46. NPIC CHRONICLE III - Halligan Reservoir Beginnings

Halligan Reservoir doesn't give up its secrets readily. The fragmented legend that I gathered over the years, before sitting down to write about it, went something like this: The dam was supposed to be bigger, but NPIC ran out of money building the foundation, so they raised some more money and finished a smaller cock-eyed dam in 1910. Ever since, there have been dreams of making it larger. Correct as far as it goes, but the real story is a bigger can of worms.

Halligan Dam (**B** opposite) is a *thin-arch reinforced concrete dam* finished May 28, 1910.[1] This was a seat-of-the-pants undertaking, not untypical of irrigation engineering and construction experiments being conducted all over the West around the turn of the century.

It is useful to bear in mind that the crop of engineers and contractors who cut their teeth on these haphazard projects, like Halligan, paved the way for the next generation that built monster dams to exacting standards and specifications – think *Hoover* and *Grand Coulee*.

When you consider the history of the project (coming up), it is astounding that this structure is still serving and in good condition after 110 years.

Reading through the Board of Directors minutes from 1901 through 1909 reveals a blotchy narrative that resembles a silent film of the same era. Characters and facts fade in and out of focus as the movie stutters and sputters along (over budget and under produced).

In 1901, when the current company was formed, it had a past. So, when *Halligan Lake* suddenly emerges without preamble or introduction in the company minutes of Fall 1906, I assume it must have originated with one of its half-dozen short lived predecessors. Other notable NPIC assets pop up out of nowhere in the record of those early years also, like *Fossil Creek Reservoir, #15 Reservoir, the Stonewall Flume* and *'New' Tunnel* (more later).

I have already declared Francis Carter-Cotton NPIC's godfather (Chapter 44). On circumstantial evidence, I'm going to declare Francis C. Grable (1852-1944) to be NPIC's wayward father and assume that assets yet in name only were likely his babies – put up for adoption, so to speak.

In 1896, F. C. Grable and his investors acquired what was to become NPIC from Traveler's Insurance Company and soon lost it again. In 1901, the original NPIC investors bought the company for $65,000 from Thomas Bradley (1872-1903), a Philadelphia lawyer.

F. C. Grable shows up regularly in the minutes, running around making deals (or not) on behalf of NPIC. F. C.'s younger brother, Sherman C. Grable (1864-1946) was employed by the Board as the company's Manager. Both brothers became NPIC stockholders.

On August 16, 1906, Littell Snively (1878-1951), engineer for NPIC, began a survey of Halligan Reservoir (opposite). Later that year, it was filed both in the Larimer County records and with the Colorado State Engineer. The survey shows a reservoir 416 acres in extent with an oddball hybrid dam design[2] combining an arch dam with a gravity extension ending with a spillway on a questionable slope. The arch portion of the dam is situated catawampus in the canyon mouth just as it is today (more on this later). The projected capacity of the reservoir is 20,700 acre feet at 110 feet of depth with 10 feet of freeboard.

A detail of interest called out in the survey shows 'Mrs. Derby's house' (**A** opposite) and a 'footbridge' across the river just above the confluence of Meadow Creek and the North Fork – looks like 'flash flood central' to me. Mrs. M. E. Derby (____-1913) purchased S33, T11N, R71W from the Union Pacific. She was the niece and housekeeper of Archibald R. Milne (1824-1907), who came from England in the early 1870s and homesteaded 160 acres on the site of Halligan Dam, where he lived until 1907. Milne's house was one of the sites of the Alford Post Office, where Mrs. Darby is shown as the postmistress in 1895.

Daniel M. Halligan (1830-1899) came from Ireland in 1847, took part in the California Gold Rush, married Mary Roberts[3], and homesteaded the NE1/4, S32, T11N, R71W, now DOW land at the estuary of Halligan Reservoir, where they grew potatoes for market.

At the northeast corner of the proposed reservoir are the *Beaver Lode Mine* and the *Humming Bird Mine* (**C** and **D** opposite), both located on US Government land, later to be homesteaded by Jimmy Andrews' mother, Julia (Chapter 25).[4]

Thanks to D.L Roberts, Zach Thode and Chris Vandemoer for their help with this chapter.

