

## MIDDLE VALLEY HISTORY

BY MAXINE FOX

Middle Valley and the town of Midvale once lay under a lake some 700 feet in depth until a river (the Weiser) finally cut out the canyons north and south exposing the present valley. The town's water well released some secrets. When the drillers cut through a lava flow at 695 feet down, they tapped an underground lake with considerable water pressure, creating an artesian flow. This stabilized at 70 pounds per square inch, with a water temperature of 82 degrees. The pressure indicates that the lava flows had formed a basin of considerable depth. From the center bottom to the top edge would be at least 950 feet in order to get 70 P.S.I. at the well head. To hold this pressure there had to be a tight lava flow above and below the underground lake. The 82-degree water signifies that deep fissure hot springs are feeding this lake

The discovery of gold in California in 1849 caused great excitement in the east, and thousands of persons left their homes in search of great treasures. As each valley became more thickly populated people left to move further west to those more wild and secluded. Among this class was J.H. Reed, who after many wanderings finally alighted upon a small valley hidden among the mountains of Idaho. It had the appearance of a great basin hallowed out of the mountains, and a wooded river flowed through it from end to end. At that time Indian camps stretched along the river and wild animals were in abundance. This was Middle Valley before the hand of the white man touched it, and it was to this valley that

as well as the snow melt from the mountains. Considerable study has been made of the nearby areas, regarding the dated period of 10 to 5 million years ago known as the Miocene-Pliocene epoch. Since it is likely that the Midvale basin was a correlated part of this area at that time, what their studies revealed would apply to this section. Fossilized oak is found in both sections and so ties the two together regarding the same geological age. Using this as a basis, a description of the basin would be somewhat as follows: The climate is moderate, with annual precipitation in the range of 45 to 55 inches. The valley, some 9 to 10 miles in length and 7 to 8 miles wide, is surrounded by mountains on three sides, and rolling hills to the south.

Mr. Reed brought his family in the fall of 1868. Fortunately, the Indians of the Bannock tribe were friendly and traded fish for dry goods. Shortly afterward other families arrived, and there was an increase of population in 1876, and the first house was erected in Midvale. The following two years witnessed rapid growth, with settlers arriving that had traveled together on wagon trains from the east. In 1878 the Indians perhaps becoming alarmed at the steady increase of people, became less friendly and went on the warpath, raiding some farms for horses. The settlers became alarmed and banded together in homes and at the fort of Salubria to the north. After a few alarms, things seemed to settle down

and people returned to their homes. However, the next spring after a war in northern Idaho the Bannocks again became restless and marauding Indians traveling through stole over one hundred horses. In an attempt to recover the animals, several lives were lost. After this, the Indians were not allowed to camp in the valley, but continued to pass through on their way to the Snake River fishing ground.

In the early seventies, work started on the great Middle valley ditch to provide irrigation for the valley and was incorporated in 1884. This was second only to the railroad as being considered the greatest work and benefit to the valley, a feat accomplished of course, by the labor of hands and teams of horses. The first bridge to span the river was built in '82 or '83, where previously a ferry had provided crossing. This wooden span was replaced by a steel one in 1983. The P. & I.N. railroad reached Midvale in 1899, when a depot was built and the building of a town began.

As population increased, the need for a Post Office became acute, and finally one was established in the fall of 1876. After being moved to various locations it became permanently situated on the west side of the river and became a part of the booming town of Midvale.

Prior to the organization of a school district in 1876, a school was conducted in Mr. Reed's home by an old trapper. After awhile, a "regular" teacher was hired and sessions started, but the first male teacher found his pupils much to rambunctious, and so school again was discontinued. Finally, a no-nonsense lady teacher was hired who managed to keep the school open for a full term. In 1883, the district was divided with a school near town (Salem) and another built on the western benchland

During these years, the surrounding rolling hills were homesteaded and numerous rural schools were built to educate the children. While the land was new and weather favorable, grain rolled

side of the valley. Fire destroyed the Salem school and 1904 a larger building was constructed which again burned in January 1947, at which time a grade school addition was added to a brick high school that had been built in 1914 and organized in 1909.

In 1905-1906, a Baptist and Church of Christ buildings were erected to serve the Christians of the valley. It was about this time that the name changed from Middle Valley to Midvale by an order of the U.S. Postal Service.

The community after 1900 was peaceful and devoted all its time to developing its resources. By 1904, the town contained a number of businesses -- hardware store, department, drug, and in 1906 construction was started on hotels, millinery, dress stores, restaurant, Red Cross pharmacy and bank. Several doctor and lawyer's offices were located in quarters above the big department store. In 1908, the telephone lines came to the valley and in 1909, a mill was built to handle grain shipment and storage, as well as a livery barn, furniture store, and a printing press was installed with a newspaper printed once a week, with the first issue on sale March 11.

The first automobile was purchased by a citizen in 1911--unfortunately 1911 was also the year of the great fire which, spreading through the major part of town, destroyed seven establishments. These businesses were never rebuilt and so left an empty square in town. In 1912, an epidemic of scarlet fever swept through the town and surrounding settlements, and few families escaped without a death. In 1914, Midvale again experienced misfortune by fire, with the department store, hotel and other buildings destroyed.

into the mill by the wagonloads. It was not uncommon for wagons to line up for nearly a mile waiting to unload. Also the area was favorable for raising sheep, and in the springs, at the shearing shed in the hills,

droves of sheep came to be sheared of their pelts and great bales of wool were then loaded in wagons to be transported to the railroad cars waiting in Midvale, which at one time was the leading shipping point for wool and wheat in the country. In the latter years, as the ground became over-cropped and the weather cycle changed to a dryer climate, and such bounteous crops could no longer be produced. With many families moving away, homesteads were consolidated into larger farms and ranches. With the advent of the motor vehicle giving people the ability to travel easily to larger shopping centers, Midvale continued to decline to the small village as we see it today. As the population declined, the rural schools were closed and school buses now bring children from as far as 25 miles to the schools in town, with student population of 124 (1985), all grades.

The people living within the school district boundaries number between 800 and 850. Within the "city" limits: 200 to 250 (1985).

Through the years of the town's history, it has been flooded at least three times (1881, 1916, 1965) by waters from the otherwise benign Weiser River, with "near misses" occurring a number of times. In my personal album, I have a picture of a man rowing a boat down the main street of town.

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*Compiled by Maxine Fox, Librarian, with credit and thanks given to several sources, including Evelyn Leger's history as written in the 1916 school annual; History of Washington County, by Judge Frank Harris; Roots of Middle Valley by W. Gerald Yongue.*

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