

Accepted 31 August 2006

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places  
Multiple Property Documentation Form

This form is used for documenting multiple property groups relating to one or several historic contexts. See instructions in *How to Complete the Multiple Property Documentation Form* (National Register Bulletin 16B). Complete each item by entering the requested information. For additional space, use continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

☒ New Submission ☐ Amended Submission

A. Name of Multiple Property Listing

American Falls, Idaho, Relocated Townsite

B. Associated Historic Contexts

(Name each associated historic context, identifying theme, geographical area, and chronological period for each.)

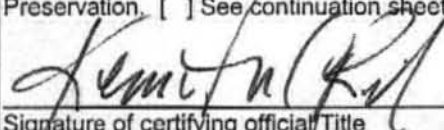
Public Works, Idaho (1924-26)  
Designed Community, American Falls, Idaho (1921-26)  
Western Irrigation Projects, Idaho (1919-1926)

C. Form Prepared By

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organization Frontier Historical Consultants date June 15, 2005  
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city or town Grand View state Idaho zip code 83624

D. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, as amended, I hereby certify that this documentation form meets the National Register documentation standards and sets forth requirements for the listing of related properties consistent with the National Register criteria. This submission meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60 and the Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for Archeology and Historic Preservation. [ ] See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

  
Signature of certifying official Title  
KENNETH C. REID, PH.D., Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

Date

18 June 2006

State or Federal agency and bureau

I hereby certify that this multiple property documentation form has been approved by the National Register as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register.

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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### E. Statement of Historic Contexts

The relocation of the town of American Falls from the floodplain of the Snake River to a new "designed community" high above the waters of the American Falls Reservoir is a unique and significant development in local, state and national history. The relocation was required by the construction of the American Falls Dam, which in turn was needed to provide adequate water storage for the irrigation systems of southern Idaho. The new community in the Reclamation Addition is one of Idaho's few designed communities. The Herculean task of relocating buildings from the original townsite is an example of a federally funded, massive public works program.

The construction of the American Falls Dam and the resulting relocation of the town of American Falls plays a pivotal roll in the historic development of Idaho as an agricultural state. Its construction proved key to perfecting southern Idaho's vast irrigation system. The American Falls Reservoir to this day provides the irrigation water storage necessary to supply southern Idaho's robust agricultural economy.

The Carey Act of 1894 followed by the National Reclamation Act of 1902 brought large-scale irrigation farming to Idaho for the first time. The Reclamation Act, signed into law by President Theodore Roosevelt on June 17, 1902, provided the legal mechanism for money flowing into the government from the sale of public lands to be funneled into public reclamation projects, by which the land could be made productive. Work on the Minidoka Dam began in late 1903, and the desert land that lay under the proposed irrigation canals opened for settlement in early 1904. Originally, families were allowed to file on 160 acre parcels, but this was later reduced to only 40-60 acres per person. Water was turned into the canal system in 1907. In 1910, the gravity flow system was supplemented by a pumped system powered by the generators at Minidoka Dam. Just in the Minidoka Project alone, 72,000 acres were under gravity irrigation and another 49,000 acres were under pumped irrigation.<sup>1</sup> An additional 115,000 acres were available for pump irrigation, but there was not enough water in the Snake River for them. As the nation turned its attention to the war in Europe in the 1910s, good water years and high crop prices spurred the application of irrigation and the spread of a farm-based economy throughout southern Idaho. Farmers used bank loans to expand their holdings and develop their properties for ever greater production. By 1918, 240,000 acres were watered by diversions from the Snake River along its 300-mile course through Southern Idaho.<sup>2</sup>

The year 1919, proved a watershed year in Idaho's agricultural history. With the end of World War I, farmers saw the value of their crops plummet. Farmers found themselves without the means to make payment on farm loans and many fell behind on the payments to repay the construction of the Minidoka Irrigation system. The problem became so severe that Idaho's Senator William Borah began preparing a

<sup>1</sup> Barry Dibble, "Annual Project History, Report of Construction and Operation & Maintenance, Minidoka Project, ID," Vol. XIV, 1920.

<sup>2</sup> Barry Dibble, "Annual Report," Vol. XIII, 1919.

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bill to extend the repayment schedule so that farmers could stay on the land and keep it in production. Banks holding farm loans began to close their doors throughout southern Idaho.<sup>3</sup>

Irrigation system managers also began to realize that there simply wasn't enough water to go around. Late in the summer, ditch companies began to have trouble delivering water at the very time it was needed most. The low Minidoka Dam provided some storage of spring run-off, but was primarily a diversion and power structure. Far up stream in Wyoming, the Jackson Dam provided 400,000 acre feet of storage -- less in drought years. The situation went from dire to desperate in 1919, when the State suffered the worst drought in Idaho's history. The Twin Falls Canal Company, one of thirty water districts and forty canal companies along the River, could only deliver 30 percent of its usual water. Other districts, such as the Danskin Irrigation District, extended their diversion structures further and further into the stream of the Snake River in an effort to keep water flowing into their canals. Eventually, the Danskin Irrigation District constructed a 400-foot canvas-lined structure that diverted the entire remaining flow of the stream into their canal. Farmers downstream were forced to haul water to cook, wash and drink. Few crops were harvested on the north or south sides of the Snake. Losses were reported at \$25 million. It became apparent to water managers that the survival of irrigation farming in southern Idaho depended upon obtaining additional water storage. A large reservoir was needed to capture spring runoff for use in late summer.<sup>4</sup>

