

IDAHO STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY

REFERENCE SERIES

CALDWELL CANAL

Number 520

1974

The Caldwell (Highline, Strahorn, Franklin, Stapleton) Canal begins on the south side of the Boise River in Section 18, T4N, R1W.

The canal was originally constructed in the summer of 1865 by John Stapleton and his associates, when they acquired a water right to 3,748 inches under a four-inch pressure. The water originally serviced just a few of the area settlers who were mainly raising hay and grain. As first constructed, the canal carried 200 to 300 inches under a four-inch pressure. The canal underwent yearly enlargements as more settlers moved into the area. On October 29, 1880, users of the system united and formed the Franklin Ditch Company. The eleven shareholders who formed this company had nearly 2,200 acres under cultivation. Following incorporation, the shareholders filed a water notice and set about to increase the dimensions of the canal. They enlarged the canal to ten feet on the bottom and three feet in depth with a uniform grade of one-quarter inch to the rod.

On June 24, 1884, the company transferred the canal and certain water rights to the Idaho and Oregon Land and Improvement Company. After closing the deal, the latter company deeded back 1,350 inches under a four-inch pressure to be delivered free of charge.

The Idaho and Oregon Land and Improvement Company, under the direction of Robert Strahorn, intended to utilize the canal water to service the recently-founded town of Caldwell and surrounding area. This company, at the outset, filed a notice of intent to divert additional water and began the task of enlarging and extending the system. By March 1887, the company had expended nearly \$20,000 on improvements. The canal measured 20 miles in length, and was designed to service 12,000 acres. However, just over 2,000 acres were receiving water at that time. The canal also supplied power and water to the town of Caldwell.

Unable to realize what they considered an adequate return for their investment, the Idaho and Oregon Land and Improvement Company sold the water rights and canal in the fall of 1890 to the Caldwell Real Estate and Water Company. The new company was guided by Howard Sebree, a prominent Caldwell businessman. Under the direction of Sebree, the canal underwent further improvements and revisions. Sebree hired W. D. Arnett, an experienced ditch builder, to supervise the new construction. Arnett abandoned the old headgate and located a new point of diversion one mile higher up the river in order to take water from the main channel. The new headgate was considered by many as a marvel as it could measure out from 10 to 50,000 inches of water. In order to connect with the old canal, one mile of new ditch had to be built. Arnett thoroughly overhauled the old canal and installed an upper levee across each fill which confined

the water to one continuous channel with no dead water being left along the works. In all, the company expended about \$10,000 on the project.

Mismanagement, oppressive water rates, and the failure of the company to make further improvements which would have enabled the addition of new users, created a bad feeling toward the company by the settlers. The farmers responded by agitating for the creating of an irrigation district and the purchase of both the Caldwell and the Phyllis canals. The Pioneer Irrigation District, an outgrowth of the Farmers' desire to purchase both these water systems, was created in March of 1900. Problems arose over the purchase price and the district was unable to buy the canals until 1902. The Pioneer Irrigation District purchased the Phyllis Canal for \$75,000, on April 13, 1902, and on June 23, they bought the Caldwell Canal for \$10,000.

The new organization soon set out to make the operation of the canal more efficient. By 1903, the canal maintained a capacity of 75.5 second feet, measured twenty miles in length with fifty miles of laterals, and irrigated about 3,000 acres. By the fall of 1903, the canal was twenty-five feet wide on the bottom, thirty-five feet wide at the top, and four feet deep with a grade of 4/100 to the rod. In 1906, the canal received water rights (34, 77, 90) of 4,805 inches.