

TETON ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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

TETON DAM DISASTER

Fred L. Scoresby

Interviewed by

Alyn B. Andrus

September 8, 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 Fred L. Scoresby, I, Alyn B. Andrews
(name, please print) (interviewer, print)
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Alyn B. Andrews
Interviewer's Signature

September 8, 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, Fred L. Scoresby, 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.

Fred L. Scoresby
Interviewee's Signature

Sept. 8, 1977
Date

ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: Fred L. Scoresby

INTERVIEWER: Alyn B. Andrus

DATE: September 8, 1977

TETON DAM DISASTER

A: Fred would you please spell your full name for me?

S: Fred L. Scoresby.

A: What is your birth date and where were you born?

S: January 10, 1931, Idaho Falls, Idaho.

A: Do you have a family?

S: Yes, I have a wife and five boys and one little girl.

A: How old is your oldest?

S: My oldest boy is twelve years old, and our baby is two months.

A: So your children were living with you when the flood came?

S: Yes.

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

S: 47 East 2nd North, Rexburg.

A: And what is your current address?

S: Route 4, Box 213 Rexburg.

A: So you moved to a different location here in Rexburg since the flood?

S: Yes.

A: What do you do for a living Fred?

S: I'm a social worker with the Department of Health and Welfare, as a probation officer for juveniles, kids under the age of eighteen.

A: How long have you lived in the Rexburg area?

S: For the last seven years.

A: Did you own your own home, or were you buying your own home before the flood came?

S: Yes.

A: You own a farm or a business in addition to the social work that you are engaged in?

S: No.

A: Would you please explain your feelings about the construction of the Teton Dam, that is, did you support it or did you oppose it?

S: I supported it. I thought it was a good thing, and felt like it was needed, especially in the Spring time when you saw all the prime land getting flooded. With the dry summer that we have had now, and the possibilities of a drought, it would be nice to have the storage water.

A: Now, Fred did you or any member of your family have a premonition of the Teton Disaster?

S: I don't think my wife or I had a premonition of the Disaster, but as I recall, both of us kind of had a feeling that something was going to happen. I think we both had this for a month or two before it happened.

A: An uneasy feeling?

S: Yes.

A: Where were you the day the dam broke?

S: We were at home. I had just finished hoeing my garden and I stood back and admired it, it was growing really good. My wife had been over at the church practicing the organ, and she had just gotten back when we heard about it.

A: Would you mind telling how you heard about it, and how you accepted the news?

S: I was at home. My neighbor next door Dennis Fikstad came running out and he was half way crying, he just kind of hollered and said that the dam had broken. I responded in disbelief. He said well the caterpillar had just fallen through a big hole, and it's busted. I ran into the house and turned the radio on and heard what was going on. Then at that point

our first reaction was to gather up the kids. Our oldest boy happened to be south of town with another family planting some trees, and so I think one of us ran up there to the neighbor's home and she was just leaving to take lunch out to them. We told her what had happened, so she went out to really the message to them. Shortly thereafter all our kids were back home. My wife got into the car with the kids, went up on the hill to my sister's home. I think our main concern at the time was just our kids, we really didn't think about our material possessions that we had. In fact, the only thing that we took out of the house with us was a baby bottle, and a two gallon water jug. I felt we might need some water before we got back to our home that night. So I filled it up. We talked to an officer and he said that the water would probably get about two feet in front of our house. I thought it might get in the basement but I never anticipated that we would get it on our main floor. I expected that when it got over we would just go back to our home that evening, we might be without water so I took some. As things turned out, we would have had plenty of time to have gotten some things out of our home, but that wasn't our main concern. The only thing that I did was I went into the basement and got Wanda's brother's and our son, Stephen's clothing and shoes, and took them upstairs, along with some bedding and the mattress. I took our storage wheat upstairs and set it on our kitchen floor and piled the clothes and bedding on another bed. As it turned out, it didn't do much good.

A: How high did the water get in your house, above the basement?

S: In the house it got about 3 1/2 feet deep. That evening I walked back over to our house with a nephew. I took some boots with me. We drove as far as Walker's Cafe and then walked from there. The water was still quite deep in town, but on our street it had completely run off, which

was amazing. There was a big lake in the back of our yard for two or three weeks because it was lower. There was quite a bit of damage done to our house. So it didn't do much good to try to save anything, like putting it on the main floor.

A: Did it damage your appliances, like your stove and your refrigerator, and your freezer?

