In the schoolyard across from the post office, in Almo in Cassia County, a granite monument marks the single-most murderous ambush in the history of the overland trails. "ALMO, IDAHO," the monument reads, "DEDICATED TO THOSE WHO LOST THEIR LIVES IN A MOST HORRIBLE INDIAN MASSACRE 1861." Historians say that here below City of Rocks an attack began Indian-fashion with firebrands and hair-raising yells. Three hundred pioneers defended sixty wagons for three punishing days. Cut off from Almo Creek and
desperate for water in the sun-beaten wagon enclosure, the defenders dug makeshift wells. Five pioneers escaped. One courageous young woman took a goat trail to safety at Brigham City, Utah, fleeing one hundred miles. Another scrambled on hands and knees while carrying, in her teeth, an infant suspended by swaddling clothes. Rescuers found charred wagons and 295 bodies. Tragically, wrote homesteader-historian Charles Shirley Walgamott, who heard the details from a Utah trapper, “the bodies of the unfortunate people were buried in the wells which they had dug.”

Historians call it the worst disaster in Idaho history. “Red barbarity ... perhaps the most horrible and wanton slaughter of all,” wrote Merrill D. Beal of Pocatello in a scholarly book on the pioneers. Larry Quinn’s 1996 A History of the Magic Valley upped the body count to 300 and added: “The attackers took scalps and mutilated the bodies of men, women, and children.” Marauders fresh from the kill then terrorized northern Utah with, according to Quinn, “scalps raised on poles and hung from bridles.” Here, surely, was carnage crimson enough to quell revisionist sobbing over the fate of the dispossessed. If only the U.S. Indian Service had filed a report. If only a survivor had published a memoir. If only Salt Lake’s Deseret News or any other frontier paper, all hungry for massacre stories, had mentioned the slaughter of 295 emigrants at Almo Creek. None did.

No paper reported the massacre because it never happened. Not in Cassia County. Not anywhere on the emigrant trails.

Like much good fiction, however, the massacre story stems from seeds of historical truth. It was true, for example, that Cassia County was the homeland of a fierce Shoshone named Pocatello who sacked wagons near American Falls. It was true, moreover, that Almo cowered below Silent City of Rocks—a stage station on the Kelton Road in the 1860s and as bad a badland as any on the overland trails. Here in 1860 a bold attacker in war paint had hijacked an entire wagon. The bandit, said the Deseret News, had “fine boots ... a pair of pants ... [and] spoke to the cattle in good English.”

Undoubtedly a renegade white. As many as eight emigrants may have died within fifty miles of the Silent City from 1860 to 1862. But Lee’s surrender to Grant sent westward a mounted wave that established regional camps to defend the overland trails. Pocatello was an old man long retired on the Fort Hall
Reservation by the time Latter-day Saints from Toole, Utah, homesteaded near Oakley Station in 1879.

Utah's "'79ers" also reached the flowering sea at the base of the Sawtooths, the Camas Prairie. Here a decade before, the Treaty of Fort Bridger had surrendered the camas lands as a refuge for the Idaho Bannock. In May 1878, Bannock hunters returned to the refuge to find meadows trampled by emigrant livestock. Worse, the succulent camas had been rooted by wallowing hogs.

"Starvation is staring them in the face," wrote General George Crook, a sympathetic Indian fighter. Already a chief called Buffalo Horn had bolted the Fort Hall reservation with 200-some rifled warriors. In late May the rebels swept west—sinking ferries, sacking homesteads, pillaging King Hill. On June 8, at South Mountain below Silver City, Buffalo Horn died in a hail of bullets as he charged entrenched volunteers. The Bannock regrouped and fled to the Oregon desert. General Oliver O. Howard gave chase with 800 troops. In August 1878, their mountain hideout betrayed by rival Chief Umapine of the Oregon Umatilla, the rebel commanders were ambushed under the army's white flag of truce. "Such an act of treachery toward their own race remains without a known parallel," wrote R. Ross Arnold, a historian of the Indian wars.
By then the Bannock homeland was wide-open cattle country. In 1872, A. J. "Barley" Harrell reached the Nevada-Idaho line with more than 3,000 Texas longhorns. Eight years later the Idaho Tri-Weekly Statesman counted 170,000 head in and around Rock Creek. From 1870 to 1880, meanwhile, Idaho's sheep population jumped from 1,021 to 27,326. Freight and stage entrepreneur John Hailey herded a large flock from Boise through the Camas Prairie to Big Wood River where, in 1881, he platted the town that still bears his name. Another visionary and Idaho place-name was sheepman Frank Gooding. A founder of the Idaho Wool Growers Association, Gooding, with brothers Fred and Thomas, imported a meaty breed of Kentucky merino that thrived on the north-side steppe. "There is a fine market and good outlet for anything that can be raised," said a north-side booster in 1885. Here "a poor man with little means but plenty of spirit and 'go-aheadativeness' soon surrounds himself with all the comforts of life."

