27, 1977

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UTAH STATE UNIVERSITY & RICKS COLLEGE

HISTORY DEPARTMENTS

COMMUNITY IMPROVEMENT THROUGH LOCAL HISTORY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWER AGREEMENT

In view of the historical and scholarly value of this information contained in the interview with DOUGLAS S. KAUER, I, MILTON R. MERRILL
(name, please print) (interviewer, print)
knowingly and voluntarily permit the Milton R. Merrill Library at Utah State University, the David O. McKay Library at Ricks College, and the Idaho State Historical Society at Boise, Idaho, the full rights and use of this information.

MILTON R. MERRILL
Interviewer's Signature

6/27/77
Date

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INTERVIEWEE AGREEMENT

You have been interviewed in connection with a joint oral history program of the History Department, Utah State University, Ricks College, and the Idaho State Historical Society. The purpose of this oral history program is to gather and preserve information for historical and scholarly use.

A tape recording of your interview has been made by the interviewer. A verbatim typescript of the tape will be made and a final typed and edited transcripts, together with the tape will be made and a final will then be filed in the Milton R. Merrill Library Special Collections, David O. McKay Library at Ricks College, and the Idaho State Historical Society in Boise. This material will be made available according to each of the depositories' policies for research be scholars and by others for scholarly purposes. When the final transcript is completed, a personal copy will be sent to you.

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In view of the historical and scholarly value of this information, I, Douglas KAULER, do hereby assign full
(please print full name)

and all rights of this material to the Merrill Library at Utah State University, to the Library at Ricks College, and to the Idaho State Historical Society at Boise, Idaho, for scholarly purposes according to each of the institutions governing policies.

I, Erma Kauer, okay this interview for Doug Kauer.
Douglas Kauer
Interviewee's Signature

June 27, 1977
Date

ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Douglas S. Kauer

INTERVIEWER: Mary Ann Beck

DATE: June 27, 1977

TETON DAM DISASTER

B: Mr. Kauer, where were you born?

K: In Rexburg.

B: How long have you lived in Rexburg?

K: All of my life.

B: How old are you?

K: Thirteen.

B: Do you have a family?

K: Yes.

B: How many were living in your home at the time of the flood?

K: My mom, dad, my brother Gary, my sister Debbie, and me.

B: What was your address at the time of the flood?

K: Route 1, Box 92 B.

B: Is that your present address?

K: No.

B: What do you do for a living?

K: I help my dad farm.

B: How long have you lived in this area?

K: All of my life.

B: Did your family support or oppose the construction of the Teton Dam?

K: My dad probably supported it because it was good for irrigation.

B: Did you or any member of your family have a premonition of the Teton disaster?

K: No.

B: Where were you and your family when the Teton Dam broke?

K: I was up with my brother, Bob, to the police station. My family was here at home.

B: What was your first reaction when you heard that the dam had failed?

K: I thought that the town would get flooded.

B: Did you go home and try to save any household or personal belongings?

K: No.

B: Did you see the flood coming?

K: Yes.

B: Would you tell me about it?

K: My grandma and grandpa came and picked us all up when we heard that the dam had broken. My mom wanted to stay and bake some bread but we made her go. Then my cousin and I walked down on the hill to see what the flood was like. We saw a bunch of debris and a trailer house floating down Main Street by the Mighty Mite, north of town. There was a guy sitting there trying to start his motorcycle but the spark plugs were wet. The police came along and asked us if we wanted a ride and we said, "No". Then another guy made us get in the back of his pickup and he gave us a ride.

B: Where did you go from there?

K: We went back up to the trailer that my uncle had brought up on the hill. We walked around the college the rest of the day.

B: How long were you up there?

K: All day and all night. When we were down by the Mighty Mite we also saw some cars driving through the water trying to get out and the water was three or four feet deep.

B: Was your father gone at the time of the flood?

K: Yes. He was up in St. Anthony getting a part for the spray rig. When he heard about the flood, he hurried home and started getting all the cows and horses. We filled the camper with food and pulled it up on the hill.

B: What did your parents do in the case of the flood coming to your home?

K: We moved all of our cows up on the hill and got everything ready for it.

B: Did the flood come here to your home?

K: Yes. It surrounded all of it about thirty feet or so away.

B: What was your brother doing?

K: He was a policeman so he came home with me and got on his uniform and went up and helped them direct traffic.

B: When you were on the hill with your grandparents, why did you go back down to Rexburg?

K: We wanted to see what was going on.

B: Did you think it was going to be that bad?

K: No, we just thought it was going to be a little water a couple of feet or so deep.

B: In vacating the area where you live, what happened to you and your family at the time of the flood?

K: We all got split apart until that night. I went back and helped my dad move the cows back that next morning.

B: Did you see any animals trying to escape the floodwaters?

K: Yes. We went up and saw Neil Martin, one of my friends, his dad had binoculars and they were watching the cow and their horses trying to get out of the pasture by jumping the fences.

B: Did you see any other animals in the flood?

K: No.

B: Where did you and your family stay during the first two or three days after the flood?

K: The first night of the flood I stayed up in one of the dorms with my cousins. My mom and sister stayed in the trailer on the hill. My dad stayed down here and watched the property.

B: How soon after the flood were you able to return to your property?

K: The next day.

B: How did you get there?

K: In the truck.

B: Were you able to drive on the road?

K: Yes.

B: What was your first reaction when you viewed the destruction of the property in Rexburg?

K: We thought that it was real bad.

B: What was the damage your parents suffered as a result of the flood?

K: The crops were all flooded and the worst thing was my three brothers and sisters that were married, their houses were all totaled and they lost everything. They came to stay with us.

B: How long were they here?

K: My sister Marilyn and her husband, Quinn, stayed for about two months until they got their HUD trailer. Dennis and Carlene stayed for a couple of weeks until they got an apartment uptown.

B: What did you think about and how did you feel as you watched the floodwaters rolling through Rexburg?

- K: We thought it was going to wreck everything when we saw the houses floating by. Also, my little nephew cried for two or three nights because he couldn't go home.
- B: How did you got about cleaning up your farmland?
- K: My Uncle Delbert brought his dump truck over and we used our pickup. We threw it in the back with our hands and hauled it away. Then we had to get some big trucks and a cat to come in and clean it up after that.
- B: What were some of the problems your mother and father had that gave them the most frustration?
- K: All the guys brought all their cows and milk cows and horses down to our place because we still had our corrals. We had seventeen milk cows to milk.
- B: What did you do with the milk?
- K: We threw it away because nobody would take it and we didn't have any place to store it.
- B: How many months did you do that?
- K: We just did it for a couple of weeks.
- B: Were the farmers very appreciative of the service your dad did?
- K: Yes. They offered to pay him but he didn't take it.
- B: Did your family personally suffer any vandalism or other form of lawlessness?
- K: My sister had some things stolen. Some people came and stole the light fixtures and things like that.
- B: Do you feel that the flood was divine punishment or a man-made disaster?
- K: I think Heavenly Father blessed us so it didn't come at night.
- B: Then you think it was man-made?
- K: Yes, kind of.

B: How did the Teton Dam disaster change your life last summer?

K: I worked harder than I ever have that year.

B: Thank you very much.