

BRIEF HISTORY OF SOUTH BOISE WATER COMPANY

October, 2008

Our primary water right goes back to 1865 when the Isaacs brothers open a wood-lined ditch from what is now Larkey Dam (near Pennsylvania Lane) to the area of Protest Rd. and Boise Ave. The ditch was 20 feet wide and 3-5 feet deep. The water was used to power various mills and then returned to the Boise River. The uses included a flour mill, a lumber mill, and an electric power plant.

Various people used water from the ditch for irrigation. In 1917 five farmers incorporated South Boise Water Company. Many residential homeowners joined the company over the next several years. As a requirement for joining they turned the rights of way of their laterals over to the company. However, the company did not own the main ditch, then called the Ridenbaugh-Rossi Mill Ditch.

With increasing urbanization, farms shrunk, businesses moved in and some individuals decided to use city water rather than irrigation water for their lawns and gardens. The lands irrigated by the company began to shrink.

In 1951 Ace Chatburn, who was on the staff of Boise Jr. College, joined the Board. He realized that the College needed water and the Water Company needed shareholders. He arranged for Boise State to become a shareholder and with this increased financial strength, the Company borrowed money from shareholders and purchased the Mill ditch and headworks. The next major change under Ace's leadership was the negotiation with River Run Development Co. that led to the construction of Chronic Dam and River Run's joining the Company. Then Boise City Parks joined to get water for ParkCenter Pond and the park around it.

In the 1990's the company faced the challenges of the Snake River Adjudication and an apparently arbitrary system of shares and assessments. Over a period of several years and the expenditure of legal fees and much volunteer time, the Company was able to establish a system of selling shares according to parcel size, equal votes and assessments for all shares and good records of current shareholders. Our water rights have been recognized in the Snake River Adjudication process, but this is not final yet.

Today the company has successfully made the transition from a company serving farmers to a company serving multiple urban entities. A few shareholders have hobby farms, but there are no large farms left. 226 individuals have shares. Boise State is the largest shareholder, followed by Boise City Parks. River Run, Spring Meadow, The Springs, and Bown Crossing are all shareholders, as are several apartment complexes and businesses. Water is used for irrigation, beautification, and fish and wildlife. The water rights are secure and the company is on a sound legal and financial footing. In this same period there have been major improvements in the structure and maintenance of the water distribution system.