American Falls Dam

The concept of a dam at American Falls was said to have been first broached by I. B. Perrine of Twin Falls. The first work on the dam occurred in 1908, when some preliminary testing of the site took place. Preliminary interest was driven by speculation that a dam at American Falls could be used to bring irrigation water to the Bruneau desert. In 1918, Professor W. O. Crosby of the Boston Institute of Technology did a thorough geological investigation of the site. The concept evolved and grew until in 1919, a dam was proposed that would impound two to three million acre-feet of water. The dam would provide assured water storage in drought years and would allow the expansion of the Minidoka Project-irrigated lands to 250,000 acres. Of the twelve dam sites available along the Snake River, only the one at American Falls had the capacity to provide adequate water storage. In 1920, the Reclamation Service dropped plans to expand irrigation into the Bruneau area. The 1919 drought taught the Service that any additional water storage would be needed to make the existing system fully functional. In 1920, the Reclamation Service drill crews, under the direction of Bert A. Hall, conducted testing of the proposed

<sup>3</sup> Irvin E. Rockwell, *The Saga of American Falls Dam*, (Cynthiana, Ky: Hobson Book Press, 1947); Dibble, 1921; 1922; 1923. Bank failures continued through the 1920s, ceased with the start of construction of American Falls Dam and began reopening upon the completion of the project.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.; Arrington, Leonard. "Irrigation in the Snake River Valley: An Historical Overview," *Idaho Yesterdays*, Volume 30, Numbers 1-2, Spring/Summer 1986, pp. 6-8.



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American Falls Dam site. The American Falls project was formally authorized by the Secretary of the Interior on September 18, 1920.<sup>5</sup>

Despite the agricultural depression, twenty-one of the thirty upper river irrigation districts subscribed to 700,000 acre-feet of the proposed reservoir at a flexible rate of about 25 cents per acre. With the horrors of 1919 fresh in their minds, the Idaho Congressional delegation, the Reclamation Service and the irrigation districts moved forward with plans in 1920. In September of 1920, the Reclamation Service set up offices in American Falls and began the work of surveying the dam and canal system and assessing property to be flooded by the reservoir water. This effort was put into high gear with infusion of \$1,735,000 appropriated by Congress through the work of Idaho's Congressman, Addison T. Smith.

While by far the best site for the storage of water, the American Falls site had a number of drawbacks that had to be overcome before construction could begin. To begin, the Falls were already being used by a small hydroelectric facility owned by Idaho Power, which had the priority water rights. When filled, the reservoir would cover important agricultural lands and would extend twenty-five miles upstream, covering 30,000 acres of Fort Hall Indian Reservation. The Oregon Short Line Railroad ran its main line across a bridge at American Falls. Miles of track would be flooded, and the company would have to raise its bridge by 22 feet. A bewildering system of over thirty irrigation districts would have to be joined into a Reservoir District to finance and distribute water from the reservoir.

Nonetheless, the question on most people's minds as they considered the American Falls Dam was what to do with the town of American Falls. If built, about three-quarters of the town would be under the reservoir. Preliminary studies by the Reclamation Service estimated that it would take \$3 million to remove and relocate the village above water line. Estimates to obtain just the rights-of-way for the dam and the relocated Oregon Short Line were put at \$124,314.31.<sup>6</sup> When Congressional money was released in March 1921, Reclamation Service crews began the task of analyzing the dam site and assessing the value of the town of American Falls. As of July 1, the Service had either bought or contracted to buy 93 properties. Property for a new town site adjacent to the old was purchased from a number of owners and sagebrush removed.<sup>7</sup> In September 1921, Secretary Albert Fall was informed that \$460,000 had been spent on surveys and in the purchase of approximately one-third of the old town of American Falls.<sup>8</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Dibble, "Annual Report." Vol. XIV, 1920; Vertical Files, Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>6</sup> F. C. Bohlson, "Estimate of Actual Disbursements for Feb., 1921, Covering work at American Falls, Idaho," January 31, 1921. On file at Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>7</sup> D. W. Davis, letter to Hubert Work, Secretary of the Interior, August 31, 1923. Not all of the sales were voluntary. DeWitt Garrison Brown refused to sell and ultimately filed suit against the United States to stop the condemnation of his land. The case rose to the Idaho Supreme Court where Brown was defeated. See *United States v. Brown*, 279 Fed. 168.

<sup>8</sup> Rockwell, p. 18; Anonymous, "Properties for American Falls Reservoir, Either Bought or Contracted for Prior to July 1, 1921, Bureau of Reclamation files, Burley, Idaho.

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American Falls

The town of American Falls owes its existence to its location along transportation corridors. The Wilson Price Hunt exploration party first camped near the Falls in 1811, and John C. Fremont noted in his journal that he camped at "American Falls" in 1843. Thereafter, American Falls became a way point for the emigrants traveling along the Oregon Trail.<sup>9</sup>

Accounts vary as to when the seeds of the town were sown, but the first sustained habitation occurred around 1880. A ferry was established across the Snake River above the Falls in 1881. By April 1882, a post office was established at the fledgling community. The river crossing was chosen by the Oregon Short Line to serve as a head-of-rail construction camp during the construction of its Granger, Wyoming to Huntington, Oregon line. The railroad passed through the town in late 1882 / early 1883. In 1884, the town was reported to include a "hotel, livery stable, store, depot and saloon."<sup>10</sup> The town was platted in 1886, and settled into existence as an agricultural community.<sup>11</sup>

American Falls served as a trading center for cattle and sheep ranchers of the area before the twentieth century. Small irrigation acreages existed in a few places, and dryfarming had started in the southern portion of the original Oneida County as early as the 1890s. With the opening of more public land under the Enlarged Homestead Act of 1902, farm families (many of whom came from Northern Utah) moved to the dryland areas of Oneida County, including the lower Arbon Valley of present day Power County. Settlement increased as dryfarming was promoted by agricultural colleges and the railroads. Successful experimental dryfarms in Northern Utah, increasing international demands for wheat, and higher than normal amounts of precipitation during the early 1900s also caused agricultural expansion into lands previously thought too arid to farm. . .

