

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

RIDENBAUGH-ROSSI MILL DITCH

Number 515 1974

This ditch commences on the south side of the Boise River in Section 24, T3N, R2E, and extends in a northwesterly direction through the northeasterly corner of Section 23, southwesterly corner of Section 14, thence to and past Rossi and Ridenbaugh flour mill, thence in a northerly direction to the Boise River. The ditch was built in 1865 by H. P. and J. C. Isaac. The Isaac brothers appropriated and diverted 385 second feet of water for irrigation of a section and a half of land, power for flour and saw mills, operation of a distillery, and the flotation of logs and lumber. When built, the ditch was eight feet wide on the bottom, twenty feet wide at the top and five feet deep, with a uniform grade of sixty-two inches to the mile. The headgate measured ten feet in width. The mill ditch, sometime after its completion, was sold to the Grangers. The Grangers sold the ditch to William B. Morris and William H. Ridenbaugh in 1878. By 1900, the ditch was owned by Ridenbaugh and Alexander Rossi, who utilized the ditch water in running of a flour mill, the flotation of logs, and for electric light power production. The water that was used for milling purposes ran back into the river just above the Ninth Street bridge. In 1903, the ditch maintained a capacity of 159.5 second feet, extended two and one-half miles in length with two and one-half miles of laterals, and irrigated over 300 acres. In 1906, the mill ditch received water rights (16, 17, 18) of 13,790 inches.

1. Meeves No. 1 Ditch. The diversion point of Meeves No. 1 ditch is located on the south bank of the Boise River in the NW 1/4 of the SE 1/4 of Section 24, T3N, R2E. The ditch was built in 1868 by Nelson M. Armstrong, who appropriated and diverted 250 inches of water under a four-inch pressure. By 1905, the ditch was owned by Peter Meeves. Water was utilized in irrigation of lands situated in Sections 14 and 23, T3N, R2E. In 1906, Meeves No. 1 Ditch received water right (53) of 90 inches.

2. The Bubb Canal. Also known as the Payne Canal, the Bubb Canal originates on the south bank of the Boise River near where such bank is intersected by the line between T3N, R2E and T3N, R3E. It runs in a westerly direction along the south bank of the river to a point in Section 24, T3N, R2E, about 80 rods north from the south line of said Section, from whence it continues in a westerly direction for about two miles.

Construction on the canal began on March 1, 1889. When completed two months later, the headgate measured seven feet and the ditch was six feet wide on the bottom and two feet deep. No enlargements were made until the spring of 1906. At this time, a new headgate also had to be built, as the river had washed out the original one. The builders of this canal, all interested landowners, were M. E. Payne, William Bubb, M. E. Pratt, Charles Rein, and Jacob Rein. In filing their water notice, they claimed the right to appropriate and divert twenty cubic feet of water per second.

In 1903, the canal maintained a capacity of 26.4 second feet, measured three miles in length with three miles of laterals, and irrigated over 700 acres. In 1906, the canal received water rights (107, 108, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114) of 580 inches. 515 2

3. Rein and Keogh Ditch. The diversion point of the Rein and Keogh Ditch is on the south side of the Boise River about 75 yards below the Ridenbaugh main headgate. The ditch extends just over one mile westerly where it empties back into the river. The ditch was built in 1894 by Charles Rein and A. J. Lamberger, who appropriated and diverted one cubic second foot of water. The water was removed from the ditch at a point 100 yards from the diversion headgate by means of a water wheel which measured twenty-nine feet in diameter and carried forty-four gallon buckets. From the water wheel, the water was transmitted to the owners lands by means of a 100-yard flume. On October 7, 1898, Lamberger sold his land, Lot 7, Section 30, T3N, R3E, to Jane Keogh. The ditch irrigated about fifty-five acres. The water wheel was also utilized by Rein and Keogh for power. In 1903, the ditch maintained a capacity of 35.5 second feet and measured one and one-fourth miles in length. In 1906, the ditch received water right (127) for 50 inches.

4. Ridenbaugh Canal. The Ridenbaugh Canal begins on the south side of the Boise River six miles above Boise in Lot 6 of Section 29, T3N, R3E. It extends in a westerly direction for about seven miles with a uniform width of twenty-six feet and a grade of two and one-tenth feet to the mile. From the seven-mile point, it extends southerly and westerly across Five Mile Creek and the Oregon Short Line Railroad through Ada County and into Canyon County, south and west of Nampa, for a total distance of 53 miles. Nearly 80,000 acres were susceptible for irrigation under this canal system.

William B. Morris began construction on the canal in 1877. On August 7, 1877, he filed notice of intent to appropriate and divert 500 inches of water under a four-inch pressure. Seven miles of the canal were finished in time for the 1878 irrigation season. After the death of Morris on August 23, 1878, capital to extend and enlarge the canal became difficult to find. Before his death, he had expended about \$60,000 for construction of the first seven miles. The canal, following the demise of Morris, became the property of his widow, Lavinia T. Morris, and his nephew, William H. Ridenbaugh. Without the necessary capital, they could do little but oversee the completed section. The canal, besides supplying irrigation water, in 1886 began furnishing water to operate an electric power plant. This 300-watt plant was built by R. W. Purdom. It utilized 100 inches of water and operated as a source of electrical power for Boise. Beginning in 1888, the power plant increased its water usage from 100 inches to 3,000 inches.

Lacking funds did not deter Ridenbaugh from filing an additional notice of intent to divert and appropriate 30,000 inches under a four-inch pressure on August 20, 1888. He had hopes of raising enough money to extend the canal, but was never able to raise the necessary capital. Consequently, he sold the canal and water rights to the Central Canal and Land Company on October 1, 1888. This company immediately began the task of enlarging and extending the canal. They expended \$67,000 on the project but became disappointed with its return and sold the canal to Morrill, Jones, and Simmons on May 28, 1890, for \$95,000.

By 1891, the system contained 100 miles of main canals with 153 miles of lateral ditches, and a chain of ten lakes and reservoirs for storage completely covering the bench and the area south of Boise.

On April 1, 1894, Morrill, Jones, and Simmons sold the enterprise to the Boise City Irrigation Land and Lumber Company for \$123,149. In 1894, 10,600 acres, including 294 farm customers and 47 town customers, received water. By 1896, 15,200 acres were under cultivation; in 1898, 16,494 acres; in 1901, 22,770 acres; in 1903, 26,204 acres; and in 1905, 27,042 acres, which included 714 farm users and 127 town customers.

During 1903, the canal maintained a capacity of 426 second feet and the headgate had the ability to divert 60,000 inches under a four-inch pressure. The canal extended 53 miles in length, with 271 miles of laterals. The system had in force 23 large gates, 109 checkgates, 296 lateral taps, 280 weirs, 33 culverts, two flumes, each 500 feet long, and a number of smaller flumes. Altogether, around one-half million feet of lumber went into the woodwork. 515 3

From September 1893, to December 31, 1902, the company spent \$93,303 on construction. Including a bill of \$93,800 for interest on bonds, the estimated cost of the canal by 1903 was \$405,252. The company charged water users \$75 per second foot with the water flowing continuously during the irrigating season. On or about January 1, 1906, the canal system was sold to the Nampa and Meridian Irrigation District. Prior to the sale, the Boise City Irrigation and Land Company had become insolvent, which caused much concern among the users and necessitated the transfer. In 1906, the canal received water rights (67, 100) of 17,042 inches.

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