The most marginal Idaho farmland required the tallest of tales. No matter the killing frost or grasshopper infestations. No matter the crickets that followed the 'hoppers to finish off drought-stricken crops. Idaho was "bright and warm" and "conducive to a cheerful and hopeful feeling which is a great aid in overcoming disease," wrote Robert Strahorn, a newsman for the Union Pacific who headed its publicity bureau.

Fables were communal identity. Common purpose. Shared hope. The Union Pacific told farmers that "grains, vegetables and fruit [would] grow in profusion" in barrens of wind-swept sagebrush. "Put money into commercial ventures, real estate, mines or live stock" because, said an Idaho booster, "heavy immigration will enhance the value of such property to a degree not now possible to comprehend." In 1885 the territorial comptroller told the story of Squire Abbott, a Camas Prairie farmer. An acre of Abbott's potatoes yielded 250 bushels without irrigation. A pound of Abbott's seed produced one hundred pounds of wheat. Another story of magical landscapes had a New England man in a field of melon boulders. Having paid a ridiculous $200,000 for 200 untillable acres, the New Englander turned over a boulder to find a highwayman's stolen strongbox with $125,000 in
gold. A month later, while drilling a well east of Shoshone, the man sunk a shaft into an open chamber. Remarkably he had discovered the golden center of the Lost McElmore Mine.

To lure the Union Pacific through snowdrifts and melon boulders, the tales had to be tall. After 1869 the railroad giant had stalled at Ogden, Utah. Exhausted and scandal-ridden, the company languished until 1874 when investors handed the throttle to Jay Gould of New York. Gould, a self-made railroad baron who fancied himself “the most hated man in America,” incorporated the Oregon Short Line as a subsidiary of the Union Pacific. Racing west from Granger, Wyoming, and spanning the Snake four times en route to a Portland connection at Huntington, Oregon, the Short Line added more than 600 miles to the Union Pacific system from 1881 to 1884.

Sometime in February 1883 the valley’s first iron horse snorted past shanty tents in a place called Junction City. Locals hoping for tourists renamed the tent city Shoshone. Here Idaho gained railroading fame for beer conveniently chilled in nearby Shoshone Ice Caves. Famed also for gunfights and brawls, Shoshone City boasted a graveyard in which every headstone but one, according to Idaho legend, marked some kind of violent death. “Ten to fifteen arrests per day were common,” wrote Carrie Strahorn, wife of newsman Robert. Gunmen stood guard over prisoners in an open hole. “Lot jumpers were numerous,” Strahorn continued, “bad whiskey was unlimited, dancehalls were on every corner, guns were fired at all hours, and the loud time from gambling dens was ever vibrating through the air.” Shoshone with its Rail Street saloons was Mecca for fargo players; also for
Comstockers from the Sierra Nevada, carpet-bag peddlers from “Bossy City,” Scandinavian maidens looking for farm work, fallen women from neighboring gold camps, Italians, Irish, Jews, Greeks, Chinese, Basque sheepherders, Mormon farm boys, frock-coated railroad attorneys, and a natty dresser named Pinkston who ran sin in the bawdy town.

Shoshone with its roundhouse and machine shops was also the transit point for the seventy-mile Wood River rail spur to Bellevue, Hailey, and Ketchum. Bellevue, called “Gate City,” boomed with more than 2,000 citizens, blacksmiths, a telegraph, and a Methodist church in 1883. Hailey, by then, had two breweries, a Cy Jacobs dry goods emporium, a Wells Fargo freight depot, a First National Bank of Idaho, and a Nelson-McClintock-Dorsey-Banfield “horse restaurant” where, said The Idaho Statesman, “your dumb brute may be fed or starved to order, just as you desire, and where carriages, buggies, phaetons and conveyances of any kind may be had for moonlight rides through the winding canyons.” Ketchum at the end of the line had a twenty-kilowatt, 125-volt dynamo-driven
smelter that electrified Idaho mining just two years after Thomas Edison patented the electric lightbulb.