A large number of German-American, Russian-American, and Scandinavian-American emigrants from the Dakotas and other midwestern states took up land claims in present-day Power County. Wheat became the area's major crop as national and international markets expanded, and Power County's soil proved to be well-suited for dryland grains. The Oregon Short Line Railroad, which bisected the original American Falls townsite, proved ready transportation to outside markets. . . By 1910, wooden cribbed grain elevators, warehouses, and a brick flour mill were established there.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Madeline Buckendorf, "Oneida Milling and Elevator Company Grain Elevator," National Register of Historic Places nomination. 1993, Section 8 pp 1-2.

<sup>10</sup> American Falls Chamber of Commerce, *Welcome to Main Street American Falls 1880-1980*, (American Falls: Power County Press, 1980), p. 16.

<sup>11</sup> Buckendorf, Section 8 pp 1-2.

<sup>12</sup> Buckendorf, Section 8 pp 1-2.

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American Falls showed steady, if unspectacular growth through its first thirty years of existence. By 1906, the town had outgrown its original townsite, resulting in the platting of the Riverside Addition. In 1907, the town's population was reported at 500. Five years later, in 1911, the population stood at 950. The town contained a rich variety of services. One of these stores was the first Skaggs store operated by two brothers. When the brothers had a falling out, one of the brothers branched out by opening the first Safeway store in April, 1916. The one commodity that American Falls did not provide was alcohol. Power County was a "dry" county, so individuals craving strong drink had to cross the Snake River to quench their thirst at the "Bottle and Jug" in Blaine County, which had remained "wet." The bar was said to be the only one in ten counties, but was closed by court order after the west bank of the Snake River became part of Power county.<sup>13</sup>

Idaho Power

The waterfall on the Snake River at American Falls attracted the early attention of settlers. In 1902, the American Falls Water Power Company and the American Falls Power, Light, and Water Company had competing power plants at the Falls. The former had a plant on the east shore, while the latter had a power plant on a small island in the River. A third power plant was built on the west shore in 1904, by the Idaho Consolidated Power Company and was run in conjunction with the American Falls Power, Light and Water Company's plant. The holdings of the American Falls Water Power Company, specifically the East Side Power Plant, were acquired by the American Falls Power Company in 1905, which expanded the head and tail race, but stopped construction when it ran out of investment capital. After the hydroelectric investment bubble burst by the early 1910s, the three power plants were consolidated under the Southern Idaho Water Power Company. This company then completed work on the East Side Plant.<sup>14</sup>

In 1916, the Southern Idaho Water Company was one of five companies that were consolidated into the Idaho Power Company. A horseshoe-shaped dam was completed above American Falls to provide water for the Company's three power plants. The construction of this small dam forced the Company to sort through and settle a complex maze of legal water rights issues. A power line was built from American Falls to deliver electricity to the nearby town of Pocatello.

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<sup>13</sup> American Falls Chamber of Commerce, p. 16; Sanborn Map Company, "American Falls Oneida County, Idaho." October 1907; Sanborn Map Company, "American Falls Oneida County, Idaho." November 1911; *Power County Press*, "Centennial Edition" (American Falls), July 16, 1980, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> Susan M. Stacy, *Legacy of Light: A History of the Idaho Power Company*, (Boise, Idaho: Idaho Power, 1991), p. 74; Idaho Power Company, *A History of the Development of the Electric Industry in Southern Idaho and Eastern Oregon, 1897-1943, with References to Idaho Power Company and its Predecessors*, (Boise, Idaho: Idaho Power Company, 1943).



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When the new dam at American Falls was proposed, Idaho Power held a significant portion of the water rights to the Snake River flow over American Falls. The construction of a new 87-foot high dam would put two of its power plants out of service, requiring it to significantly expand its East Side Plant. It would also submerge the Pocatello power line and interrupt electrical service until the reservoir was filled and water could be sent through the new turbines. As plans progressed in 1921, a deal began to be negotiated between the Idaho Power Company and the Reclamation Service. The Company would be reimbursed \$1 million for its water rights and would retain rights for the use of its East Side Dam and the right to use reservoir water for power generation. On October 13, the parties concluded their discussions and drew up a document that sealed the deal. The contract had only to be signed by Secretary of the Interior Albert Fall within 90 days for the dam project to begin in earnest.<sup>15</sup>

Canceling the Project

In September of 1921, Secretary of the Interior Fall took a whirlwind tour of irrigation projects in the western states. Following a tour of the new Arrowrock Dam near Boise, Fall arrived at American Falls on September 5, 1921. Rather than wining and dining him at the site of the proposed dam, local project Director Arthur Powell Davis took Fall on an arduous 177-mile tour of the proposed shoreline of the American Falls Reservoir. Traveling by automobile without benefit of roads, the Secretary returned to American Falls finding only objections to the massive project. He was appalled when told \$460,000 had been spent on studies and land acquisition already and that \$3 million would be needed to move the town; \$1 million to buy out Idaho Power; and additional sums for dam construction, purchase of the railroad right-of-way, and purchase of Indian lands.<sup>16</sup>

Fall objected to flooding productive agricultural lands and funding new irrigation projects when farmers working irrigated lands were becoming delinquent on their water payments. Even as Fall toured the American Falls Reservoir, Senator William Borah was preparing a bill to extend debt repayment for Idaho farmers in the Minidoka Project downstream from American Falls. Fall adamantly objected to the government's funding new irrigation projects when existing projects were losing money.

According to the terms of the agreement reached with Idaho Power, Fall had 90 days to sign the agreement before it became invalid. In December 1921, word was received by the American Falls office of the Reclamation Service that Fall had not signed the agreement and had issued orders to close the office and to abandon the project.

Politicians and captains of industry responded to this news with a flurry of meetings that culminated with the Idaho Congressional delegation of Senator W. E. Borah, Senator Frank Gooding and

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<sup>15</sup> Stacy, pp. 74-75; Rockwell, p. 23.

<sup>16</sup> Rockwell, pp. 19-24.

