

The Teton Dam Disaster Collection

**David W. Archibald- The Teton  
Dam Disaster**

By David W. Archibald

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**Box 5 Folder 6**

Oral Interview conducted by Alyn B. Andrus

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Brigham Young University – Idaho

Alyn B. Andrus: David, would you please spell your name?

David W. Archibald: David W. Archibald.

AA: What is your birth date and where were you born?

DA: I was born in Rexburg, Idaho, August 23, 1889. I am the son of Robert R. Archibald and Lisabell Watson Archibald.

AA: Do you have a family?

DA: I married Lilly Stallings in 1913 and we have eleven children. They all attended Ricks College and ten of them are alive today.

AA: I presume they all are married and have families on their own?

DA: They are all married and have families on their own?

AA: They are all married and I have 69 grandchildren and 75 grandchildren.

AA: What is your current address?

DA: 221 South 2<sup>nd</sup> West, Rexburg, Idaho, at the Golden Living Center.

AA: The Golden Living Center is a place for retired people?

DA: Yes, at the present time there are fifty of us here.

AA: How long have you lived in the Rexburg area?

DA: I was born in Rexburg and have lived here with an exception of about fifteen years in the Rexburg area.

AA: You were born when the flood came on June 5, 1976?

DA: Yes.

AA: Would you mind expressing your feelings about the construction of the Teton Dam? Did you support it or have any feelings one way or the other about it?

DA: For fifty years before the construction of it, being a farmer, I knew the need for the reservoir and I supported it. I think that it should be rebuilt in the future because the valley needs the water.

AA: We could have certainly used it this year, could we have?

DA: Yes, if it hadn't of been for our storage water this year, we would have been short.

AA: Before the dam broke, did you have a premonition that it would break or that something bad was going to happen?

DA: No.

AA: Did your wife?

DA: No.

AA: Would you tell about where you and Mrs. Archibald were when the dam broke? Go right ahead and relate in as much detail as you would care to about what happened to you that day. Tell about how you heard the dam had broken and what you thought about and what happened to you after you received that news?

DA: That Saturday morning was like any other June day. We got up and had our breakfast. Some of us were busy visiting, writing letters, reading, or in small groups chatting. The report came in the morning that there was a leak in the dam but we didn't think much about it. We went along visiting and chatting. There was no excitement here at all as far as I could see. The first reports were that even if the dam breaks, it will not come further south than Main Street in Rexburg. We were 2 ½ blocks south of there so we weren't worried. The next report came about seeing the volume of water that was coming down through the area. It said the dam was breaking. They said, "It will come as far south as 2<sup>nd</sup> South Street in Rexburg."

The management of the Golden Living Center, not wanting to take any chances with us old folks getting our feet wet, moved us over to the Viking. We went upstairs in the Viking and were sitting around unconcerned. Most of us were chatting and wondering, speculating as to the damage that I would do in the valley. Two school busses came and they said, "We had better take you up to Ricks College." We got in the school buses and went up to Ricks College. You can see how unconcerned I was because I left our car there. We didn't move the car. We went up to the college and there at the Hart building, some college students entertained us with songs and readings. We were enjoying life.

After an hour, we went out on the balcony and we could see that the flood was there. We realized that we should have moved our car, but it was a little late. We found our car had been picked up with the water, floated around the building, turned around and lodged right side up against another building.

The Golden Living Center was a wonder that it stood as well as it did. There was only about one inch of water on the floor at the most. There was three feet of water on the outside of the building. If a tree had hit one of those tall windows at the side or the front,

the story would have been different. It withstood the pressure of the water and was outside on the carpet. There was very little damage done to the building.

AA: Did you lose any personal items in your room as a result of the water?

DA: No we had put most of our stuff on the bed. What I lost was minor. The trunk was on the floor and a suitcase or two that we forgot to pick up was damaged. I had considerable furniture stored in a basement in Rexburg and you can guess what happened to that.

AA: You lost all that?

DA: Yes.

AA: What about your car? Were you able to use that car again?

DA: The insurance company were considerate on the car. They came and looked it over. It was a new car only about 1200 miles on it. They allowed us a good adjustment and so we expected the cash adjustment. We went and bought us another one. They overhauled the car but we didn't want to take a chance.

AA: Did you own a home, apartment or any property outside of the city of Rexburg?

DA: No.

AA: Your losses were restricted to those that you talked about?

DA: That's right.

AA: What were your first thoughts when you heard that the dam was breaking?

DA: I wasn't very excited because it's several miles up to the dam. The valley stretches out quite wide here and I couldn't visualize enough water getting this far down to the damage that it did. I didn't realize how much water was stored behind that dam. Today, I can't figure why those engineers would permit that much water to fill up against an unproven dam. It's poor judgment.

AA: Had you seen the Teton Dam before it broke?

DA: Yes, on several occasions while it was being built.

AA: Did you ever have any thoughts that maybe that dam would not hold?

DA: No, I didn't. Those engineers had a lot of experience and I had seen a lot of dams built. I figured they knew what they were doing.

AA: You mentioned that you went out on the balcony of the Hart Building and watched the floodwaters?

DA: Yes. An old cow had wandered off from some place and was testing the water. She decided to go back on the hill.

AA: What did you think about as you watched the water roll past?

