

NARRATIVE DESCRIBING WILLIAM BALDERSTON'S EXPERIENCES

IN JACKSON'S HOLE, WYOMING 1913-14-15

I was born in Boise, Idaho, December 13, 1896 and lived there with my three sisters until my father's death in May of 1914.

My father was born and raised on his father's farm near Colora, Maryland, and after graduating from Westtown he followed the advice of Horace Greeley "Go West Young Man" and settled in Aspen, Colorado, where he became editor of the Aspen Times. He met my mother, Stella Sain, in Aspen where she was teaching school, and they were married and moved to Boise, Idaho, where father was appointed editor of the Idaho Daily Statesman.

I have many fond recollections of my childhood days in Boise. I believe Boise had a population of about 20,000 in those days - the gold rush days were over and Boise was emerging as the capital city and was developing into an agricultural center.

We all received our primary education in the Boise schools and attended the Boise High School. I was a member of the class of 1913 that had the famous football team that beat the Wendell-Phillips High School team from Chicago.

During my high school years I spent most of my summers working with surveying crews in the southern part of the state. I recall I spent one summer on an irrigation project just out of Weiser, Idaho under the direction of Leigh Savidge, who was chief engineer. Leigh was later to become a leading business man in Seattle and the largest Dodge dealer in the northwest. I still keep in touch with Leigh and have seen him numerous times in recent years.

Another summer, between my junior and senior years, I got a job as "Stake Artist" with the Oregon Short Line Railroad. We started the summer of 1912 locating the railroad between Ashton and Victor, Idaho. This job was finished in mid-summer and then we packed up in dead X wagons and headed over Teton Pass for my first trip into Jackson's Hole!

The Oregon Short Line Railroad had a right of way from Green River, Wyoming to the south entrance of Yellowstone Park by way of the Hoback River Canyon. In order to hold this right of way it had to be resurveyed every five years and we got the job of making this resurvey starting at the confluence of the Hoback and Snake Rivers and working our way up the Hoback River to the "rim".

The party consisted largely of men from Salt Lake - some of the names I remember were:

Mr. Wingate, chief of party
Jack Kimball
Al Peabody
Hal Sharp
Ed Flood, teamster
Packard, transitman

There was a very precarious wagon road up the canyon which we used from time to time as we moved camp. I believe the remains of this old road are still visible in parts of the canyon.

Among the local people I remember most vividly was a man called Pap Carter who had an elk ranch along the river between Hoback and Wilson. I remember during the summer he married a young woman whom he had corresponded with in Chicago. They called her Pap Carter's Mail Order Bride and this caused a great deal of comment in camp! He used to come into camp and furnish the cook with some very good elk meat otherwise, our fare was pretty poor and there was a great deal of grumbling around camp about Fritz, the German cook. We supplemented our diet of pork and beans by catching some cutthroat trout in the Hoback. I remember going out one Sunday and catching enough trout to feed twenty hungry men in about an hour and a half!

The following year I received the appointment to West Point from Senator William E. Borah. However, shortly after I took the examinations and was preparing to leave for West Point as a "plebe" my father died and I had to change my plans.

Our family had a close friend, who lived near us in Boise, by the name of A. J. Wiley, who was a well known consulting civil engineer. He had done a great deal of work for the U. S. Reclamation Service and it was through his good offices that I secured a job as rodman on a surveying crew at the Jackson Lake Enlargement Project.

In May 1914 a party, which included Frank Banks, chief engineer of the project, left Boise by train for Victor, Idaho where we took dead X wagons over Teton Pass and up the Wilson Road to the Dam. The trip over Teton Pass was pretty strenuous and it was necessary to change to runners to get over the top as the snow was several feet deep. We spent the whole day getting over the Pass and I believe we stayed at one of the ranches in Wilson before starting on the final leg of our journey the next morning.