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Congressman Addison T. Smith working with Idaho's Governor and other local politicians and prominent businessmen to reverse Fall's decision. When the Congressional delegation went to meet with Secretary Fall, they found him conspicuous in his absence. To escape the heat of the Tea Pot Dome scandal, Fall had removed himself to his Three Rivers Ranch in New Mexico and was accepting no messages other than from the President of the United States. When it became clear that the 90-day deadline would pass before Fall returned to Washington D. C., attention was turned to the Idaho Power Company. Going against the advice of his Wall Street advisors, Idaho Power Company head Sidney Z. Mitchell proclaimed that if Fall did not return by the January 13, 1922, deadline for the agreement, his company would extend the agreement until Fall returned. The extension was signed by Mitchell and Judge Finney, Assistant Secretary of the Interior, late in the day on January 13.<sup>17</sup>

When Albert Fall finally returned to Washington late in January, 1922, Senator Borah quickly arranged a meeting the next morning to convince Fall to sign the Idaho Power agreement. This meeting between a hand-picked Idaho delegation and Fall was nearly derailed when Senator Gooding burst in bombastically expressing his opinions in no uncertain terms. The meeting broke up in disarray, but Borah managed to quietly talk with Fall even as the others left. Arranging to meet alone, the two worked toward a compromise, but Fall declared that he would not sign the Idaho Power agreement unless Idaho farmers funded half of the costs. Sidney Mitchell joined Borah the next morning for the next round of meetings with Fall and proposed a consolidated reservoir district that would be able to issue bonds sufficient to cover the Idaho farmer's half of the construction costs. Fall agreed to revive the project if Borah pulled his farm relief bill, and Idaho's half of the project money was put up by November 1, 1924.<sup>18</sup>

Wasting no time, Idaho's Governor Brady organized a meeting in Pocatello on February 17, 1922. Over 200 farmers and businessmen representing every irrigation district along 300 miles of the Snake River met with the Governor to learn of events and plan a course to raise the \$2,700,000 necessary to meet the November deadline. The "Big Reservoir" district was to be organized by the Idaho Reclamation Association (IRA). The district would then issue sufficient bonds to cover the farmers' costs.

Support of the Big Reservoir was sought through meetings, editorials and pamphlets. Every voting irrigator connected with the project was individually contacted and apprised of the situation, but, Idaho was in the midst of an agricultural depression and local banks were shutting their doors with alarming frequency. As a result, the proposed project and its financing suffered a setback from a backlash of public opinion. Education and lobbying continued through 1922, with the vote to form the American Falls Reservoir District taking place on January 16, 1923. The District was confirmed by the 11th Judicial District of the State of Idaho on March 24. Plans were quickly made to issue the bonds in May

<sup>17</sup> Rockwell, pp. 33-48.

<sup>18</sup> Rockwell, pp. 52-61.



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so that the money might be secured a full year ahead of the dead-line. Before the bonds could be issued, however, the Reservoir District had to be proved constitutional. Over a year later, the Idaho Supreme Court issued a decision in favor of the District on July 23, 1924. On September 12, \$2,700,000 in bonds were sold to Marshall Field, Glow Ward & Company of Chicago, having been selected from a field of six bidders.<sup>19</sup>

Building the Dam

With local and federal money available, the Bureau of Reclamation selected Utah Construction Company to build the dam. The \$1,936,000 bid was accepted on October 16, 1924. The first dirt was excavated for the dam on March 10, 1925.<sup>20</sup>

The dam was completed sixty days ahead of schedule on April 21, 1926, at a total cost of \$2,850,000. The dam's gates were shut and water from the spring run-off began to collect in the reservoir. When completed, the concrete structure was eighty feet tall and just under one mile in length. About 800 feet of the dam consisted of a concrete spillway. Behind it was a reservoir with a capacity of 1,700,000 acre feet, stretching 22 miles to the east.<sup>21</sup>

By late 1924, Idaho Power had enlarged their East Side Power Plant by adding two generator units. The new 81-mile transmission line to Pocatello was authorized on February 26, 1924, and was in operation July 6, 1924.<sup>22</sup>

The Oregon Short Line right-of-way was also relocated. The railroad was paid \$80,779.79 for its old right-of-way and property within the old townsite. While the Reclamation Service purchased the new right-of-way in 1921, irrigation companies were billed \$205,000 for the grading and relocation work. The railroad bridge across the river was raised 22 feet at a cost of \$250,000. The OSL spent \$37,000 on the construction of a new depot in the Reclamation Addition.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Rockwell, pp 89-152; Department of the Interior, "Memorandum for the Press," May 15, 1923.

<sup>20</sup> *American Falls Press*, March 12, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>21</sup> Rockwell, pp 153-154; Stacy, p. 76; F. A. Banks, "American Falls Reservoir: Plan and Estimate," letter on file at the Bureau of Reclamation Office, Buhl, Idaho.

<sup>22</sup> Don Hibbard, "American Falls East Shore Power Plants," National Register of Historic Places nomination, Section 7, 1976; Dibble, "Annual Report," Vol. XVIII.

<sup>23</sup> *American Falls Press*, "Official Souvenir Edition," July 13, 1925; Documents on file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

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In exchange for 30,000 acres of flooded tribal land, the Fort Hall Reservation received \$700,000. Of this, \$100,000 went to enlarge and improve the Fort Hall irrigation project.<sup>24</sup>

On July 13, 1925, a giant crowd gathered at American Falls for the dedication of the cornerstone. The new Secretary of the Interior, Hurbert Work, sealed the stone in place. Having done so much to make the dam a reality, Senator Borah was conspicuous in his absence from the festivities.<sup>25</sup>

### Moving American Falls

In addition to moving the Oregon Short Line right-of-way and the Idaho Power transmission line, the Reclamation Service faced the daunting task of relocating much of an entire town. American Falls had to be removed from the reservoir area and transplanted to a new subdivision, named appropriately the Reclamation Addition. In all, 344 residences, 46 businesses, 3 hotels, 1 school, 6 churches, 1 hospital, 6 grain elevators, 1 flour mill, and numerous small sheds and shacks had to be removed from the reservoir before water began to rise to reduce the amount of floating debris and to protect the new hydroelectric turbines.<sup>26</sup> But before any buildings could be relocated, the infrastructure for a new community had to be planned and installed.

