

THE STORY OF TAUTPHAUS PARK, THE SNAKE RIVER VALLEY IN 1882,
AND THE TOWN OF EAGLE ROCK – NOW IDAHO FALLS, IDAHO

Written by E. P. Henry

The Utah and Northern Railroad was still building northward into Montana. A Division had been established at Eagle Rock, and shops and roundhouse built, with cottages for workers nearby. The depot, with its platform for passengers and freight, its storeroom and agents office was in operation, and just across the track in front of the depot there sprang up a row of shacks, just as in a mining town, largely saloons, with the usual board walk in front of them. The railroad company built a large water tank, also just in front of the depot, with a steam pump down on the Snake River and a pipe line to the tank to keep it full of water. Pipe lines were also laid in the area to supply water for the cottages of workers.

A citizen of Eagle Rock and an employee of the railroad company was appointed by the railroad company to supervise this water supply. The name of this citizen was W. H. B. Crow -- They called him "Alphabet Crow". He homesteaded 160 acres of land just outside of the 160 acres homesteaded by Anderson Brothers, which was the town-site of Eagle Rock. "Eagle Rock" was an old ferry crossing some ten miles upstream where there was a tall rock in midstream on the top of which an eagle built her nest, so it was called "Eagle Rock Ferry."

When Mat Taylor built the bridge later across the narrow gash in the lava rock at the present site of Idaho Falls, the name Eagle Rock was transferred to the bridge crossing and the post office, and was the route of all travel north, until the railroad was built.

The railroad built, it did nothing to exploit the value of the country through which it ran, that they left to the frontiersmen, and the frontiersman in the Snake River Valley then saw no value in the land comprising that valley, it was a desert, any residence was on a stream of water. There were five on the Blackfoot River in the year 1882, and five on the Willow Creek, and four on the Snake River where it enters the valley. Otherwise, the valley was wholly uninhabited, save the ranch of S. F. Taylor on the Taylor Creek, some seven miles southeast of Eagle Rock. Any Irish potatoes we ate were shipped up from Utah.

The reason why the old residents of the valley did not raise potatoes and other vegetables in a garden about their homes was that the growing season in that epoch was too short; often there was a frost every month of that season, and also because they knew nothing about irrigation; so they planted nothing, not even a tree.

This era of short growing season in all this area is not generally known today; let us hope that it does not return.

It was about 1878 that two Smith brothers took up a homestead, each on the Snake River just where it entered the valley. They dug a ditch from the river to their homesteads. Before it was completed, Anderson Brothers of Eagle Rock proposed to them to enlarge it and give them the water they needed for the right to the head gate site. This was agreed to, and Anderson Brothers built a considerable canal down to Willow Creek, where they filed on a desert claim of 640 acres. They later fenced it, but did nothing to demonstrate and prove the value of the land.

Such was the Great Snake River Valley in 1882, so also in the year 1885, but in that year a stranger came to town.

He was medium as to build, wore a black beard, had a prominent roman nose, a broad receding forehead, heavy black eyebrows, and black piercing eyes. He looked neither to the right or left as he walked briskly along the board walk across the track, but others turned to look at him. He seemed wholly preoccupied.

It was said that he came from up Montana way, and had lots of money, but it was his looks and confident manner that may have prompted this suspicion.

He introduced himself to Dick Chamberlain, but Dick would not attempt to repeat his name. "Damnedest name I ever heard," he said. "Took up a lot of land south of here."

The records show that the land was filed on in 1884, so he was now going to do something, but what?

Well, shortly after that tools began to gather on a spot in the desert just south of here. Tools that we Desert Rats had never seen before, huge scrapers, wheeled drags, a large corral, and lots of work stock, then a huge barn. A big stone bulkhead was started on the lower floor of the valley, just here at the foot of the mesa, leading up to the second floor of the general valley levels.

"What in Hell," muttered the Desert Rats as they rode by.

Then a house was quickly thrown up, no doubt to feed the work crew. That house was moved three times within the next month. Though a temporary structure, this was to be site of the home, and a picture that this man had in his mind, the previous sites did not harmonize with that picture in his mind, so, he moved it. One of the moves was to turn it around to face in another direction. Then with teams and scrapers he began scraping a basin in the upper valley, a huge basin, and just behind the masonry bulkhead slowly rising from the lower floor to the upper levels. The dirt taken from this basin was being placed in a levee all about it.

"What the Hell," again muttered the Desert Rat. He just had to ask.

"A lake," snapped the black-bearded, black-eyed man as he darted by.

"A lake?" muttered the Desert Rat, "And not a drop of water. This scout needs fixing."

A month or so later, a crew was digging a canal from Sand Creek toward the site of this lake. The Desert Rat knew Sand Creek, but evidently this man with a picture in his mind did not. For when his canal was nearly completed, all work ceased. Evidently the enterpriser had found out that Sand Creek would not afford the water he needed to materialize his picture.

Early the next spring a large crew started digging a canal from the Snake River itself. The headgate site was about eight miles above Eagle Rock. This was named the "Idaho Canal."

We doubt whether this man thought much about enriching the valley as a whole by this enterprise. Its course lay directly toward the lake already built and awaiting the filling of it with water. The overflow, the fall, and the boon of that fall, and the babble of cascading waters---Water! Water! Cold, clear water from the Snake River of that day--- This was the Oratorio that was dominant in the picture, and it's setting here in the desert of the Great Snake River Valley, that drove this strange man onto it's realization.