I will never forget the first time we got a full view of the magnificent Teton Range as we worked our way up the valley. It made such an impression on me that when I got back to the University of Wisconsin two years later, I wrote a theme in my English Class describing the trip and my professor was so impressed with my description of the Teton Mountains that he put me in the advanced English Class!

The Reclamation Camp was located on the Snake River just below the Dam adjoining the property of Ben Sheffield, who ran a big game hunting camp and acted as Moran Postmaster. The Engineering Office and bunkhouse was located in a long wooden building between the store and hospital, along with the Drafting Room, Paymaster and General Offices. My roommate was Merion Gorman, who was stenographer-clerk and was one of the fastest persons on the typewriter I had ever seen. I remember it was still pretty cold when we first got up there and we used to sleep with heavy woolen socks on and we had a bearskin we used to pull over the bed to keep warm!

I cannot recall the exact number of men who were employed on the Dam at that time. However, with the logging crew at Moran Bay, the saw mill operators, the carpenters, mechanics, skimmers, the steel men, laborers, etc., I would judge there were pretty close to 350 men in camp.

There was a great deal of activity going on when we arrived. A coffer dam was being constructed above the original concrete dam to hold the water back so that the foundations of the new parts of the dam could be adequately anchored to the bedrock. Several tremendous boilers, which had been hauled in by horse teams, had been installed to furnish steam for the pumps that were pumping the water out of the area in back of the coffer dam.

It is very difficult for me to relate the incidents that occurred at the Jackson Lake Enlargement Project chronologically because after fifty years or more, my impressions all run together! These memories, however, are still very vivid in

my mind and I look back upon those years of my life with very fond memories. In fact, after I left the Dam in the fall of 1915 and took a sheep train back to Madison, Wisconsin to attend the University of Wisconsin Civil Engineering College, I met my future wife, Susan B. Ramsay, whose Mother has always said that I wooed and won her by my tales of Jackson's Hole!

The Jackson Lake Enlargement Dam was the third dam of a series that had been built at the outlet of the lake to dam the water for irrigation purposes in southern Idaho. When we arrived in May of 1914 work on the third dam - the Enlargement Project - was well under way. A large coffer dam had been constructed on the upstream side of the dam to keep the rising waters of Jackson Lake away from the base of the dam so that the new dam and its foundations could be securely anchored to the bed-rock. During the construction of the enlarged dam it was necessary to "shoot out" the west wing wall of the old dam. In order to do this a whole crew of "powder Monkeys" had to drill the entire face of the wing wall at intervals of 18" with hand drills and load each hole with dynamite. When it came time to set off the charge a group of us, including Frank Banks, got under the sluice tunnel under the old dam. The chief powder man came into the tunnel, pushed the handle and set off a terrific charge, which nearly deafened everyone in the tunnel. After the "shot" nothing was left of the wing wall but the reinforcing steel.

When one considers the great advances that have been made in construction machinery, earth moving equipment, and power tools of all kind, it is amazing to realize that the Jackson Lake Dams were constructed by manpower and horsepower. I do not believe that the average person looking at the Dam to-day realizes what a feat of logistics and engineering it was to build a dam in this remote area 70 miles from the nearest railroad before the days of trucks and automatic equipment, and that everything used in the dam except the lumber had to be hauled from Ashton, Idaho over a dirt road by horse teams!

The new dam called for a water level some 14' higher than the old dam, which, of course necessitated raising the height of the concrete dam as well as the dike which stretched off about a mile across the willow flat. Quite a bit of the earth for the enlarged dike was placed by horse teams and slips and a great deal of it was pumped from the bottom of the lake by a dredge which floated out in the water and pumped gravel from the bottom of the lake into the dikes.