The new townsite was to be an engineered community. The Reclamation Service purchased land from Judge H. O. Jones, D. G. Brown, Mrs. Mary Franklin, and the Indian Spring Natatorium in late 1920 and 1921.<sup>27</sup> The ground consisted of nearly empty dryland farm land and undeveloped sagebrush. On May 25, 1921, Russell V. Black was contracted to lay out the new town using the most advanced methods available. He submitted a report on September 20, 1921, just missing Secretary Fall's ill-fated trip to American Falls. Black's services were terminated on October 6, and he was replaced by A. R. Tibbitts on November 1.<sup>28</sup>

While Black was replaced as town planner, the fundamentals of his plan were enacted. His planned community expanded outward from a central town square. The sides of the square were dedicated variously to municipal buildings, churches, businesses and residences -- though in implementation the result was far from pure. The broad streets were not laid out square with section lines, but instead at an angle so that each home would have a full measure of the morning sun.<sup>29</sup> A business district was set

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<sup>24</sup> Harold Johnson, Steve Joseph, Chuck Mullen and Thule Egan Stone, "Reclamation of Riverside Addition, American Falls," prepared for Environmental Studies 461, December 10, 1973. Paper on file with Valerie Hoybjerg.

<sup>25</sup> Rockwell, pp 153-154.

<sup>26</sup> Russell V. Black, "Final Report of Studies and Recommendations for the New Town of American Falls, Idaho," September 20, 1921. Manuscript on file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>27</sup> *American Falls Press*, December 31, 1920, p. 1; Johnson *et al*, "Reclamation of Riverside Addition," p. 7.

<sup>28</sup> Dibble, "Annual Report," Vol. XV, 1921.

<sup>29</sup> Personal communication with Valerie Hoybjerg, March 23, 2001.

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between the square and the Oregon Short Line to the northwest. Beyond the other three sides of the square, residential neighborhoods were laid out. A park was platted along a ravine that descended down to the river.<sup>30</sup>

The plans for the new 300-acre townsite were officially approved by County Commissioners in early September 1923. The Reclamation Addition contained 867 business and residential lots. Physical development of the townsite was reported for the first time on September 13, 1923. On October 4, 1923, sales of lots in the Reclamation Addition began.<sup>31</sup>

The Service sent out bids for contracts to move buildings, lay seven miles of sewer line, lay nine miles of water mains, install twelve miles of graded and paved streets, build eight miles of new sidewalks, construct power lines to over 350 homes and businesses, and finally prepare foundations to receive the buildings being moved up from the old town. In all, the Bureau of Reclamation<sup>32</sup> spent \$400,000 in preparing the site for occupation.<sup>33</sup> The speed with which the orders were placed and work began was staggering. Fifteen hundred shade trees to landscape the new community were ordered March 12 and were reported to be planted by March 30. When the old school was deemed unmovable and sold for salvage, bids were let for a new \$80,000 high school on March 28. Ernest White was awarded the contract on April 16, and ground was broken for the new school on April 30. Work was also begun on the new \$40,000 courthouse.<sup>34</sup>

As work progressed on the Reclamation Addition, appraisers systematically assessed the values of land and improvements in the old town. Owners were then made offers for their property. While a few demanded additional money, most accepted the offers. Once the buildings became property of the Bureau of Reclamation, it offered them for sale on the condition that they be removed from the reservoir impoundment area. Owners were given first right of refusal, followed by renters and then the public at large. Sale was conditional on the removal of the building by December 9, 1925. Grain silos were granted an exception and were to be removed by the summer of 1926.<sup>35</sup>

Houses were then relocated into the Reclamation Addition and on the higher ground of the original Townsite. Four zones were created to group the houses according to value. The lower value homes in the "C" and "D" categories were at first excluded from the Reclamation Addition and were forced to find lots in the remaining portion of the Original Townsite. A petition was circulated that allowed some of

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<sup>30</sup> Black, "Final Report," 1921.

<sup>31</sup> *American Falls Press*, September 13, 1923, p. 1; September 20, 1923, p. 1.

<sup>32</sup> The Reclamation Service was renamed the Bureau of Reclamation in 1923.

<sup>33</sup> *American Falls Press*, "Official Souvenir Edition," July 13, 1925.

<sup>34</sup> *American Falls Press*, March 12, 1925, p. 1; March 28, 1925, p. 1; Jennifer Attebery, "Power County Courthouse" National Register of Historic Places nomination, 1987.

<sup>35</sup> Copies of these contracts and associated correspondence are on file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.



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Power County, Idaho

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E. Statement of Historic Contexts

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the lower value homes to be moved into the Reclamation Addition. This was passed by the American Falls City Council on December 2, 1924.<sup>36</sup>

Building movers from Ohio and Texas who had learned their craft moving towns to new railroad locations, arrived in the spring of 1925 to begin moving structures. These companies and individuals were referred to in the *American Falls Press* variously as: E. W. Plant Co., Willingham, Howard Douglas, Mitchell and Lawson, and Dobbur.<sup>37</sup> In all, 329 properties were purchased by the Bureau of Reclamation within the American Falls Original Townsite, Riverside Addition, Union Addition and Keirs Addition. The removal of structures from these properties fell into three categories. On 123 of the properties, the former owners retained title to the buildings and were responsible for their removal or salvage. On 141 of the properties the Bureau of Reclamation obtained title to the buildings and was responsible for their removal or salvage. On 55 of the properties, the former land owners retained title to the property, but contracted their removal through the Bureau of Reclamation as part of the purchase price.<sup>38</sup> Eighty-seven structures were classified as either immovable or not worth moving.<sup>39</sup> Stone and brick structures that could not be moved were torn down for salvage. Smaller structures and those deemed not worth salvaging were simply left to fate. The largest structure in the town, the Oneida Grain Elevator, was a massive concrete silo that was so heavy that it could not be economically moved. It was left in place to stand alone in the waters of the reservoir. It was placed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1993.<sup>40</sup>

