

The Demise and Rise of Kettle Falls and Marcus

Compiled by David Bull

Each time I hear how the City of Kettle Falls was relocated to Meyers Falls to cope with the threat of Lake Roosevelt's rising waters and the inundating of the old town, I can't help thinking what a logistical nightmare it must have been to relocate several buildings. Even with today's technology, let alone what was available in the 1930's, it would be a daunting task. Once again the sheer magnitude of relocating even one community tweaked my interest, and here we are with several in our region that successfully completed it. I had to find out more. Here is what I've found so far

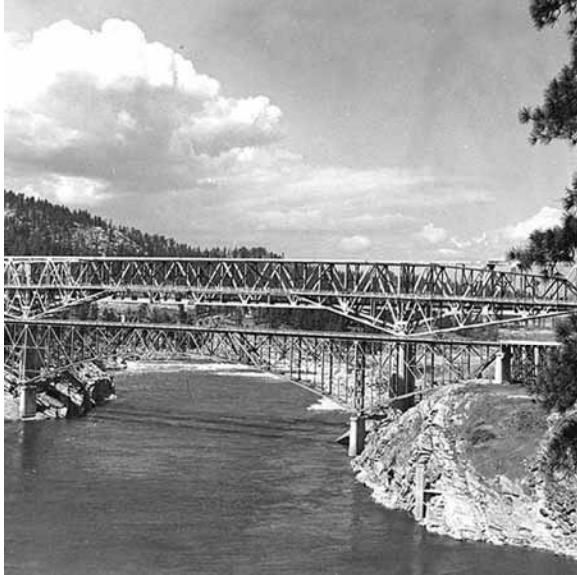
Lake Roosevelt's creation displaced both rural residents and inhabitants of at least ten towns - Boyds, Daisy, Keller, Kettle Falls, Gerome, Gifford, Inchelium, Lincoln, Marcus, and Peach. In addition to these ten towns, several other communities that were smaller and not necessarily incorporated were also affected. Although less than 15% of the area inundated was being cultivated prior to dam construction the riverine corridor, with its good soil and access to water, supported economic activities with agriculture, particularly orchard husbandry, predominating. Lake Roosevelt also inundated between 400 and 600 farms.

Further, although the land area inundated by Grand Coulee and Lake Roosevelt was sparsely populated, the United States Bureau of Reclamation (BOR) had to acquire more than 2 000 pieces of property, displacing between 3,000 and 4,000 non-indigenous people alone. BOR paid for all acquired land but provided no resettlement assistance for those displaced. The reservoir formed (now referred to as Lake Roosevelt) covered 151 miles (243km) of the main-stem Columbia River, as well as substantial portions of tributaries including the Spokane, Kettle, and Sanpoil rivers, among others. Lake Roosevelt inundated approximately 70,500 acres (28,500ha) of land in addition to the original riverbed.

Lake Roosevelt began forming in June 1937 when the dam's foundation was spanned. In 1939, rising reservoir levels inundated the town of Keller, the first to be inundated. Lake Roosevelt reached its maximum height in June 1942. According to articles in the Wenatchee Daily World, a local newspaper, BOR nailed moving notices on hundreds of farm and community homes and gave people more than a year to move. When the federal government initially offered to buy the land of settlers residing in the location of the future dam and reservoir site, many landowners refused, arguing that proposed compensation amounts were too low. In response, the government exercised its 'taking' rights and the courts had to eventually settle the issue of compensation.

To acquire a parcel owned by a settler, BOR would make an offer on the property. Compensation was based on land values in the immediate vicinity. If the owners felt the government's offer was too low and rejected it, the government pursued condemnation to gain title to the land. If the owner was not satisfied with the compensation received, he could file suit against the government. By 1938, contracts of purchase had been signed or were in the process of being negotiated for all but less than 1% of the property owned by settlers. In addition to purchasing farms and town lots, BOR had to acquire a variety of businesses in the reservoir area.

Despite the depression and the building threat of a war, BOR spent \$10.5 million making purchases in the reservoir area. They acquired land, buildings, improvements, and other facilities, such as telephone lines, telegraph lines, roads, bridges, and railroad track. Between \$2 million and \$2.5 million of the \$10.5 million, was used to purchase land.



For example the Columbia River Bridge at Kettle Falls, opened to traffic on May 3, 1941. It is one of two highway bridges (and one railroad bridge) constructed to replace bridges flooded by waters rising behind the dam to form Lake Roosevelt. The Washington Department of Highways constructed the bridge, and it had the longest central span of any highway bridge built in Washington State during the 1940's. The bridge was completed (except for painting) in June 1941, not long after it opened to traffic. It was built beside a Great Northern Railroad bridge also financed by the Bureau of Reclamation. Both bridges were built upriver from the old 1929 highway bridge, which was

taken down immediately after completion of the new bridge. In 1995 the steel truss bridge was added to the National Register of Historic Places.

When BOR acquired the land needed for the reservoir, it purchased all improvements on the land, such as homes and other structures. Before filling, the reservoir area had to be cleared of all structures, trees, and brush which could cause damage or obstruct any part of the dam or navigation on the Columbia River. In order to avoid having to demolish or burn all the acquired structures in the reservoir area, the federal government auctioned off structures that were movable.

Many homes and buildings were bought by their original owners, at a nominal cost of around \$50 to \$75. Purchasers were responsible for moving the structures out of the reservoir area by May 1, 1939. In the end,



purchasers, not the government, moved over 5,000 structures. BOR burned structures remaining in the reservoir area. Farmers and other reservoir oustee's had to find either property they could afford or move in with relatives. Most relocated to nearby areas. Although BOR did not assist in the resettlement of families and towns, it rebuilt or replaced 25 miles (40km) of railroad track, 180 miles (290km) of highway, 72 miles (116km) of primary roads, and 54 miles

(87km) of secondary roads. Replacement of 14 bridges and track alone cost BOR \$2 million. Also, some telephone lines, telegraph systems, power line facilities, and fences were moved to higher ground.

Communities did not receive government assistance in finding new home sites. Each of the inundated communities had its own relocation experience. A few communities, like Marcus, the largest town inundated by Lake Roosevelt, Kettle Falls and Daisy persevered by relocating; other towns, such as Peach, and smaller towns, were never re-established simply breaking apart and being scattered to the wind.

For Kettle Falls, houses were bought and relocated by the government. Structures not moved, were dismantled or destroyed and Kettle Falls annexed itself a 60-foot strip of land leading to and including part of the town of Meyers Falls (See photos). The town moved to its new location and a few years later the community voted to change the name from Meyers Falls to Kettle Falls. Built around the railroad, the newly named Kettle Falls became successful and many people welcomed the electricity and irrigation provided by the new dam.



In 1939, Marcus had a population of 531. In February of that year, just months before the May relocation deadline, the residents of Marcus and the residents of Lincoln had yet to find relocation sites for their towns. The actual sites of most of the towns have now disappeared under the reservoir, but the remnants of Marcus and Kettle Falls can still be seen. Marcus is visible during the lake's drawdown and curious visitors can still stumble across the remains of old Kettle Falls year round in Locust Grove.

They can imagine what brought people to the town as they look at the stairs that once served the stage-coach riders. Careful observers can find the family name Bevan etched into a sidewalk outside the old bakery. If you can't find them, then another option would be to chat to the few remaining residents of the former Kettle Falls who lived during this period of history (I believe there are five or six left). The remains of old Kettle Falls are slowly being reclaimed by the landscape but if we continue to talk about the town and remember its stories the old town site will never truly be gone.



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