When the dredge first started to operate it ran into trouble because of the fact that the roots of the swamp willows prevented the intake pipe from getting down into the gravel. There was great consternation among the local engineers when this happened and the doubting Thomases had their day; however, Frank Weymouth, Chief Engineer of the Reclamation Service and Consulting Engineer A. J. Wiley were called in. They made a special trip to the dam to look over the problem and as a result they recommended the installation of a large rotating cutting bar down at the snout of the intake to cut the willow roots away and allow the intake to sink into the gravel. This took sometime to design and the equipment had to be hauled in by freight wagon from Ashton. But when it was installed it worked perfectly and the dike again began to rise very rapidly.

Another very interesting phase of the construction work was the logging camp and the saw mill operation. Most of the timber was cut up around Moran Bay where it was assembled into large log booms and hauled down the lake to the saw mill by the famous "Titanic" which was operated by Captain Hugh MacDermott. During the course of our engineering work we made numerous trips up the lake on the Titanic and it was always a great pleasure to hear Captain "Mac" talk about his early days in the valley.

The Reclamation Service maintained a hospital which was located just opposite the main office. When we first arrived the hospital was in charge of a Doctor Wise. Doctor Wise had been in the Government Service for some time and was generally looked upon as a "character", and it was the fervent wish of everybody who knew him that they would not become ill while he was in charge. He was certainly not a very sociable person and, although, he was supposed to eat with the engineers, he usually ate his meals alone in the hospital. Finally one day Charlie Fessler, who was camp cook, at the time, reported to the superintendent that the doctor had not eaten anything for several days and was extremely irritable; so, Frank Crowe went over to investigate and found the doctor pacing up and down the hospital in a terrible state of mind. He kept making constant calls over the Government telephone to Ashton, Idaho where the Government Warehouse was run by Mr. Swanson, to find out if an express package had arrived for him. Finally in the middle of the night he received a phone call from Ashton. He went to the stables, got out his saddle horse and headed out for the railroad, a distance of 70 miles. Mr. Swanson reported that he got there the next night, his horse nearly dead, picked up his express package and then took the train and stage back to the Dam, via Victor, Idaho, where arrived several days later in good spirits. This performance, apparently, made Frank Crowe pretty suspicious of the doctor and while he was gone, he had the hospital books examined and found that the doctor had requisitioned enough drugs during the previous year to kill an army. Further investigation disclosed that the Reclamation Service Headquarters was questioning the amount of narcotics that were being requisitioned and had held up this last shipment. An examination of the hospital later disclosed dozens of little envelopes with cocaine in them hidden all over the hospital. The doctor had apparently forgotten where he had stored his reserve supply!

Dr. Young was appointed to replace Dr. Wise and he proved to be a very fine and popular member of the "crew". He was a great companion and went on many weekend expeditions with us and we were all happy to have him in charge of the hospital. Dr. Young has long since retired and is living in Washington, D. C. He has made a number of trips back to see Jackson Lake Dam in recent years and I have corresponded with him on several occasions.

The Reclamation Service was anxious to have progress pictures taken of the Dam for record purposes and shipped an 8 x 10 Century View Camera with a supply of glass plates asking to have regular pictures taken and forwarded to Washington. The question arose as to who would take the pictures and develop them. Frank Banks had seen me around camp with a 3X folding Eastman Camera and inquired whether or not I could run the view camera and develop and print the pictures. Fortunately, I had done some of this work at home and told him that I would try and he forthwith appointed me official "progress photographer for the Jackson Lake Enlargement Project". I think I designed and with the help of a carpenter, built the first dark room in Jackson's Hole and started taking progress pictures for the Government.

One of the most enjoyable weekend trips we made was the weekend of July 4th and 5th, 1915, when we climbed up to Frying Pan Glacier on Mount Moran. A group composed of Eddie Markham, store clerk - Fred Bagley, engineer - W. B., engineering crew - Marion Gorman, W.B.'s roommate, clerk and stenographer - Snow Engineering Crew - Dr. Young - headed up the lake on the "Titanic" for Moran Bay. That night we put up in a trapper's hut and started up for the glacier early in the morning. We got to the glacier about 11:00 o'clock when we had lunch, and then explored the ice cavern. Some of the boys wanted to climb to the top but Doc Young vetoed this idea, and very wisely, because none of us were experienced mountain climbers.