DA: I was surprised at the volume of water and the speed that it was traveling.

AA: How deep would you say it was as it passed by the Hart building?

DA: Three feet or a little more in places.

AA: Did you see any buildings floating in the water?

DA: A few small ones.

AA: Were you surprised that the flood did as much damage as it did?

DA: Yes.

AA: How soon after the flood were you able to come back to the Golden Living Center?

DA: That evening they gave us a nice supper at Ricks College. We had a good bed, Sunday morning we went down to my son's place at Rigby, Don Archibald. We stayed there for sixteen days. We returned to the Golden Living Center. My wife and I were the first ones here. We had to cook our own breakfast.

AA: When you came back there were no cooks here?

DA: We were so anxious to get back because we wanted to see how things were. We bought us a bag of groceries that first day. We batched it.

AA: I suppose the cooks were out taking care of their own homes and cleaning mud.

DA: Yes.

AA: Did they have people to cook and take care of the building after that?

DA: Yes, two days, later, people began returning and the cooks were here. All the force were back plus a few extra.

AA: Did they have the building carpeted by then?

DA: No, it wasn't completely carpeted, but it was cleaned up. It was livable.

AA: Did you see Rexburg right after the flood?

DA: No.

AA: You went to Rigby and stayed with your son, Don, for about two weeks. During that period did you see the city of Rexburg?

DA: No.

AA: In cleaning up the city, I suppose you noticed a lot of activity. What was it that impressed you the most about the cleanup operation here in Rexburg right after the flood?

DA: The thing that impressed us was the number of people that came from various places to help. I had a son from Salt Lake City and his family came and helped. I had a son from Billings, Montana, that came down and helped. Many other people helped. We should be grateful, which we are, for the consideration our friends and relatives and people in general who came in this valley to clean up.

AA: What impresses you about Rexburg and the surrounding countryside today a year after the flood?

DA: Its marvelous the improvements that have been made. As soon as we drove around, after we returned, we went out through different places: Sugar City, Salem, Wilford, and to our old home in North Salem, Hibbard and Burton. We looked at the damage that was done and now we look at it today. It's marvelous. We should be grateful to the government and the church for the assistance they have given us. Within hours after the flood, the church had provisions here to help those that were in need of help.

AA: Did you personally receive any help, along with the other people who lived here at the Golden Living Center, from the church or from the government immediately following the flood?

DA: We didn't need any.

AA: Did you have any dealings with the Bureau of Reclamation in submitting a claim?

DA: Yes, we submitted a claim for what we had lost as near as we could estimate. There were a few questions asked and we received our check.

AA: How long has it been since you received your check from the Bureau?

DA: Almost a year ago.

AA: I wanted to know if the Bureau took a long time in processing the claim, but apparently they didn't.

DA: No, it didn't seem like they were unreasonable at all.

AA: You were satisfied then with the way in which the Bureau handled your claim.

DA: Yes.

AA: Did you deal with any other government agency or with any other agency that was here to help out after the flood? Agencies like the Small Business Administration for example.

DA: No, only the insurance company on the automobile.

AA: How has the flood affected you? Has it changed your life; has it changed some attitudes that you may have had? Would you mind talking about that for a few minutes?

DA: I could blame that for aging a little. I'm getting lazier. I don't know how much we should blame the flood for that. I've taken advantage of that anyway.

AA: Do you feel that the flood and the cleanup operations, after the flood, had a detrimental emotional effect upon older people? I'm not talking about yourself, but older people in general.

DA: Yes, I know a number of friends whose homes were destroyed and the loss of a lifetime. It seemed to upset them very much. It has been difficult. Some of them haven't gotten back on their feet from the flood.

AA: I can see how a person who is 60, 70 or 75 years of age wouldn't be too eager to start over again. That would be a blow emotionally wouldn't it?

DA: Yes, it would. So many relics and valuables were lost that can't be replaced: pictures, history, genealogy.

AA: You have given me the impression that people here at the Golden Living Center were much better off as far as the flood was concerned than retired people who lived in their own homes.

DA: Yes, I believe that.

AA: Do you feel that the flood was the result of a divine punishment, a natural, or a man-made disaster? I have heard some people say they have felt that God was punishing the people by causing the dam to break. Do you believe that?

DA: No, I don't. I believe that was the error of man and we have to pay for our mistakes one way or another. Those engineers building a faulty dam was what caused that disaster.

AA: Would you say that God intervened after the dam broke to save people's lives?

DA: Yes. The community, as a whole, the cooperation of KID, and other means of getting information out to the people saved a good many lives. When people listened to the advise given, they were able to get to safety. There were only a few that happened to be fishing or in the Wilford area that didn't have much time.

AA: Do you feel that the Teton Disaster has changed the community of Rexburg. I'm not talking about physical changes like new homes and buildings, but psychological changes; changes that perhaps we can't see.

DA: I believe it has united the people of the valley. A good many of them, form their experiences, have been helped spiritually. How long that will last or how soon we will forget remains to be seen. At the present time, people of the valley that were in the flood are grateful for the help that was given them from outside various places and people. I would say, from a standpoint of people as a whole, that outside a few who are emotionally upset, the benefits outweigh the disaster.

AA: Is there anything else that you would like to say before we end the interview?

DA: I think there has already been too much said.

AA: Thank you, Mr. Archibald.