

TETON ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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

TETON DAM DISASTER

Gloria G. Andrus

Interviewed by

Alyn B. Andrus

October 4, 1977

Project made possible by funds from the

W.K. Kellogg Foundation  
Idaho State Legislature through the  
Idaho State Historical Society and  
National Endowment for the Humanities

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 Gloria G. Andrus I, Alyn B. Andrus  
(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.

Alyn B. Andrus  
Interviewer's Signature

Oct. 4 1977

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, Gloria E. Andrews, 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.

Gloria E. Andrews  
Interviewee's Signature

Oct. 4, 1977  
Date

ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Gloria G. Andrus

INTERVIEWER: Alyn B. Andrus

DATE: October 4, 1977

TETON DAM DISASTER

June 5, 1976

I was outside of the house hosing off my plastic plants and Alyn was in the house doing his Saturday morning vacuuming. My friend, Marilyn Hansen, had been digging up part of her lawn so she could have concrete poured for a patio. She called on the phone and asked Alyn if he thought if she packed the sod around her basement windows it would keep the water out. He asked if she was going to be irrigating that heavily. She was incredulous that we had not heard about the breaking of the Teton Dam.

He ran outside and told me. We immediately turned the radio on to station KRXX. Don Ellis was broadcasting. He tends to get a little overly excited, but I'm glad that he did that day. About that time sirens started screeching all over town as police officers tried to make sure everyone had been advised of the flood and was getting out of their homes.

Everyone was advised to head for Ricks College and the hill. An emergency center was established at the Manwaring Center. For one month that was the place to call for absolutely any question that you needed answered.

About the time I thought about calling Steve to tell him that we would be all right, our phones went out. We knew the water was a couple of hours away so we finished vacuuming the house. Alyn went around the ward to see if he could help any of the widows living on the "flats". I hurried to my law office and picked up all the law books and files that were lower than

a couple of feet from the floor. I hoped that we wouldn't have any more water than that. I felt at that time that there would be a lot of heart attacks from the stress and the over-exertion. I was correct. Marilyn's children were hysterical so she brought them up to my house, along with Blackie, their dog.

We stood in the road in front of our house and watched the water coming into town. As it came through Smith Park it was carrying with it animals, cars, gas tanks that were exploding, and houses. It was so absolutely unreal that you hoped it was a nightmare and that you would soon awaken. Then we went through the house out onto our deck on the west of the house and watched the water enter the plaza where my office is located. A new office building had just been completed in the plaza. The water surged around it. We could hear walls on the lower level giving way and we wondered if the structure would stand. It did.

Cows and bulls which had made their way to the edge of the water started running through our yards in an attempt to get away from the water. One poor cow was so exhausted that she just laid down. A group of men had to hook a chain around her and pull her out of the water with a pickup. That was right in the middle of the plaza. A house from over by the new high school, owned by a widow, Neva Newton, came to rest in the middle of the road between Dr. Petersen's office and the house across the street. It was almost a month before it was removed.

I can't begin to express the horrible feeling that I had. My stomach ached all day and I felt like I had to vomit. If I had known the work involved in cleaning up afterward, I may have. People roamed in and out all day long. We fed anyone who could eat. We had to borrow a baby bottle from Betty Davis because Marilyn's sister-in-law had not brought one for her baby.

The water started going down late in the evening and the people who could get to their homes went back to inspect the damage. All of our "guests" left about midnight. Marilyn's family went back to Driggs up over the dry farms.

June 6 (Sunday)

Most of the wards held Priesthood meeting just long enough to get organized. We all put on our grubbies and started shoveling mud. Alyn, Daniel and I went to Alice Tout's house. She does not have a basement so that made it a good house to start working on. Pumps were limited that first day so few basements were pumped out. At Alice's house we just moved furniture to the side and scraped mud off the carpets as best as we could. We didn't want to move furniture outside yet because the ground was still so wet.