S: Yes. In fact, the only way I could get into the house was through the fireplace. The fireplace chimney was completely laid out on our neighbor's lawn across his driveway and the furniture in the living room was all in a big pile in front of the fireplace opening where the hearth had stopped it. There was an item or two that got our of the opening. Our refrigerator was turned over on it's side and our freezer was down a back ahll, wedged between the two walls. It was bound in there so tight that we had a difficult time freeeing it. It was damaged and we just disposed of it. We took our refrigerator and other appliances to a dealer and were going to have them gone through, but they had so many problems with trying to fix them that we just disposed of them all.

A: Your furniture, likewise, was I guess, all damaged?

S: Yes. Our furnace was an oil furnace and it was really damaged. Our chimney in the middle of the house was completely seperated between the basement and the upstairs, it was just disposed of.

A: Was your house structurally damaged?

S: Yes, it had lifted off the foundation and probably would have floated completely away if it hadn't of been for the hot water pipe system. The pipes in the basement kind of anchored the house through the floor joists and the basement partitions, so it gave as much as it could. But it actually lifted off the foundation and then just set back down, just a little ski-wampus, but it sustained enough structural damage that they

condemned it. We did a lot of work trying to clean it up before it was condemned. But it ended up being torn down.

A: Had you seen the Teton Dam before it broke?

S: Yes. I had driven over there several times on my way to Driggs. In fact, an employee of the Bureau of Reclamation had a son on probation and I stopped over there to see him one day and he gave me a little tour. We right out onto the dam and saw the key trench where they were still building it. The dam was about half way finished when I was out on it. I was quite interested in the construction of it, and watched its progress frequently.

A: Did you ever think that there may come a time when the dam might leak or break?

S: No, I really didn't think about it. It looked pretty big and awesome to me. My only feeling since has been that they used too much dry farm dirt and not enough rock and gravel in the construction of it. You can test that by all the dry farm dirt that is in my backyard.

A: You had never wondered then, if, when the dam would break, there would be a lot of water come through the streets of Rexburg?

S: You mean when I heard that it had broken?

A: Yes, well I mean you weren't prepared for what you got?

S: No, I don't believe so. In fact, I never expected that it would get on my main floor. Someone had made the comment that it would probably be like the flood of '62 and just reach our back yard, but it was a little different.

A: When you saw what the flood had done to your house, your appliances, your furniture, what were your first thoughts?

S: Well, I guess my first thoughts were when I was sitting on the hill looking through the binoculars and seeing how high the water was, like

over in Sugar City, and then seeing houses float like boats, seeing a herd of cattle swept away. It was just kind of an awesome sight seeing those houses, several miles away, floating, and then close to town some were floating down the river channel just like houseboats. Then the disbelief of going downtown and seeing the damage like Walker's Cafe, it was really amazing to see the cattle and cows and pigs on doorsteps just standing there like they are in shock, and then seeing my house. It was hard to believe what had happened, and when I went into my house there was six or eight inches of mud, and the basement was still clear full of water. It was kind of a shocking feeling.

A: Now you described what the flood looked like as you looked at it through binoculars. Did you see any animals trying to escape the flood?

S: Yes. In fact, on a road west of Sugar City, with binoculars you could see the water coming and the dust that it kicked up ahead of it. You could see cattle and horses running ahead of it. Then, also, the Willis Walker farms, I saw all of their milk cows get carried away, and their herd of stock cows too. A lot of them just floated away.

A: Did you note any unusual animal behavior as the flood approached?

S: Well, through binoculars I saw the animals trying to escape it.

A: Just running?

S: Yes.

A: Where did you stay that first night and the first few days after the flood while you were trying to clean up your house?

S: The first night when the flood hit we stayed with my sister Fern Benson, and her husband Lynn in Rexburg up on the hill. That first night they had five families in their home, we stayed there for one night and the next day we went down to Iona and stayed with my wife's folks for about a month. I came back up here everyday from Iona.

