

Crow Butte

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The following is from a report done by the Bonneville Power Authority and sent to Dean Bass for his review. This report was prepared in the early 1970's soon after the old family homestead on the Columbia River was flooded by the John Day Dam reservoir. In 1977 a state park, Crow Butte, was opened in the area. The park was closed in late 2002 due to budget problems and reopened by private parties in 2005.

Historic Overview:

Originally Crow Butte was part of the mainland, but it became an island in 1968 when the John Day Dam reservoir was filled to create Lake Umatilla. The Government Land Office surveyed this area in the late 1860's, but these maps indicate that no white settlers were living in the immediate vicinity of the proposed BPA project at that time. In fact, it was not until nearly another forty years had passed before the first claims were filed in this part of Artesian Coulee.

First to come was a group of men who recorded "petroleum oil and gas claims" in June 1902 in Sec. 3 and Sec 4, T4N, R24E, WM, but no actual discoveries were made. These claims later were "wholly abandoned" and no annual assessment work for holding title was ever done.

Among the first permanent settlers on record to establish a home in this area was William F. Crowe, a bachelor from Walla Walla. Crowe, after who Crow (note the missing "e") Butte is named, arrived at least by 1905, and possibly earlier. He paid \$1.25 per acre for the 160 acres of his Desert Land Claim, which included government Lots 1, 2, 3, and 4 (also designated respectively as NE NE, NW NE, NE NW, and NW NW), Sec. 4, T4N, R24E, WM. Most of this property is now inundated by the John Day Dam reservoir. A large portion of historic site 45 BN 329 is situated at the shoreline in the extreme southwest corner of Crowe's claim (extreme southwest corner of Lot 4). These historic relics are not the remains of Crowe's residence, but probably instead were mostly from the Bass farm, as will be explained later. The Crowe home stood about one mile northeast of the historic site 45 BN 239.

Crowe made final payment for the property to the Government Land Office in Walla Walla on January 19, 1906. Also in the same year, the Spokane, Portland and Seattle Railroad (commonly referred to as the S.P.& S.) paid Crowe \$1,730 for a 100' strip of land across the northern portion of Lots 2, 3, and 4, and another \$270 for rights to use material on Crowe's property in the construction of the railroad right of way. The track was laid soon after. The S.P. & S. was jointly financed and built by the Northern Pacific and the Great Northern. The expensive S.P. & S. line from Portland to Spokane was completed at a golden spike ceremony near Stevenson, Washington, in the Columbia River gorge, on March 11, 1908. Immediately a competitive battle began between the S.P. & S. and the Union Pacific, which also had a line up the Columbia, but on the south bank. The S. P. & S. survived the great disputes of the railroad tycoons and remained a separate entity until combined into the Burlington Northern system in 1970. The track in the Crow Butte vicinity was removed to higher ground prior to the filling of the John

Day Dam reservoir. The old abandoned S.P. & S. bed still can be seen in the northern part of Lot 4 (and also in adjacent Lot 1, Sec. 5, T4N, R24E, WM) when the reservoir water line is down. Also visible are traces of where a road, running north-south, crossed the tracks (on the boundary line between Sec. 4 and Sec. 5, T4N, R24E, WM). More about this road will be mentioned later.

The Crowe house was of concrete block construction, with a basement. G. W. Bennett and his wife, who was related to Crowe, also lived in the residence. Frank Crowe, a lawyer in the Walla Walla region, also stayed here for a while. The Bennetts were residing here in the 1920's, but moved to Corvallis, Oregon, in the early 1930's. The house stood abandoned for many years and the site is now underwater.

In August 1904 another unmarried man, John P. McCausland, made final payment on government Lots 1 and 2 (also designated respectively as NE NE and NW NE), Sec. 5, T4N, R24E, WM. McCausland may have been, in fact, in this locality before Crowe.

This property was directly west of Lot 4 of Crowe's claim. McCausland acquired the 79.92 acres according to the provisions of the Desert Land Act and paid the same price (\$1.25 per acre) as did Crowe for his lands. Most of this property is now inundated by the John Day Dam reservoir, and the causeway to Crow Butte Island crosses the northwest part of McCausland's Lot 1. A portion of historic site 45 BN 239 is located at the shoreline in the southeast corner of Lot 1.

In 1906 the S. P. & S. acquired the right to lay track across the northern part of McCausland's Lots 1 and 2. As mentioned earlier, vestiges of the railroad bed can still be seen in the northern portion of Lot 1 when the water is down. In January 1909 McCausland sold this property to Frank L. Bass for \$5,000. Included in the sale was all that portion of Lots 1 and 2 lying south of the S. P. & S. right of way. The Bass family occupied this site for many years, and most or all of the historic remains at 45 BN 239 probably are attributable to this farm. More about the Bass property will be said later.

McCausland had applied for other lands in the vicinity by Homestead entry in April 1906. For "the sum of Nine dollars and no cents, being the balance of payment required by law," he acquired the property directly south of his Desert Land Claim and of Crowe's Lots 3 and 4. McCausland's 160 acre Homestead claim included the S1/2 of the NW1/4, Sec. 4, and the S1/2 of the NE1/4, Sec. 5, all of which is in T4N, R24E, WM. A part of the eastern end of this property has been inundated by the John Day Dam reservoir, but the remainder still is exposed. The southerly portion of historic site 45 BN 239 is located on this property where the north-south boundary line between Sec. 4 and Sec. 5 transects the shoreline. Six months after filing the entry, McCausland sold this land for \$2,000 to William M. Van Patten. Apparently the property passed into other ownership over the years, but little or no construction was done on it. After selling the land, McCausland, of course, still retained his Desert Land Claim, which he sold to Bass in 1909. After this time McCausland apparently abandoned the immediate environs. The McCauslands reportedly occupied a farm about one to one and one-half miles west of historic site 45 BN 239 for some years.