Later when we got into homes with basements, the procedure went something like this. First, the pumps would pump the water down far enough that you could start hauling the garbage out onto the lawn and sidewalks. Most of the homes here have basement apartments in them so that meant taking out chairs, couches, magazines, food storage, etc.

After all that was thrown away, then the bucket brigades would start. Mud was shoveled into buckets with scoop shovels and carried outside and dumped in the gutters. When you could get the pump back again, water was added to the mud and made liquid enough to be pumped out. This required a crew of about six persons to keep stirring and shoveling toward the pump. Alyn's brothers, Robert and Kendall, came from Ucon with a couple of liquid manure pumps. They brought crews with them and came to help everyday for several weeks. I told Alyn that Fourth Ward ought to build a monument to them because they really helped.

June 7 (Monday)

We all went to Eldon Hart's home, Millie's parents, and worked all day. It was more of the same routine.

June 8 (Tuesday)

I finally got up courage to go to the law office and start cleaning. The waterline on the exterior of the building was about two feet high. We are situated at the beginning of the hill. The glass doors and windows did not break so all we had in the building was what had seeped under the door. It was only a couple of inches deep.

Brent Eames, one of the partners whose house did not get flooded, was there shoveling things up. He was such a wild shoveler that I also had to clean all the walls. In one place there was even mud on the ceiling. Before the flood I had stacked the lawbooks on the library table. Brent had splattered those with mud, too. I called him all sorts of uncomplimentary names.

We removed all the mud that we could and then decided to let the carpet dry and see if it had shrunk. We had ordered a special jute-backed carpet for that area because we were afraid that the ditch might overrun and flood the lower level. We have since had it cleaned and it will be fine.

In most homes, we just pulled the carpet up and cut it and the pad into strips and dragged them to the junkyard.

On Wednesday the disaster center sent word to the radio station KIGO from St. Anthony that typists were needed. I decided to clean up and go do a little white collar volunteering. After an hour or so I felt so guilty that I turned in my resignation, put on my grubbies and caught up with Alyn and the pumping crew.

Random Thoughts about the Flood

Water At first we had no water. In a day or two we had water that we had to boil for ten minutes and then add Clorox to it. I became so absolutely weary of boiling water that I was reduced to tears. They did not turn the gas back on in our part of town for about ten days.

Daniel had been going to Ricks College to shower after pipe moving, but Alyn and I just sponged off in cold Clorox water. Each night we would wash our grubbies in Clorox water and wear the same ones again the next day. I gave myself a very short "flood" haircut. Daniel complained that our house smelled like the local swimming pool. However, we didn't get ill.

I still can't remember what clothes I had in the cleaners. I'm sure that I will think of them when fall comes and I start reviewing my winter wardrobe.

On Friday, I picked up an order from the Sears catalog store. When I got home, I only had the jacket of Daniel's leisure suit. I called the store the next morning to see if I had left the package containing the pants there. They found it and I said that I would be down to pick it up later. The flood got there before I did.

The floodwaters reached the parking lot of the Fourth Ward, but didn't get into the building.

Madison High School is built on two levels. All the records and what equipment they were able to carry, were moved up onto the upper level. The water did not come high enough to reach that level. About two weeks later when the building had been cleaned by our wonderful volunteer groups from Utah, etc. and the school people were just ready to move back into the lower level, a very freak accident occurred. A filled water truck



without a driver rolled down the hill and hit the back of the high school. It ran through the wall and into the library area. Besides all that damage, it activated the ceiling sprinkler system and the entire school was soaked again. Is Rexburg jinxed or not?

Marilyn After Bill and Marilyn had their basement cleaned out and the walls scrubbed with a brush and Clorox water, they decided that there might be mud behind the walls. They cut up about six inches from the floor to let the mud and water out. The house just kept stinking. So this week, one month after the flood, they pulled all the wallboards off and tore out the ceiling. Mud and water came pouring out of the ceiling in the basement.