Weekends we were allowed to take the saddle horses from the Government stables and go off on fishing and exploration trips around the valley. There were very few established trails in those days, so we had to bushwack through the timber to get to

the best fishing areas which included Jenney String and Leigh Lake. Probably the best fishing we had was in Jackson Lake when we trolled about 100' offshore in late September for mackinaw up in Mackinaw Bay (this is now Colter Bay, I believe).

Ben Sheffield, whose ranch adjoined the Government property just below the dam at the old location of Moran, acted as postmaster and also ran a very popular big game hunting camp, which was very successful. A great many Easterners came up to hunt and fish and I remember the first fall we were in Colonel A. E. Randall came out from Washington, D. C. He loved to fish and did pretty well in his elk hunting but, so the story goes, when they took him out on a bear hunt he insisted on the bear being caught in a steel trap before he would take a shot at it!

Early in July each summer the Moore's Dudes came through on their way to Yellowstone Park. These boys on this dude string were about my age and we would always get up a baseball game between the Moore's Dudes and my camp buddies, and if I remember correctly, they always beat us! Two of the men in the dude string I met later when I attended the University of Wisconsin.

Frank Banks and Frank Crowe were both graduates of the College of Civil Engineering at the University of Maine and were great canoeists. Occasionally they would let us take their canoes and go up the lake on different expeditions. One evening my roommate and I were canoeing along the west shore of Jackson Lake looking for game when we heard someone chopping back in the woods. In those days it was pretty unusual to find anyone in those woods and we stopped, beached the canoe and walked in to see what was going on. Here was a man whom we recognized as one of the workmen from the Dam making a dugout canoe from the log of a big lodge pole pine that he had felled. He wasn't very happy to see us so we went on our way and didn't think much about the incident at that time. About a week later Frank Crowe got a call from the Soldier's Station at the south entrance to the Park that a holdup had been committed and that a desperado had taken money and jewels from the tourists on several stage coaches in the Park. He also advised that he had allowed some of the tourists to take his picture and that they would send a copy down as soon as possible for identification. Lo and behold, when the printer arrived, here was the man that we had seen making the dugout canoe along the west side of the lake! A canoe was later found drifting around the head end of Jackson Lake and the theory was that he had used the canoe, slipped by the soldiers at the south entrance by paddling down the Snake River. I believe his name was Trafton (?) and he was later apprehended over in Idaho.

In the fall of 1914 I returned to Boise for a short visit to see my Mother and sisters and to lay in a stock of photographic supplies for my newly operating darkroom. My lifelong friend and bosom companion, Warren Bruce, decided to come back to the Dam with me. He had had two years of mechanical engineering at the University of Wisconsin and decided to work for a year before going back to finish his college education.

We took the train to Ashton, Idaho where we spent the night sleeping on the floor of the Government Warehouse building and started off the next morning afoot on the Government freight road headed for Jackson Lake Dam. Had a big piece of cheese and some crackers in our knapsack to last us the whole trip! As we left Ashton it was an Indian summer day in September with a haze hanging over the valley, the dust on the freight road was ankle deep and the first night we spent in a deserted log cabin that the freighters used. When we awoke in the morning there was four inches of snow on the ground and it was still snowing! By noontime we were in snow up to our knees and the going was pretty rugged. By nighttime we found a camp with some freighters, got some warm food and a wagon box for a bed. The next day we had to ford the Snake River it was about waist deep and our clothes were literally frozen stiff after we got out

of the water. We got into camp late in the afternoon of the third day - I think we walked about sixty miles in all - and it was mighty good to bite into some of Charlie Fessler's good food and to have a warm bed!