Another early nearby settler was Ed Mulroni (spelling ?), who lived about one mile east and one-quarter mile south of historic site 45 BN 239. He was a single man and a farmer, who probably

passed away by the 1940's. Reportedly his house was long gone by the early 1940's. Other settlers acquired lands along this portion of the Columbia River, but they are not mentioned here because they were well outside of the proposed BPA project boundaries.

The Crowe's, Bass's, Mulroni, and other area residents relied on an artesian well, with a constant water temperature of 72 degrees and an output of about 800 gallons per minute, to irrigate crops and supply other water needs. From this circumstance, the lowland immediately north and northwest of Crow Butte was named Artesian Coulee. The springs, now covered by the reservoir, were located one mile west of historic site 45 BN 239 in the NW NW, Sec. 5, T4N, R24E, WM. Flumes, pipes, and ditches carried water to the croplands located in the vicinity of the proposed BPA project. Most, or all, of these irrigation ditches and canals now are inundated by the reservoir.

By 1908 Crowe and others established a promotional scheme called the Warm Water Irrigated Tracts and divided their property into several dozen smaller lots, averaging about ten to twenty acres apiece. The northeastern part of historic site 45 BN 239 is included in Lot 25 of the Warm Water Irrigated Tracts. Lot 25 is in the south half of Crowe's original government Lot 4 (NW NW, Sec. 4, T4N, R24E, WM) and is larger than most of the other tracts. The proposed BPA line will cross over the middle of the western half of Lot 25, all of which is now inundated except for the extreme southwest corner where historic site 45 BN 239 is situated. None of the other Warm Water Irrigated Tracts adjoined the historic site. By the late 1910's, the tract development proved unsuccessful, although the small community of original settlers continued to thrive.

The local residents provided land for a school in 1917, when they sold Lot 25 for use as School District No. 26, of Benton County. Selling the property were William and Rose Van Patten, George and Maude Barnett, and William F. Crowe, all of whom had an interest in the land as a result of their involvement in the Warm Water Irrigated Tracts scheme. An approximately 80' x 35' schoolhouse, painted red, was erected between one-quarter and one-half mile northeast of historic site 45 BN 239. The interior was divided into rooms and the teacher resided in the building until the late 1920's or a few years later when a small one-story, unpainted cottage was constructed 200' to the east. It is known that teacher Roy Duggan and his family lived in the schoolhouse in the mid 1920's, staying about six years. Trenna Gertz, a widow, came after Duggan and taught for two or three years around 1930. The school operated until the late 1930's, when the local children began being bussed to school in Paterson. The old schoolhouse stood south of the road, which came eastward about one-quarter mile from the Bass home. The school yard bordered this road.

This historic debris at site 45 BN 239 appear to be from the Bass farm, although it is possible, but less likely, that much of this historic debris was refuse discarded from some of the other occupational sites mentioned earlier and/or that these remains were bulldozed here during the clearing of the reservoir prior to flooding. It seems most likely though that these historic items are from a stock barn erected by Frank L. Bass at the same time that he constructed his house in about 1908-09. Reportedly the stock barn stood at or a short distance northwest of 45 BN 239. Most of this debris could have been discarded while the Bass's occupied the farm. The approximately 40' x 30' building housed an average of seven milk cows, plus horses, and farming and ranching equipment dating from the 1910-40 period. The frame structure, with a one-way

sloping roof, faced east and was still standing after World War II. The barn stood in the open with no trees nearby. This type of structure, of course, was a typical feature of the early twentieth-century farms and ranches that once dotted the eastern Washington countryside. Many of these have accidentally burned, or have been intentionally removed because of dam building projects or by the process of consolidating smaller farms into larger operations. Furthermore, with the passage of work animals from the farming scene, unneeded stock barns most everywhere have been neglected and are disappearing at a fast rate.

The approximately 40' x 20' Bass house stood several hundred feet north of the barn. The one-story structure had board siding left natural, a stone foundation, and a shingle roof. When Bass moved in, his family included his wife, a daughter, and a son. Later two more daughters were born here and a son, Dean Bass, now of Yakima. The family burned driftwood and railroad ties for firewood in this generally treeless region, and on the back porch they installed a pump (500 gallons per minute) to supplement the water acquired from the artesian springs. A swarm of bees lived in the walls and at regular intervals the Bass's removed a few boards to get the honey.

The house stood 50' west of the north-south road, which crossed the S. P. & S. tracks several hundred feet to the north. Many locust, maple, and poplar trees lined the road, which made a 90 degree turn to the east in front of the Bass house and proceeded due east to the schoolhouse. An alfalfa field was in front of the Bass home, and other trees lined the road in the vicinity of the school. Bass sold hay to local sheep men, but he was not directly involved in raising sheep. A wood-frame garage, only large enough to hold a Model T Ford, stood a short distance north of the house, and a chicken house stood a couple of hundred feet farther north.

The small community in Artesian Coulee prospered through the 1920's, but the depression years of the 1930's proved trying, as it did in all farming areas throughout the country. Still, the Bass family was able to hold on until World War II, at which time the roads into the area were closed by the military when a bombing range was established in the Horse Heaven Hills. With no access in or out, the Bass family was forced to leave in the fall of 1943 and resettle elsewhere.

The house stood abandoned until 1946, when Robert and Lois Crowe moved in. They stayed two years, had a baby there, and then moved elsewhere. The home probably never was occupied again. The small farming community was never re-established and the abandoned buildings were destroyed prior to the raising of the John Day Dam reservoir.