The first building to be moved to the new townsite was that of Theil Welding, owned by A. R. Theil. The building was moved by Howard Douglas on January 22, 1925.<sup>41</sup> Two weeks later, George Morris' house was on wheels, ready to move, and O. F. Crowley, S. H. McCallough and E. E. Zarring had signed contracts to move their houses. By mid-February, a temporary "moving road" was under construction in preparation for the moving of an estimated 350 structures. The road crossed the dam construction area at the east end of Campbell Avenue and then followed the old Oregon Trail up the hill to the Reclamation Addition. Upon completion of the moving road, houses and buildings began moving up hill to new foundations. By April 20, twenty houses had been moved. The local paper complained that the

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<sup>36</sup> Resolution for reclassification of Class C and D houses, American Falls Mayor and City Council, December 2, 1924. Document on file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho.

<sup>37</sup> *American Falls Press*, March 12, 1925, p. 1. Individual movers were often referred to in the press by only their last names. For example, the paper reported "Dobbur" received two additional complete moving rigs the week of March 12.

<sup>38</sup> Many of these were not worth moving. The Reclamation Bureau ultimately moved only 16 residences, contracting Lewis and Hall to relocate the buildings within 60 days. *American Falls Press*, April 23, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>39</sup> These figures were derived from a typed and handwritten spreadsheet in the Bureau of Reclamation document files, Burley, Idaho. Railroad, city and utility company properties were excluded from the totals. The document was used by project managers to track the purchase and sale of buildings.

<sup>40</sup> Buckendorf, 1993.

<sup>41</sup> *American Falls Press*, January 22, 1925, p. 1.

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E. Statement of Historic Contexts

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work was not proceeding fast enough because on June 11, only 50 buildings had been moved. The St. John Lutheran Church made national news in June when the building was caught on the road on Sunday and worshipers attended their church while it was still on wheels.<sup>42</sup> By August, the move was in full swing with several houses on the road at any one time. Some of the larger structures were also being moved. The Grand Hotel, the largest building to be moved in 1925, took a full two weeks in late September to make its way up to its present location on the corner of the town square. Pushing to complete the move, on October 8, 1925, the *American Falls Press* published a Bureau of Reclamation notice that all buildings, with the exception of the grain elevators, were to be removed by December 1, or they would revert to the government.<sup>43</sup>

The giant grain elevators were moved to the new Oregon Short Line right-of-way in late May 1926. On July 13, 1926, the moving road was reopened one last time. On July 29, 1926, Project Manager F. A. Banks closed the "Moving Road" across the dam construction site. The last structure to be moved was the old OSL depot. The building was not needed since a new depot was constructed. In November 1926, the old depot was cut in two for transport to the new townsite, officially ending the relocation of American Falls.<sup>44</sup>

The American Falls Dam released its first irrigation water on May 2, 1926. Total cost for the dam was only \$2 per acre foot of water, well within the original estimate of \$5 per acre foot. From its first day of operation, the dam provided economic water storage for irrigation districts throughout southern Idaho. As an indication of the security this water brought to the economy, eight days after the American Falls Dam released its first irrigation water, the First National Bank of Paul reopened its doors for business. The American Falls Dam continued releasing irrigation water throughout the successful irrigation season of 1926. On October 26, 1926, it once again shut its gates to begin the annual task of collecting surplus water.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> *American Falls Press*, February 5, 1925, p. 1; February 12, 1925, p. 1; April 30, 1925, p. 1; June 11, 1925, p. 1; June 18, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>43</sup> *American Falls Press*, August 13, 1925, p. 1.

<sup>44</sup> F. A. Banks, "Moving Road Notice," July 13, 1926. On file at the Bureau of Reclamation, Burley, Idaho; Johnson *et al*, "Reclamation of Riverside Addition," pp 9-10.

<sup>45</sup> Barry Dibble, "Annual Report," Vol. XX, 1926.

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Power County, Idaho

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### D. Associated Property Types

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The Multiple Property Listing has five distinct property types: relocated dwellings, relocated commercial and community structures, relocated grain elevators, relocated sidewalks, and buildings constructed as part of the public works project.

1. Relocated Dwellings. This property type consists of single-family dwellings and their associated outbuildings that were relocated from the original townsite and placed in one of the neighborhoods surrounding the town square. These range from simple Craftsman cottages, to elaborate bungalows and Victorian homes. While location within the townsite and architectural style are the first identifiers of these properties, they also display several hallmarks such as concrete-block ring foundations and low-quality mixed-aggregate concrete basements; many display a unique "rakish" cut on exposed eaves. Relocated dwellings typically are on only one side of the streets due to the necessity of machinery pulling through the lots. In the few cases where relocated dwellings are on both sides of the blocks, the buildings are off-set to allow relocation tractors and wagons to pass between. Long-time owners are often very aware of their home's traveling heritage. The age of these structures can be confirmed through research in the county assessor archives, which tracks the age, if not original location, of assessed structures.

2. Relocated Commercial and Community Structures: Only a handful of these buildings remain. They are typically located within the heart of the business district or facing the town square. These are one- or two-story brick business buildings such as the Grand Hotel, an apartment on the east side of the town square and the town fire hall. Smaller structures such as a stepped-parapet-roofed garage located on a back alley of the business district qualify under this property type. This property type also includes churches relocated to the Reclamation Addition. Most of these structures were relocated in 1925.