As I look back over the years here's some of the people I remember most vividly:

- Frank T. Crowe, Superintendent - Frank Crowe was a very able leader, a hard driver and very popular with the men. He had an outstanding career and became famous as one of the leading dam builders in the country.
- Frank Banks, Chief Engineer - Believe Frank Banks spent the rest of his professional life with the U. S. Reclamation Service and retired to live in Washington after a brilliant career. Both Frank Banks and Frank Crowe were graduates of the University of Maine and they both married girls from Boise, Idaho, who were friends of our family. Both of these young ladies, Dode Polk and Lenney Kortz, were very kind to me when I first arrived in camp just out of high school!
- Joe Markham, Time Keeper - Joe Markham was a handsome Irishman - probably the most popular man in the camp. Joe married Johanna Waldin, the first registered nurse in Jackson's Hole, and while I was at the Dam he was homesteading the Markham Ranch, which is now the game refuge below the Dam.
- Eddie Markham, Joe's younger brother from New Britain, Connecticut. Eddie was a lot of fun and went with us on a great many of our weekend expeditions. He was small in stature but he was very fast on his feet and a good boxer. One evening I recall, I boxed him in the bunk house and came to fifteen minutes later on my bed!
- Bob Sass, Assistant Superintendent
S. R. Wilson (nickname John Bunny) Bookkeeper
- Nick Carter, Transitman
- Dick Ward, Transitman
- Roy Knielands, Assistant Timekeeper
- Mr. and Mrs. Weiss
- Dr. Young - After the drug episode with Dr. Wise, Dr. Young was brought out from Washington to replace him. In strong contrast to Dr. Wise, Dr. Young was extremely personable, a fine doctor and very popular with the men in camp. He joined in lots of our expeditions and made a real contribution to life in the construction camp.
- Charlie Fessler - Charlie was the chief cook and a very important man for all of us. There was a special mess for the engineers and the office people and we always had excellent food. We were served lots of game which was very plentiful.

Fred Powell, Draftsman

Dutch John, Stable Boss

Red McCabe, Foreman

F. E. Mennaugh, Draftsman

Hugh MacDermott, Captain of the "Titanic"

Ben Sheffield, Postmaster and Ranch Owner

Herb Whiteman, Foreman of Ben Sheffield's Ranch

Harold Hammond, Stable Boss and later owner of White Grass Ranch

Beaver Tooth Neal, Trapper and Beaver Poacher

In addition to these members of camp there were quite a number of visitors that used to drop in. Usually they would be invited to join us in the engineering mess. It was a great experience for a youngster of my age 17 years to hear these men tell about their experiences in the wilderness. I particularly remember Rosen cranz, who was a forest ranger and who is still living in Jackson, and also Mr. Felix Buckenroth used to drop in. He later founded the Jackson State Bank.

Beaver Tooth Neal was a frequent visitor in the camp and was of great interest to everyone because he was such a character and had a reputation as a beaver poacher. The game wardens used to catch up with him quite often and he had to resort to special tactics to get his illegal skins out of the valley. The storey was told that at one point two officials of the Dam were headed out to Ashton over the Reclamation Road. Beaver Tooth asked them if they would take out his bedroll as he was going out on horse back and did not have room for it. They willingly took the bedroll out and left it at the Government Warehouse in Ashton, whereupon Beaver Tooth came in a few days later and picked up the "bedroll", which was pretty well filled with beaver skins!

There was another "tall tale" that went around the camp when I was there. When they were pouring the big concrete piers at each end of the Dam it was necessary to send two men down into the forms each morning to puddle the concrete as it came down through the chute from the cement mill. One morning, so the story goes, two Hungarian workmen went down into the east pier in the morning and only one came out when the noon whistle blew. Apparently the other one had been trapped in the concrete and is still buried in the pier.

Eddie Markham was in charge of the store and I remember we all used to go over and help him inspect potatoes when the Idaho potato farmers would bring in a dead X wagon full of potatoes to put in the cellar. The weather was quite cold and the potato farmers would make the trip all the way through from Ashton without stopping over night so that the potatoes would not freeze. Somehow they figured that if they kept the potatoes in motion they would come through o.k. but we had to inspect them all and we did find some frozen potatoes at times!