Rails conquered distance without shaking myths of progress that legitimized dubious claims. Long after the silver played out and Gould lost control of the Oregon Short Line, the Middle Snake desert remained “this land of promise and fulfillment” where, said engineers, the resolute would “realize progress” and “lay the foundations of a great Commonwealth.” Through fables the children of those pioneers created what folklorist Barre Toelkin has called “a blood bond with the land.” Fables made a virtue of racial violence—increasingly a tragic but inevitable and therefore justifiable result of the frontier process, a cutthroat moral necessity in Idaho’s masculine West. Thus the predator-pioneer “clubbed the desert and made it grow” in a 1928 poem by Idaho’s Vardis Fisher. John Ryan of Camas County, Fisher’s contemporary, used the same kind of brutish folklore in a loosey autobiographical compendium of man-against-nature tales. Pioneers were “soldiers of peace” in Ryan’s regional memoir. “When the soldier of peace assaults the wilderness, no bugles sound the charge. The forests, the deserts, the wild beasts, the savages, the malaria, and fatigue are the foes who lurk to ambush him, and if against unequal odds he fails—as did Ryan’s own father and uncle when felled by tuberculosis—‘no volleys are fired above him. The pitiless world merely sponges his name from the slate.’” Likewise the Almo dead stayed nameless and nearly forgotten until, more than seven decades since the massacre that never happened, the town had a slate engraved. It was 1938, a bad year in Cassia County. Farmers wanted federal aid for Snake River water projects. The Oakley Chamber of Commerce thirsted for tourist dollars from national monument status for the nearby City of Rocks. Idaho’s Sons and Daughters of the Pioneers, meanwhile, sponsored historical essays, collected donations, and invited President Roosevelt and First Lady Eleanor to the wilds of Cassia County for a gala publicity stunt. FDR sent his regrets. But on the chill morning of October 17, 1938, the governor, a senator, a Union Pacific official, and the superintendent of Yellowstone National Park huddled among reporters in the schoolyard across from the post office in Almo where a six-foot memorial headstone—slate gray and shaped like the state of Idaho—was solemnly unveiled. Today the monument stands unaltered in tribute to magical landscapes, its story as telling as any in the lore of the homesteader’s West.
The 1861 Massacre at Almo Creek had yet to be invented when the first wave of placer miners swept through the Middle Snake. Historians estimate a high tide of 3,000 to 4,000 miners from 1870 to 1874. Rumor-driven, treaty blind, inherently violent, and predominately male, the fever was sudden but fleeting. Skittish mineral prices and ever more golden places guaranteed boom and bust. Unlike California, however, where mining ditches and flumes quickly became the infrastructure of irrigated agriculture, the rugged basin of the Middle Snake stayed sparsely populated. In 1890, the year of Idaho statehood, the U.S. Census found barely 3,000 souls dotted in ranching hamlets through a region larger than Belgium. Hailey-born poet Ezra Pound disparaged a cultural desert 5,000 miles above sea level “and five million or thousand miles from ANYwhere, let alone from civilization” long after mining’s decline.

No one knows for certain who found the first Snake River gold. Memoirist Charles Walgamott recalled that two off-duty stage drivers discovered placer gold deposits near Shoshone Falls in the fall of 1869. Boise’s The Idaho Statesman identified a prospector named Jamison. Said to have been an old associate of miner Elias D. Pierce who, a decade before, had ignited the Clearwater gold rush, Jamison panned the Snake River’s mouth. Working east, he found profitable placer deposits near the mouth of the Bruneau River. Farther east, the deposits increased. A placer bar near Shoshone Falls yielded gold “as high as $40 to the hand.”
As the high water declined in the late spring and summer of 1870, hundreds and eventually thousands rushed the Snake River placer deposits, prospecting from Hagerman to Clark's Ferry along a sixty-mile stretch. A camp named Shoshone rose a mile below the Twin Falls. Another called Drytown sat at the mouth of Dry Creek near present-day Murtaugh. Springtown, a third camp located a half mile west of the future site of the Hansen bridge, became the "metropolis of the river," the largest and most important settlement after the Chinese entered the canyon in 1871.