3. Relocated Grain Elevators. This grouping is restricted to the two grain elevators relocated to the north side of Fort Hall Avenue. These elevators were relocated in 1925.

4. Sidewalks. This property consists of relocated sidewalks stacked in uncoursed ashlar retaining walls in Stedding Park. These sidewalk fragments are believed to have been removed from the Original Townsite to accommodate the movement of buildings from their lots.

Public Works Buildings: This property type includes replacement structures built specifically as part of the 1925 public works program. The County Courthouse on the south side of the town square is perhaps the best example. This building has been previously listed in the NRHP. A unique member of this type is the dwelling at 454 Tyhee that was constructed out of left-over concrete foundation blocks.



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### G. Geographic Data

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This Multiple Property Documentation covers the Reclamation Addition of American Falls, Idaho, which was platted to accommodate the moving of structures from the Original Townsite area to higher ground when the American Falls Dam was constructed. Legally the area is described as:

Blocks 1 - 86, Reclamation Addition, American Falls, Idaho.

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**H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods**

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**Evaluation Methods:**

The delineation of the Multiple Property Listing is the result of several architectural surveys by local historian Valerie Hoybjerg in conjunction with historical consultants. Initial evaluation of historic structures determined that moved structures shared common traits such as older styles of architecture, formed block concrete foundations or mixed-size aggregate concrete basements. Individual building styles were also discerned, particularly the "rakish" exposed eaves. This process was conducted interactively with examination of Power County Assessor office records to determine building construction dates and with various photo archives in American Falls, the Burley Bureau of Reclamation Office and the Idaho State Historical Society Archives in Boise. Using the tools of style, detail, archival data and comparative photographs, individual buildings were identified and digitally photographed. A map with the identified buildings was then prepared to determine boundaries.

**Historic Research:** Working closely with local historians, a history of the American Falls Dam project and the relocation of American Falls town to its new site was prepared for a nomination for the Submerged American Falls Townsite in 2001. Re-examination of the history determined that with a few alterations, the history applied equally to the relocated townsite.

**Criteria for Significant Properties:** The significance of this MPL is tied to the relocation of a town as part of a massive public works program created to assure adequate water storage for Idaho's irrigation systems. The program resulted in a planned community that utilized salvaged components from American Falls that would otherwise be submerged by rising reservoir water. Contributing components of the Multiple Property Listing are to be included if they meet one of two criteria: 1) they were relocated from locations inundated by American Falls Reservoir, or 2) they were constructed as part of the Bureau of Reclamation program to relocate the heart of American Falls into the Reclamation Addition.

**Evaluation of Integrity:**

Because the significance of the MPL is tied to the unique history of uprooting a community and replanting it in a designed community, buildings that were relocated or built by this program primarily derive their significance from their history and not their physical attributes. Most of the relocated structures have seen alterations over time by owners working to meet changing needs and evolving lifestyles. This is not seen as significantly affecting the integrity of the properties since it was the intent of the original designed community that the relocated buildings continue to be used and that it was necessary for the community to grow in its transplanted location. Indeed, the relocation of the townsite was a significant investment by the federal government in the future of the town of American Falls. The relocated structures were not placed on every lot, and it was expected that empty lots would be infilled

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Power County, Idaho

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### H. Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods

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with new construction as the town grew. Indeed, houses continue into the present to be built in the townsite.

For individual sites to be considered for inclusion under the MPD, they must either have been moved to the Reclamation Addition as part of the Reclamation effort or have been built as part of the government's effort to relocate the community. This can be determined through Power County Assessor Records and the 1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map of American Falls. The 1927 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map has accurate depictions of building outlines and can be used to identify additions to structures. While minor changes to the exterior and smaller additions to increase livable space are seen to be within the original intent of the community designers, larger additions and the extensive use of incompatible modern materials in siding, windows, doors, and roofs would tend to disqualify individual buildings from listing under the MPD.



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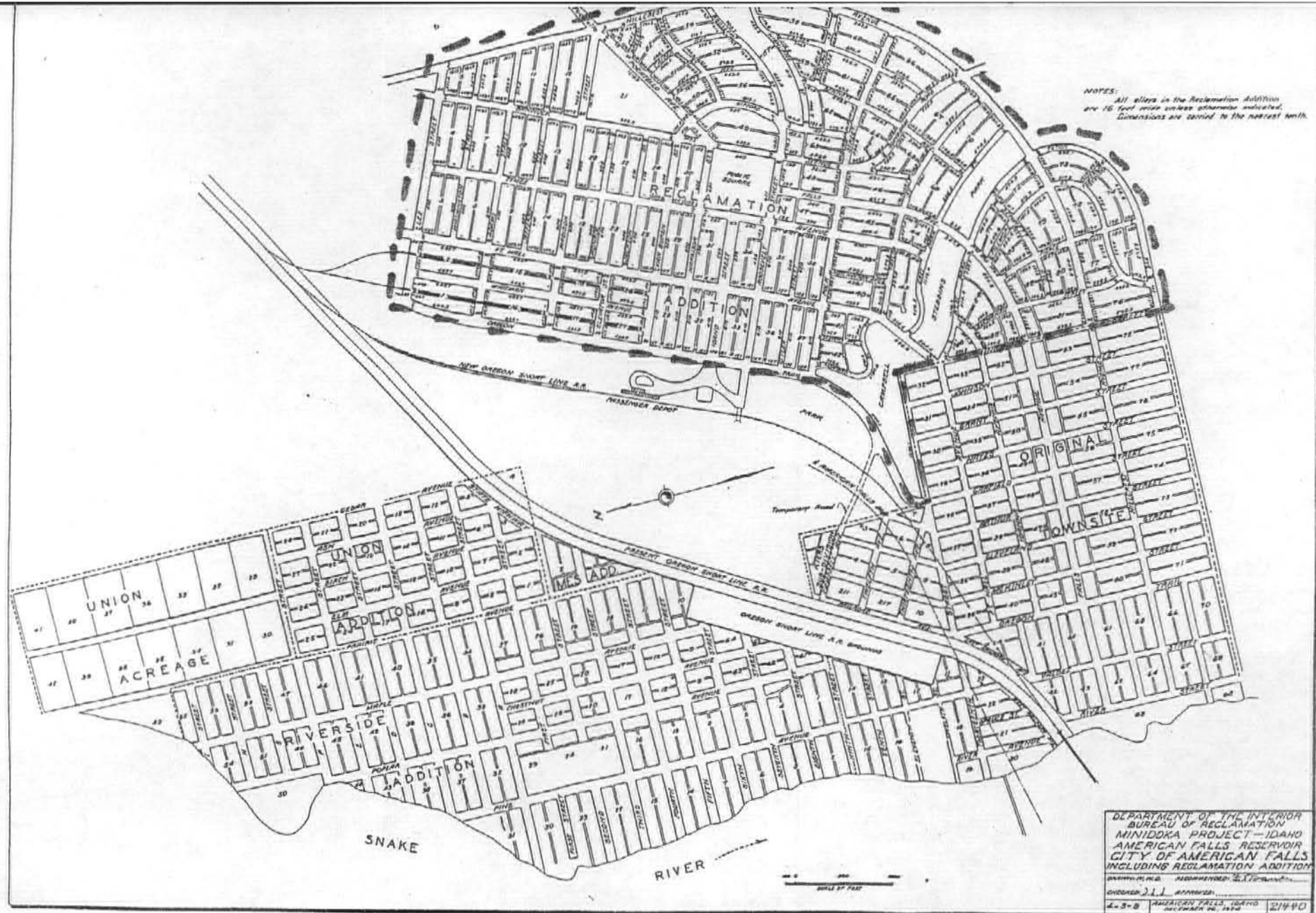
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AMERICAN FALLS  
 POWER COUNTY, IDAHO  
 RECLAMATION ADDITION DENOTED WITH : - - - -