During the period I was on the Dam from May 1914 to September 1915, Joe Markman was homesteading his ranch where the present game refuge is located. Every one liked Joe and he was popular with the whole crew. He was particularly kind to me on a number of occasions. I recall one interesting experience I had with him. During the summer of 1915 a family by the name of Cox from Terre Haute, Indiana, spent a number of weeks at the Sheffield Camp. There were two very good looking Cox daughters and at one point my roommate, Marion Gorman and I organized a dance at the schoolhouse below the Dam because the young ladies wanted to go to a western dance. I was trying

to raise enough money among the office personnel to buy materials for a punch to serve at the dance. Joe told me if I would kick the top of the door jamb separating the office from the drafting room he would furnish the lemonade for the dance. The whole office gathered around to watch me attempt the feat and after nearly breaking my back I finally kicked the door jamb and Joe came through with the lemonade!

When September 1915 rolled around I had saved up about \$900.00 to start me on my college education. I said good bye to all my "pals" in the bunk house and I started off on foot for Victor, Idaho, where I caught the train. My roommate, Marion Gorman, walked out with me about four miles where we shook hands and promised to keep in touch with each other.

As I walked down the valley towards Wilson that morning in the crisp autumn air, I promised myself that someday I would return to this beautiful valley. Little did I realize that it would be many years before I saw those majestic mountains again!

It was not until 1948, thirty three years later, that I was able to return to Jackson's Hole with my wife and our two sons. There had been a great many changes but, thanks to the foresight and generosity of the Rockefeller family, the natural beauty of the valley had been preserved for all Americans to enjoy.

On this particular trip we came down from the south entrance of the Park and as we drove along the shores of Jackson Lake and gazed at the magnificent range across the water my family all agreed that I had not exaggerated the beauty and splendor of this valley!

When we got to the Dam we found Charlie Fessler in the store sitting behind the counter. I asked him if he was Charles Fessler. He replied:

"All that's left of me."

The last time I had seen him in 1915 he was thin as a rail! I told him that he probably would not remember me but I had worked on the Dam on the surveying crew in 1914 and 1915. He looked at me quizzically for a moment and then said:

"Oh, yes, I remember you.. You are the boy that came over from Boise."

We had a fine time talking about the old days and I inquired about Joe Markham and he advised me that Joe had died a few years before but that his two sons were in the bar at that moment. Thereupon Charlie took me in to the bar and introduced me to John and Eddie Markham. We had a drink at the bar together and I greatly enjoyed talking with the two Markham boys about early experiences on the Dam. I recall asking about Hugh MacDermott who was "Captain" of the Titanic the side wheeler which was used to drag log booms from Moran Bay down to the saw mill. The boys advised me that Captain Hugh had died some years before and was buried somewhere over in Idaho.

We again came back to Jackson's Hole in 1952 when we stayed at the White Grass Ranch as guests of Inga and Frank Galey. I had secured options on several pieces of property and discussed these locations with Frank. After some discussion Frank said:

"Bill, Inga and I would like to have you and Susan as dudes at the White Grass Ranch but if you are really serious about buying property who don't you buy some from me?"

It never dawned on me that Frank would be willing to sell property from his beautiful ranch and I was delighted at the prospect, so, we jumped on our horses and

rode up to the north end of the ranch. There was a beautiful grove of douglas firs, a mountain spring and a breath taking view! This was something I had been yearning for ever since I walked out over Teton Pass in 1915!

After a short discussion Frank and I shook hands on a deal and Sky Ranch was born!

The Krannenburg Construction Company started work on our main cabin that fall (1952) and we occupied it the following July. Sky Ranch has become a rallying place for our entire family and we have spent our summers there for the past eighteen years!