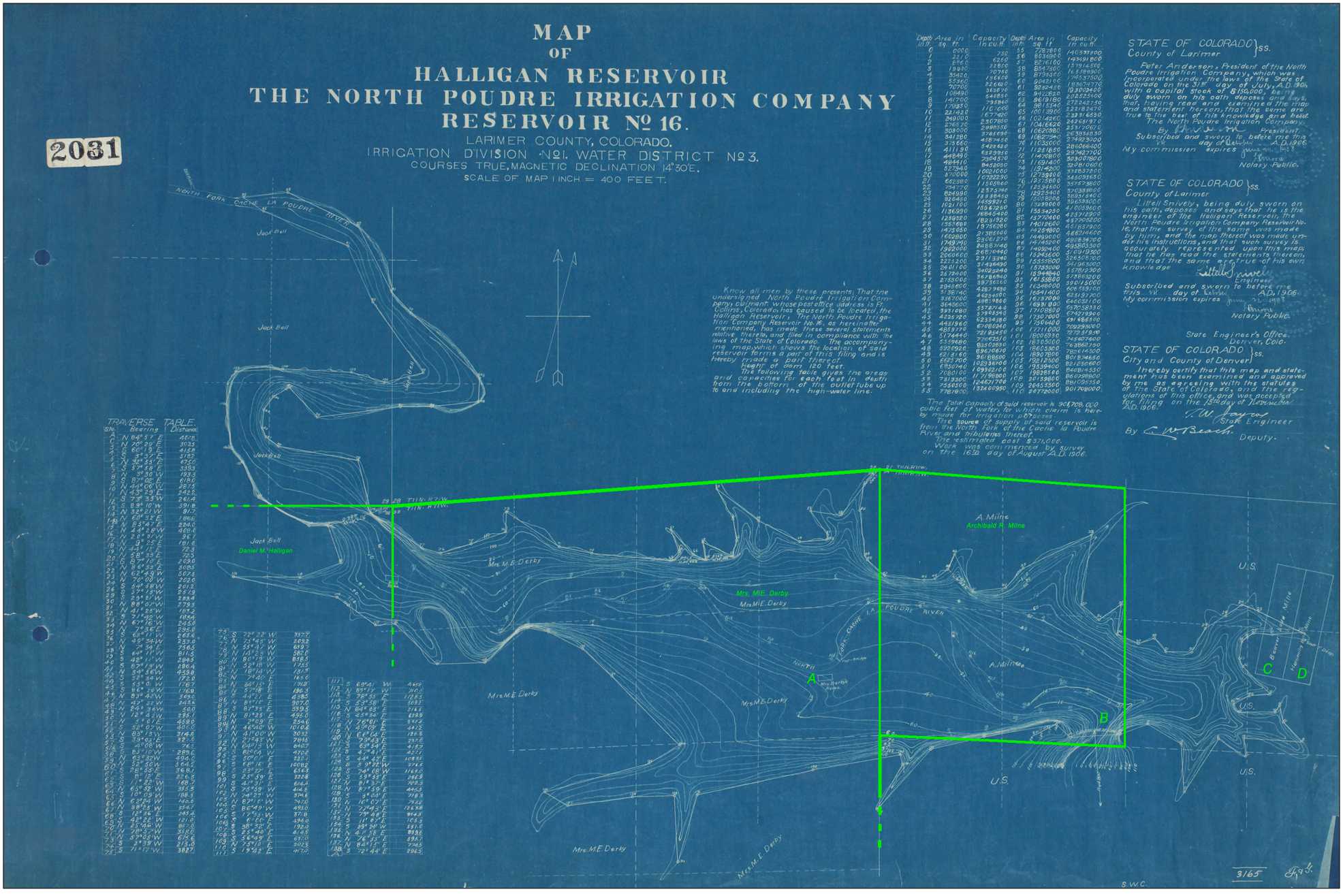
Mary Roberts Halligan (courtesy of D.L. Roberts)

[1] More-or-less at the height of spring run-off. That in itself may have been a cliffhanger.

[2] Near the turn of the century, almost everyone involved in the design and construction of dams knew enough to be pretty dangerous by today's standards. The original design and siting of Halligan dam is a case in point. It seems unnecessarily awkward and complicated – so much so that, a century after first proposed, what could have been a simple expansion, remained 'dead in a ditch' until recently. The expansion project has been showing signs of life lately, at least enough to shoot itself in the foot (more later).

[3] Mary Roberts (1839-1920) was R. O. Roberts' sister, Evan Roberts' great-aunt (photo above).

[4] Jimmy Andrews, who likely directed his mother's homestead claim location, developed an enthusiastic interest in mining (Chapter 27). Suppose there's a connection?



https://lib2.colostate.edu/archives/findingaids/water/wnpr.html#series1