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**SUPPLEMENTARY LISTING RECORD**

NRIS Reference Number: N/A

Date Certified: 8/31/2006

American Falls, Idaho, Relocated Townsite MPS  
Multiple Name

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This multiple property documentation form is approved as a basis for evaluating related properties for listing in the National Register of Historic Places in accordance with the attached nomination documentation subject to the following exceptions, exclusions, or amendments, notwithstanding the National Park Service certification included in the nomination documentation.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

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Amended Items

**Registration Requirements**

The registration requirements for the MPD were developed from portions of both the Associated Property Type (D) and Summary of Identification and Evaluation Methods (H) Sections. These registration requirements are amended and clarified as noted below:

**Areas of Significance**

Properties identified under this MPD will be considered for listing at the local level under National Register Criterion A in the areas of Community Planning & Development and Politics/Government. These themes reflect the nature of the American Falls relocation project as a major federally supported undertaking directly associated with the larger American Falls dam and reservoir public works project, which itself was a major element Idaho's early twentieth century irrigation system. Likewise the relocation project was responsible for much of the post-1920s physical re-development of the community of American Falls as a modern planned community.

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Signature of the Keeper

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Date of Action

(Continued)

Relocation and construction activities associated with eligible resources must date from the period of significance 1925-1926, the dates of the local Bureau of Reclamation program. Subsequent development activities may be eligible under another context that may be developed at a later date for post-relocation development efforts. In addition, eligible properties may also be significant under additional criteria or contexts unrelated to the relocation project (Architecture, Commerce, Religion, etc.). Such situations will be handled on an individual basis.

### Integrity

Individually eligible buildings must retain physical integrity from the historic "relocation" period 1925-1926, in order to be able to convey an appropriate sense of time and place. Integrity of design, materials, and workmanship will be paramount. Minor changes to the exterior and smaller, innocuous additions to increase livable space are seen to be within the original intent of the community. Additions such as these that occurred within the period of significance are considered historic. Later such changes, if minor, will not affect eligibility. Larger additions and the extensive use of incompatible modern materials in siding, windows, doors, and roofs after the period of significance would tend to disqualify individual buildings from listing under the MPD. Integrity of location acknowledges the historic nature of the 1925-1926 building moves, but subsequent relocations would disqualify individual buildings. Evaluation of the integrity of setting should be viewed with an understanding of the unique circumstances of the American Falls project and the expectation of subsequent neighborhood development. Individual buildings lots, however, should retain strong integrity from the historic period.

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Signature of the Keeper

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date of Action

(Continued)

Relocated buildings may be considered for individual listing or as part of a historic grouping of relocated properties, where adjacent properties share a common history. A small number of non-historic properties within such districts may be acceptable if the predominant streetscape reflects the historic 1925-1926 period. The individual integrity of buildings with such districts should still be high.

#### Sidewalks

The individual eligibility of the retaining walls created from relocated sidewalks is questionable. While an interesting sidelight to the substantial community re-building effort, it is unclear if this project represents a significant, National Register-eligible component by itself. Perhaps the structure(s) could be considered in the context of overall park development, either during or after the historic period. The size and scale of the resource may be a determining factor.

The subsequent development of the Reclamation Addition and the American Falls community after 1926 may be considered in the future under additional contexts.

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#### DISTRIBUTION:

National Register property file

Nominating Authority (without nomination attachment)



The American Falls, Idaho, Relocated Townsite MPS provides sufficient context and guidance to evaluate the eligibility of resources associated with the massive, federally-sponsored community relocation project completed between 1924 and 1927 by the Bureau of Reclamation in American Falls. Property types include residential and non-residential properties moved out of the projected American Falls dam and reservoir inundation area into the newly platted Reclamation Addition, as well as new buildings erected under Bureau of Reclamation supervision to meet the civic infrastructure needs of the new designed community. The physical integrity of the nominated resources should be high to convey an accurate sense of the historic period. Nominations can include both individual properties and historic districts.