- A: After about a month did you move back into your house temporarily? Or did you find a place to live?
- S: We stayed in a HUD trailer. We moved into a HUD trailer that was parked on our property and lived there until we built our home.
- A: Would you go ahead now, and tell about some of the problems that you had to face cleaning up your property. Just go into as much detail as you would like to go into.
- S: Well, early Sunday morning, I guess everyone including myself felt a lot of the weight from having the flood come and damage everything that you had worked for and saved for. But I felt a great relief the next morning when quite early here drove up two pickups and my four brothers. When one of my brothers heard about the flood, he stopped his work and figured we would need a water pump to pump out the basement. So he immediately went to Idaho Falls and got a pump on Saturday and rented it. My brothers and sister, and my wife and in-laws, well, they were all there to greet us and start working. We really pitched in on Monday and started cleaning up.
- A: Did you receive any help cleaning up from people outside of your own family?
- S: We did a little, but our families were good enough to help us that we really didn't need the help like a lot of the other people did. My wife's cousin happened to come up and they knew that we were in the flood. He brought five or six people with him and they spent a day helping clean up the basement and the mud out of it. Then we had a few other people, that came from Utah that helped. But most of the work was done by ourselves and our family.
- A: Now Fred, during cleanup operations here in Rexburg, what were your impressions the way in which people cleaned up their homes and their

businesses. You mentioned the fact that people came in here from Utah and other places to help. You must have had some particular feelings about what was going on and the help that was given, would you mind telling about those feelings?

A: Well, I think I had feelings of disbelief that so many people came and tried to help out. When you go to the stake center and see twenty or twenty-five buses completely loaded with men and women to come and help, boy, it gave you a pretty good feeling inside. To come and donate their time, it was really something. There was one family that were driving through here on vacation from California and they spent a couple of days helping my neighbors next door. Our neighbors were an older couple and this family helped clean up their yard, the husband, wife and kids. It gave you a good feeling inside for what people did. Also, I think in our little community, the flood grew the people a lot closer together. People worked together and spent time talking to each other, instead of just saying hello.

A: You mentioned that you dealt with HUD, and as a matter of fact HUD brought a trailer house in and set it up for you to live in. Now would you mind talking about HUD for a few minutes. How did you find HUD to deal with?

S: Everything was kind of hard there the first few weeks when they were trying to get organized. Going through the lines it was kind of like going through the old college registration where it took so long. But the people were here to help and I admire what they have done for us. I think they dealt pretty fairly with us.

A: How long did you live in that trailer?

S: Almost a year. We moved out just before a year was up. We really can't complain about the trailer, it was hard living in it with six kids but it was a good enough trailer that they turned around and sold it, so it stayed in the area.

A: Was your home that was flooded torn down?

S: Yes. A bulldozer just bulldozed that thing in and hauled it away.

A: Did you receive any help from the other government agencies right after the flood?

S: Yes, we received a little allowance from Red Cross. We spent the money for shoes. We also got some food stamps and bought groceries with them. I think a lot of people in the flood took advantage of the agencies here to help.

A: Did you find the Red Cross to be very helpful then?

S: Yes, they were really helpful and they provided a lot of things like cleaning supplies and stuff that came in real handy for people to use in the clean up.

A: How do you feel about the role that Ricks College played during the days of the disaster and those which followed?

S: It is practically undescrivable what they did. To open their doors the way that they did and let people move into the dorms, plus provide meals was just really amazing the way they performed. It was really well organized. In fact, their doors were open that evening for people to have a place to stay, and they were just really great.

A: Did you deal with the government agencies other than HUD, such as the Small Business Administration during the days following the flood?

S: We did take out a loan with the Small Business Administration when we were first getting started on our plans for building a home. And then when we put in our settlement it was paid back at that time.

A: How soon after the flood did you submit your claim to the Bureau, approximately?

S: Oh, maybe four months.

A: Did you find the Bureau easy to deal with?

S: The people that came and inspected our place weren't local people they had come from the south and the ones that we dealt with were real cooperative.

A: Have you received your claim money?

S: Yes we have.

A: Are you satisfied with the settlement?

S: Oh I would have to say that we were. I kind of anticipated with the flood that land and things would probably be de-valued, but just the opposite happened. Flooded land and flooded homes actually increased in value. We got more for our home than if we would have sold it on the open market because they went by a square footage basis. So I feel good that way, but as far as the actual replacement cost they were a little low. Building materials skyrocketed after the flood and they were probably a little low in their estimate that way, because things really inflated. We feel good about our settlement.

A: Do you feel that this local inflation has caused a hardship on you in building your new home?

S: No, I really don't. I felt like we got a pretty good bid on our home. The builders were looking for work and gave us a good competitive bid.

A: Now, you are building up on a hill here in Rexburg aren't you?

S: Right. In fact, we have moved into our new home.