Marilyn has expended a lot of unnecessary energy by trying to save the walls and ceiling in the basement. She would have been better off to pull them out right at first. They would have dried faster and the smell would have been gone sooner.

About the third Saturday after the flood, she was getting antsy about her lawn. Alyn and I took our mower down to her house and mowed her lawn. It improved her spirits considerably.

Volunteers Bus loads of people have come from Utah and western Idaho. They leave home at about 4 a.m. to get here around 9 a.m. They bring their own lunches and working tools. They really pitch in and help. We could not have cleaned up the town without them. Take Porter Park for example. About seventy of them stood shoulder to shoulder and raked the park. We had been so depressed about that but felt it would have to wait until we got the homes and businesses cleaned up.

A landscaper from Idaho Falls came up and repaired one of the flower beds in the island in the middle of East Main. He then planted it with petunias. Just little things like that really helped our morale. They

announced Friday, one week ago, that there would be 300 electricians in town. If your home needed electrical work, you were to hang a white flag on your door handle. If you had a door left. Students from Brigham Young University have been here this past week. They have donated labor, machinery, trucks, front end loaders, etc. One California firm brought in a front end loader and parked it near Porter Park with a for rent sign on it. It sat there for days and no one used it because the Idahoans and Utahns were donating their equipment. That tickled us pink.

The looters moved right in before the rest of us had time to wonder what to do next. I told Alyn that they ought to be shot and then charged with the crime. The damage done by the flood was bad enough, but then the looters had to steal that which was not damaged.

One man's trailer house had floated off its foundation but was not damaged. By the time he located a truck to pull it back to its place, it was gone. It was later located in a trailer park in Missoula, Montana. Truck loads of cattle were found on the way to Nevada. El Gene had about thirteen color TV's which were high enough up not to get damaged by the flood. A truck pulled up and told her that he was from a TV repair shop in Idaho Falls and that he made arrangements with her husband to take the sets to Idaho Falls for safekeeping. Of course, they didn't end up there.

The Idaho State Police have set up roadblocks and imposed a 10:30 p.m. curfew. They check cars leaving the area for items that may have been stolen. They check the cars coming into the area to make sure that they either have a pass or a Madison County license plate. If you reach the checkpoint after 10:30 p.m., they watch you pretty carefully until you get to your house. I have thought so many times this past month what it would be like to live under those conditions all the time.

Alyn Alyn worked his little heart out the first two and a half weeks after the flood. At that time, Senator Frank Church wanted to hire a man living in the Rexburg area to work in his Idaho Falls office as a flood disaster liaison person. Alyn did not want to take the job but he knew that his weed spraying job would not get going until late in the summer, if at all this year. He did not enjoy the job the first day or two but has now had some rewarding experiences and seems to enjoy it more. Hopefully, the job will last until he starts school at Ricks. He listens to sad stories by flood victims, tells them where to get assistance, and in most cases, he puts in calls to HUD, SBA, etc.

Daniel Daniel, too, has really worked hard during the flood. All of his friends' homes were damaged and he said that he felt so guilty that he just had to help. Of course, he had to keep moving pipe up on the bench so that the crops would not burn. All of Whitewater's musical equipment was in the practice room at our house, so none of that was lost.

Gloria Gloria had tended dogs, tended kids, kept Rich, Millie and Reed for about a week, typed one morning, bucketed mud for a week, helped serve meals at the Manwaring Center, organized young women to help at the Bishop's Storehouse, cooked, etc. She was surely glad when her boss said that it was time to open the law office again.

She loves her old house up on the hill. She is glad that she is a member of the church and is really proud of the way the people have responded during these trying times.

Right after the flood, Red Cross officials predicted that in about two weeks people would start committing suicide, shooting each other, etc. We all smiled and kept on working. None of that came to pass. President Kimball came and talked with us and gave us such good practical advice: pace

yourselves, work a normal day, take time to play and sing with your families, keep your little families together so the children will not suffer any undue trauma, etc.