Unlike the gold in California and northern Idaho, which was often found as nuggets, the Snake River gold was very fine placer gold. Placer deposits of sand and gravel contain free or alluvial gold that has eroded out of bedrock veins or lodes, often in association with magnetic "black sands" containing high concentrations of iron oxide. Snake River gold originated in lode deposits near Yellowstone National Park. The Green River in Utah, which has its source in the same area, contains similar fine gold. To the miners trying to recover these minute particles, the gold flakes seemed like flour. During the recovery process, if the volume of water in the sluice or rocker was too forceful, the flour gold could float away. Mining engineer Thomas Egleston described the frustration experienced by a Snake River miner attempting to pan flour gold: "The heavier pieces of the black sand and flour gold remain persistently together. ... After the heavy black sand has been separated by the magnet, the fine particles of gold float. ... When, after much trouble, the surfaces are wetted and the gold is got under the water and onto the top of the sand, the first wave from the other side of the pan over the sand floats the gold again."
The gold appeared to be present in amounts that encouraged prospecting, but a typical ten-acre placer claim miners thought would pay $8 per day would in reality pay only $3. The gold was “so fine and light,” the Statesman reported, “that a miner is easily deceived.” During the 1870s, when gold fluctuated near $20 an ounce, a Snake River miner needed at least 1,000 colors or flour “particles” to equal one cent.

At Springtown, Shoshone Falls, and Salmon Falls, placer miners relied on rockers and sluices. They preferred working bars exposed by low water, as well as “skim bars” and “bench gravels” deposited right at or just above the high-water line. There were “bench placers” among boulders and gravel in elevated bars as high as one hundred feet above the Snake. At Bell Rapids and between the Upper and Lower Salmon Falls, the gold was erratically scattered in deposits rich enough to entice but mostly too covered with sand and gravel to mine profitably. New hydraulic and ground sluicing methods—filters made from burlap sacks, for example—recovered some additional gold. The richest Snake River deposits were located on Bonanza Bar west of American Falls and from Raft River to Salmon Falls. Miners worked these sites extensively from the 1870s well into the 1900s. Many of the claims along the Snake River were reopened when the Great Depression of the 1930s raised the price of gold from $20 to $35 an ounce.

The miners faced near-impossible hardships in spring and early summer when snowmelt flooded the Snake. Dispatches and letters published in the Boise, Silver City, and Corinne, Utah, newspapers expressed both the miners’ praise and condemnation for the Snake’s “vast and singular defile.” One miner’s angry complaint appeared in The Idaho Statesman: “For rattlesnakes, scorpions, mosquitoes, gnats, sagebrush and hot sand it is the
best country I have ever seen; but as for gold and a mining country, I cannot say as much, although there is scarcely a place on the river that a man cannot get a prospect, but not in sufficient quantity to pay.” Four others found time to play while waiting for placer season. Building “a very fine yacht” and sailing four to eight miles upriver, they marveled at “splendor almost indescribable,” at chasms “more formidable than walls surrounding ancient cities. The clear water gushing from the high banks forms falls along the north side, at the foot of which are great resorts for mountain trout.”

In the spring of 1870, as the season got under way, perhaps 400 to 500 miners persevered in crude encampments. The biggest settlements rose in the area around the Shoshone and Twin Falls. Gold deposits were especially large, reported the Statesman, “where the water is very swift and forms eddies, and by the reaction, deposits the precious metal on its banks. Several of these canyons are located near this vicinity [Shoshone Falls], one above here and one below Salmon Falls.” Supplies came from the Union Pacific depot at Kelton, Utah, via the Kelton Road that connected Salt Lake City with Boise. The Rock Creek Trading Post, five miles south of Hansen and about nine miles south of the canyon, was the area’s only store. Downstream claims at Salmon Falls were far removed from trading centers until Len Lewis, in 1873, took over Payne’s Ferry where Kelton Road crossed into the Hagerman Valley about two miles above Thousand Springs.

The first Snake River gold rush was short-lived. Daunted and discouraged by the end of the 1870 season, many miners returned to Boise, Corinne, and Silver City. An item from Silver City’s Owyhee Avalanche captured the prevailing frustration: “Bob Drummond got back from the Snake River mines this week, and says that he is Snake bitten enough to last him some time.”
Chinese miners, first allowed into the canyon in the spring of 1871, bought out the
claims abandoned by prospectors too impatient for the frustrating work of sluicing for flour
gold. Claims that paid less than three dollars a day did not profit white miners. Wrote one
discouraged prospector: "The Chinese are better adapted to this sort
of mining and there is room for 500 of them. Therefore, let
them come. They can work in peace."