A: Is there any reason why you wanted to get on the hill particularly?

S: No, in fact, we would have probably rebuilt back where we were, but the main reason that we didn't is because we had a narrow lot. It was just fifty feet wide. We didn't want to build a long narrow home. If we were going to have to rebuild, plus we wanted a garage, it would have been hard to add a garage on our narrow lot. We decided to relocate, and ended up building up there on the hill. It's windy, but a beautiful view.

A: You won't be bothered by any subsequent flooding will you?

S: Unless it's a flash flood with mud coming off the hill.

A: Fred, we are running out of tape on this side. I'm going to turn the machine off and turn the tape over and then we will continue the interview. Now, would you tell me, did you suffer any form of vandalism during cleanup operations?

S: No, we didn't suffer any at all.

A: Do you know of anybody that did? I'm not asking you to reveal any names or tell any stories, but do you know of any of your neighbors or friends that did?

S: Yes. In fact, my neighbor right down on the corner, he had a freezer and a refrigerator sitting out on his lawn, and somebody came along early in the morning and picked them up and took them. I think there was a lot of pilfering going on in the county, being in the occupation that I am in, I'm aware that there were some things that went on. I think there was a lot of stuff packed out of the area before the state police and local authorities started checking vehicles. They did a real good job policing the area. The first two or three days after the flood there was a lot of stuff taken out of the area before they were able to put up their roadblocks and check everybody.

A: Do you feel that they did a good job, an effective job?

S: Overall, I think they did a good job.

A: How would you describe the job that our county and state authorities did along with the law enforcement officers during the flood and during cleanup operations?

S: The county commissioners and that type of thing?

A: Yes.

S: Well, I'm well aware of the chairman of the county commission and what

he did. He devoted several months just kind of left his farm and family and spent a lot of time just working with the county in cleanup operations. There's a lot of people that contributed a lot of time for the interest of the general public.

A: You mentioned that you lived in Iona for about a month after the flood. So you drove from Iona to Rexburg and back each day. Now how far is Iona from Rexburg?

S: Oh, about twenty-five miles.

A: You had to pass through one of these roadblocks then, twice a day didn't you?

S: Right.

A: Did they give you much hassle?

S: No. In fact, the things that we salvaged, we took to Iona and put in my in laws' garage. They had just built a new garage and we stored everything there. We got all of our stuff out before the roadblocks were ever set up. That's why I think there was probably a lot of things taken out of the area. We didn't have a problem because I had Madison County plates on and they would usually just let you go through. I didn't have to have a pass or anything. I had a couple of brothers that came up quite a bit, and they eventually had to get a pass to get through. But it was no problem. Some of them got to recognize you after a few days and would just wave you on through.

A: Fred, about how long after the flood were you able to go back to work?

S: Well, I work for the state and they gave the people in the flood a month off. It was a work vacation for a month, and I just worked in the cleanup operation. After our house was finished, I spend quite a bit of time helping through the ward and taking volunteers around to homes and assign work for them, that kind of thing.

A: So when you went back to work had your office been flooded out?

S: Yes, we lost our office in the flood operation. We ended setting up temporary quarters on Ricks College in a trailer house.

A: Oh I remember, that was the trailer house that sat up here south of the Manwaring Center.

S: Right. There were two trailer houses there and that's where our office was for several months. In fact, it was all winter.

A: So are you in a new office now?

S: Yes. Before the flood we were in two different locations. But after the flood, our two offices were merged together into one office and we are not together in a new office building.

A: How did the flood affect your children? Have you noticed any particular unusual behavior patterns as a result of the flood?

S: They enjoyed playing in the dirt and making a Teton Dam and watching it flood. I think there was more of behavior change with me and my wife than our kids. I developed quite a degree of insecurity. What I mean by that is with my kids I really felt a strong need to know where they were all the time, almost like it was overprotected feeling. I would bring my kids up into the flood area with me sometimes. I just had a strong need for a long time to know where they were every minute. I think it was just the feelings of all that destruction and everything. It just kind of developed those feelings. We haven't noticed too much of a problem with our kids. They have come through it really good. Kids can adjust to problems better than adults I think.

A: Did you have any pets?

S: No we didn't have any, but we developed a pet after the flood. I had this wheat storage that got wet and expanded and was scattered all over.

And when we started cleaning up our home we dropped it in a pile on the front yard. There were two or three pigs around there and once they got over to the wheat they just wouldn't leave. And we had a hard time getting rid of them.