An escape for all this water had to be insured. So the Idaho Canal had to be extended on down the valley and along the lower floor to be gobbled up later by settlers, as they screamed for more water. All secondary, however, in the mind of this unusual enterpriser, to the picture that he so yearned to realize.

At last the head gates were raised and the water, water! water! rushed through and into and down this canal. It reached this lake, built two years before, and as designed, the water fell picturesquely into the basin about to be a lake of water. It slowly filled full, then flowed over the top of that huge bulkhead, designed for this over-flow - soon there was a boom of water here. Then water! water! began flowing over a wall some distance to the south. From this overflow to the canal just below was a rapidly falling channel with the irregular cemented floor rocks extending upward here and there to insure a babble of water- to drop soon upon the floor of the canal prepared to receive it without wear and tear, as was the floor under fall of water.

When so tested, no part of this man's construction failed, save that later, winds blowing over the waters of the lake created waves enough to eat into the dirt of the levee about the lake on the northeast side, necessitating a rather expensive rip-rapping.

The "picture" was now approaching realization. But canals and irrigating ditches had to be built, and land leveled for irrigation - This done, trees were planted - here again in harmony with that picture - A row of trees on either side of the driveway into the

grounds, over a rustic bridge, curving and ascending gracefully to the level of the home, and the large stable, in front of which was a small lake of clear water for stock, geese, and ducks.

It was we Desert Rats who were most startled by this picture in our old familiar desert, where we had looked along the surface of the ground in the summer and could see the heat shimmer, as our lips parched and cracked, and the mucus in our nostrils dried and clung like bark inside, and the mucus back in our throats also dried and fell into our mouths like a scab to be spit out, as the skin of our necks and faces crinkled and scaled off.

Lakes of water were visible off yonder - the mirage - proof positive that your outlook was that of The Desert. The Butte, just south of Eagle Rock, was distorted. Little columns of dust arose yonder and yonder, and pirouetted skyward, than vanished. At times the mountains over Lost River way were three stories high - the base, a belt of sky, another section of mountain, then another belt of sky, with the tip of the mountain top over all. Yes, this area met with all the specifications of a desert - but - How surely had C. C. Tautphaus violated them just here --- For that was the name of this enterpriser, Charles C. Tautphaus.

It was a year or more before his name was generally known. The Desert Rats gave it up and called him "Old Top", and "Tops", he was too, as a daring and fearless enterpriser.

Early in the history of Snake River Valley, this spot was dubbed - "Tautphaus Park". Not only did the Desert Rats marvel, who had classed the land as utterly worthless, but all in the area visited it, and any strangers visiting the area were shown "Tautphaus Park". It became noted. Picnics were held there. People from far away places visited it, and of course, its expression there surrounded by desert waste, was far more emphatic.

"If this can be here, then the like can be done anywhere in this desert with water - water - water!"

So it is that the people of the now vigorous city of Idaho Falls may never know the debt they owe to this early enterpriser, who first demonstrated and proved so conclusively, the value of a "Desert".

The city of Idaho Falls eventually bought this property for a park, and called it the "City Park". Later the Desert Rats protested, knowing so well this bit of early history, and they petitioned the Council under Ed Fanning a Mayor, to give back to this plot its old name - "Tautphaus Park". The petition was granted, and the old Desert Rats bowed their heads, and muttered "Amen, and may it remain so forever."

Charles C. Tautphaus lingered here for a year or two, enjoying the "picture" he had created, when restlessness prompted search for other conquests.

He contracted to build the Brunneau Canal, an enterprise further south in the state of Idaho. The enterprise failed, and C. C. Tautphaus was left "holding the bag" to the tune of eighty thousand dollars. He later made two trips to Alaska, again searching conquests, but finding none. Still later he made a trip to Tonopah, Nevada, and there, among strangers, he contracted pneumonia, and died. His body was sent home, and he was buried just over the fence that separates the scene of his arduous labors, from the Idaho Falls cemetery. Maybe the lot was selected for that very reason -- Visit it, now and then, good people of Idaho Falls, and tell your children this story of "Tautphaus Park".

A grandson of C. C. Tautphaus, now living in California, became curious about the history of his grandfather, whom he resembled, and searched among the archives of the San Francisco Library. He found the ancient coat of arms of the Tautphaus family - the very unusual name tending to verify this record. He had an artist copy it, and he can furnish a photograph, in color, of the painting.

This may still more justify the people of Idaho Falls in cherishing this bit of early history of their now prosperous valley, in the naming of their park "Tautphaus Park".

The family of this unusual man consisted of his wife and five daughters, all of whom labored with him to help him realize "His picture". His wife now sleeps beside him in the Tautphaus lot in the Idaho Falls Cemetery.

She, too, was unusually daring, for as a girl of six-teen, she and a young sister sailed from New York around the horn to San Francisco, California. Not long after their arrival she met and married C. C. Tautphaus, and there the five daughters were born.

Of course there are none now who recall how graciously she entertained the few ladies of that day in Eagle Rock, but all of them longed to bathe in that first Lake in the Snake River valley desert - Not a mirage - but a lake of water, proven such by the boom of a fall of water and the babble of a cascade - the symphony of waters deserved by this enterpriser to prove the conquest of - The Desert.

E. P. Henry

One of the "Desert Rats"

(A son-in-law of C. C. Tautphaus)