

THIS ADDED TO LEC MEMOIRS - 1992

INCIDENT AT BOULDER DAM

Now at San Diego/CA - 12 Oct/92 - have just returned from Las Vegas and Boulder City/Nevada - where what was promoted as a 'reunion' was carried out.

Those engineers and workers remaining from 1931-34 construction days of Boulder (alias Hoover) Dam were focus of the gathering.

From an original crew of several thousand men only 21 former supervisory and other workers attended - only 2 of those were ex-USBR engineers - balance of attendees - 110 persons in all - were wives, relatives, and friends.

The 'reunion' was not what could be considered an event of outstanding nature; it was put together by people with not the least doubt they had good and sincere intent - but nevertheless there was little or no understanding or realization of the role that life had handed them.

I have nothing but the strongest admiration for their efforts to keep the spark of Boulder Dam's birth alive.

After the dam was constructed a group of politicians - assumed to be Democrats - changed its name.

Prior to taking action on the name change, it is clear the group waited out the 4-year construction period to be as certain as possible this project on the Colorado River was going to be successful.

It was - and outstandingly so!

A Senator among the name-change adherents sponsored a Bill in Congress to change the name "BOULDER" to "HOOVER".

Unfortunately the Bill passed.

Not having universal appeal, the change generated concerted opposition at the time - but that soon died out - and the more colorful and descriptive name of "BOULDER" has been forgotten by the younger generation now in charge.

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At the 'reunion' I encountered a television crew from New York - who had been assigned to Boulder City to record part of a series of programs said to be depicting "GREAT PROJECTS" - Boulder (Hoover) dam was on their list.

The crew chief asked me: "Did you know Frank Crowe?". "Yes" I answered, "I knew him well".

The crew chief continued: "Then you would be willing to be interviewed on camera - tell something about your duties on the dam - anything of general interest about the project".

Previously alerted to this request, my answer was: "Am sorry - no; I was a mere cog in the vast assemblage of manpower and technology gathered for the job. There is no substantial contribution I could make that would add some interest to your production".

(NOTE: It is not known what the television crew got from the 'reunion' - but my guess is that they were inclined to be disappointed.)

By this year of 1992, those men holding positions of authority in the hierarchy that constructed the dam are the men who should be honored in any television program about this project - men who have long left us: Steve Bechtel, Sr. - Harry Morrison - Henry Kaiser - Chas. Shea - Frank Crowe - Grant Bloodgood - Ralph Lowry - Walker Young - John Page - Wilber Dexheimer - Jack Jones - all these and others holding key posts - what men they were!

My job as Junior Engineer with the United States Bureau of Reclamation was obtained during the darkest days of the Great Depression - but that is another story that has already been written and filed with my engineering papers at University of Wyoming's Heritage Center.

On the strength of an assignment at Boulder (Hoover) Dam - a wonderful girl (Edna) - who shared my life for just over 50-years after Boulder - agreed to marry me. We were assigned a house on Palm Avenue in Boulder City/NV - other engineers resided on the same street - when we visited each other the talk was invariably about the great dam we were building - each of us had something to say about our work.

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Edna was thoroughly absorbed with the dam - she wanted to know everything about the job.

At least once a week she wanted to be driven to Inspiration Point (visitor overlook) so progress could be noted.

I never knew if that was bona fide interest - or just an expression of support for me; but it made for a more congenial relationship - her motive was encouraged - never questioned.

On one occasion - am not sure but seem to recall was during 1932 - upon our arrival at the Point - there was a lone man - taller than most - sitting on the unfinished rock wall - it was Frank Crowe, Six Companies, Inc's (contractor for the project) General Superintendent of Construction.

As we drove up and parked - Crowe turned his head and spoke: "You work on this job?".

"Yes I do" was my answer, "for USBR" - told him my name and introduced Edna.

He continued: "I used to work for them - a good outfit; if you keep your nose clean you'll do well".

Crowe had worked for the Bureau of Reclamation in his earlier career - later entered the employ (1925) of Morrison-Knudsen - one of the members of Six Companies' consortium.

Edna remarked later: "Mr. Crowe was abrupt - did not say much".

My explanation was that he had a whole lot more to think about than talking to strangers.

It was about ten days later that my path with Crowe crossed again - just before a concrete placement was to begin on the Arizona wing of the huge power plant,

He said: "How you doing Cramer?", and was gone before I could answer - but what was amazing - he remembered my name. I saw him again many times after that - sometimes in meetings to clear some point that seemed to him to be delaying progress the way he wanted it to go; sometimes in the distance - he was daily out on the job - would not wear a hard hat - only an old Panama.

He was completely wrapped up in the job.

He was the man who put this whole thing together; he gathered the six largest (often competitors) contractors in the United States - induced them to bid on this biggest job of dam-building ever undertaken in this country.

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I have returned to Boulder City and the dam many times over past fifty years - but each time I see this dam I marvel again that men can do such things.

Always a try will be made to visit Crowe Park - pay tribute to a fellow engineer.

The Park is a small area in Boulder City - put together by local people who wished to keep his memory alive.

There is a concrete and stone monument - with embedded plaques depicting his profile and some facts about the man. He was a model for any engineer to emulate - and I am very proud that I knew him.

Leaving Boulder City in late 1935 - on transfer to All-American Canal Project - was a sad day, yet a triumphal one in some respects.

There were memories of unforgettable co-workers - the first years of my marriage - and always the vibrant picture of the greatest dam in the world - rising before my eyes - and to be a part of it would be a piece of my life that can never be erased.

But leaving Boulder City was not the close of my association with Frank Crowe - although I thought it was.

In 1940 - after a few years at Yuma/AZ on the All-American job - my transfer to Shasta Dam Project was arranged. Shasta was to be a 560-foot high concrete gravity structure on the Sacramento River in Northern California.

Who was slated to be in charge of construction?

None other than Frank Crowe!

Henry Kaiser was one of the contractors on the Shasta job - it was he who talked Crowe out of semi-retirement to take on this one last job.

At Shasta I was in charge at the 350,000KW power plant (See LEC Memoirs - Vol. I of V - Part 2 of 2 - starting Page 18). Crowe - with a party of notables was touring the project's pre-construction readiness - and although it had been more than five years since we last met - he left the group to greet me by name.

Crowe died shortly after completing the Shasta project, at a cattle ranch he had purchased near Redding/CA.; he was just over sixty years of age; he had earned an honored and incomparable place among engineers - but paid a terrible price - he drove himself to death.