A: You have talked just a little bit how the Teton Disaster changed you and your wife. How do you feel it has changed the community?

S: Well, it's kind of given the community a fact lifting: got washed out and now it's being rebuilt. In fact someone driving through the area today would probably never know there was a flood, it's been rebuilt so well. And I think it's kind of changed the community. It has changed neighborhoods, like in my neighborhood it will never be the same, some people have moved out and there's been some commercial areas come in where homes were. I guess there's been some changes for the good, some for the bad.

A: It's been just a little over a year since the flood came, do you feel that we have built rapidly?

S: I think that we really have. In fact the whole area has rebuilt rapidly. The progress in commercial development and in homes being built has come about quite rapidly.

A: Do you feel that in rebuilding, there have been workers and contractors who have made a lot of money for little work that they put out?

S: Oh, I think a lot of people probably become kind of wealthy over it. Sub-contractors, a lot of fly-by-night people. There's a lot of people that came into the area and they must follow disasters. There were a lot of people from other areas that came in and some did a good job and some left people hanging, holding the bag.

A: Had anything like this happened to you?

S: No. I know one lady just in our immediate area that had paid some contractors in advance and they did a real poor job and then they flew the coop. She was out several thousand dollars. I'm not aware of a lot of that, but there is some of that, that has occurred. I guess we're pretty fortunate.

A: Do you have any feelings about how the flood may have affected older people?

S: Well, I think in our ward there have been some people that have passed away that might have lived longer if the flood hadn't of happened. There were several older people who had health problems and with the flood problems they experienced, it just seemed to have quickened their deaths. I'm sure some of them died earlier than they would have otherwise.

A: Just two or three more questions, Fred, before we end the interview. Do you feel that the flood was divine punishment or a man-made disaster?

S: I think it was a man-made disaster. But I kind of feel like the way things happened that there might have been a divine hand in when it occurred. It happened, for instance, in the day time. And it could have been at night when people were asleep. Or it could have happened in the middle of the winter, and that would have been a disaster, a lot worse than what we had. I think there might have been a divine hand in when it ahppened. I think the Lord probably knew that it was going to happen, but he didn't stop it either. There are some lessons to be learned from it. One great lesson that I learned is that personal possessions really don't mean that much. We can't take them with us. They are here for us to use and enjoy while we are living here, but I think what's really important is your family and friends and just the associations that you make here are the important things.

A: Do you feel that the Teton Dam should be rebuilt?

S: Well, I think some form of a dam should be rebuilt. And I kind of feel like with the investment that's been made there, there's a big investment sitting there right now in the same location. I'm not an engineer so I don't know about the feasibility of putting it in the exact spot. But some type of a flood control measure is needed. The farmers need water storage for dry years. If this drought continues, for another winter, well, looking back it would sure be nice to have that lake full of water for next year. There's a need for it but I don't know in what form.

A: Is there anything else you would like to add to the interview?

S: I will just say that it is an experience that I would not want to have to go through again. I think that we are probably better for the experiences we have had. Most people that went through the flood are. Financially it hasn't hurt us too much. For instance, we have a newer home. In some respects we are better off and in other ways we aren't. I had a low interest loan and my taxes weren't really high. Now we are in a new home and it is costing us a lot more interest that we had before, and I'm sure that our taxes will be a lot higher. Our power bills are higher, our expenses will be a little greater than they were before the flood because of our new home.

A: You are a social worker, in your work since the flood have you noticed any problems that you would trace back to the flood, any emotional problems that perhaps originated as a result of the flood?

S: Some kids might have had underlying problems before the flood but their parents were in control of the situation. We have had some cases where you can tract things back to the flood. It caused enough disruption in some homes that it affected the kid's behavior. Some committed acts of

delinquency that brought them to court. There's been a case or two where kids have been removed from their homes as a result of the problems that have occurred. One case, in particular, was a family that was flooded out and the family spent several weeks in Ricks College dorms and their one teenage son ended up meeting a group of kids from Rexburg that he hadn't known before. As a result of these relationships that he developed after the flood, he got involved and ended up committing some acts of delinquency. He was removed from his home and he is still out of his home. We have had a few cases that seem to be directly related to the problems associated with the flood. That is when some kids started experiencing acting out behavior. Some parents were so busy coping with their own problems that they forgot about their kids' problems.

A: I want to thank you for the time that you have given and we will conclude the interview now.