The Chinese invested not only money but also
intensive labor, a resource they had in abundance.
"Invariably, the Chinese substituted labor for machin­
ery," wrote historian Randall Rohe. In 1857, the Alta
California reported that "many a claim, abandoned in
despair on previous occasions by the impatient
American miner, will be made to pay handsome
wages by these celestial gold hunters." Labor-intensive
mining gave Chinese companies a temporary monop­
olly in many places.

Archaeological evidence indicates
that Chinese miners worked
claims throughout the
canyons above Salmon Falls. A
deed rolled into a can of baking
powder—
and fortu­
itously dis­
covered below
Twin Falls.

Little Falls
This is to certify that I have this day
bargained and sold to Ah Man Mang the
claim known as the Bledsoe claim together
with all tools thereon also ((1) Blacksmith
shop & coppers also (700) feet timber. Said
claim by illegible assessor at the Little Falls
and illegible to the claim known as Tong Toek Tang claim. The above is held by
said company for wages due them from R.
Bledsoe.

They are to have [illegible] to hold all
entire line [illegible] is made. The assess­
ment due said company
is twelve hundred and forty two and 50/100
dollars.

Witness
G. Ramsey R [?] Bledsoe
Wm R. Barlow

Falls more than a
century after the gold
rush—documented the Tung Toek
Tong company's November 11, 1871,
purchase of Relf Bledsoe's claim at a place.
called "Little Falls" (probably Twin Falls). The sale turned the claim over to the Chinese in lieu of wages, implying Bledsoe had employed laborers from the Tung Toek Tong during the sum-

mer and fall of 1871. Rather than pay the Chinese with gold dust, Bledsoe simply gave them his claim and all the related equipment. Tung Toek Tong most likely referred to one of the fraternal organizations the Chinese formed in those days. The Chinese came to America from Canton on the Pearl River Delta in eastern Guangdong Province near Hong Kong. Most were laborers from villages and farms, but well-educated merchants came too. Their high degree of "business sagacity" helped immensely in the achievement of business success on the American frontier.

A complex network known as the Six Companies connected the Chinese communities scattered across the West with the homeland. The Six Companies was a powerful mercantile organization that represented Chinese from the districts of Guangdong Province. Characterized as clannish, the Cantonese merchants automatically had membership in one of the Six Companies as well as in several tongs. Tongs helped the Chinese preserve their cul-

William Doc Hisom, left, and his partner William White worked sluice boxes along the Middle Snake from about 1906 to 1913. Right: Yee-Hi, in suit, sits with an unidentified tough in Blackfoot, Idaho. Inset: an imported opium tin, about 1880. Opium-based patent medicines were common in the gold miners’ West.
ture in a foreign land, and merchants belonged to at least one clan tong, a secret-society tong for protection, and any number of benevolent tong
groups. The well-developed mercantile network of the Six Companies and access to the Snake River placers provided by the Kelton Road made it possible for Chinese miners to maintain contact with Guangdong. Merchants such as Ah Mon Mong, named in the Bledsoe deed, kept the Chinese supplied with a variety of durable and practical items such as ceramic wares and foodstuffs imported from Guangzhou. They also brought in opium.

Smoking opium was once commonplace and perfectly legal in southern China and throughout the gold miners’ West. In the 1860s, 1870s, and 1880s, China exported opium packaged in very distinctive rectangular brasslike metal cans containing 6.67 ounces. Trading posts sold it over the counter along with all the other necessities and luxuries such as brandy, tea, gunpowder, and canned goods. Opium-based patent
medicines were abundant and widely used, said an advertisement, "to relieve pain and irritation, to relax spasms, to produce sleep, to check secretions, and to influence nutrition." In 1881, the 11th Idaho territorial legislature attempted to discourage the smoking of opium by regulating its sale. Metal opium containers, ceramic pipe bowls, and other kinds of paraphernalia still dot many placer mining archaeological sites.

Chinese coins, or wen, with their square holes are another archaeological trace of the gold miners' West. Worthless as currency in camps where gold dust was the medium of exchange, the coins most likely served as gaming pieces or talismans. Perhaps some coins were used for consulting the I Ching. Chinese miners also used coins to rub muscles and release the flow of chi or energy during Gua Sha, an ancient folk remedy.

Placer mining waxed and waned with the rise and fall of the Snake and in response to rumors of better claims. By the late 1870s, according to a British tourist, Springtown was merely "a hamlet composed of a few miserable Chinese huts, that lies buried at the base of the canyon 500 feet below. Here I found two merchants who traded with the Chinese miners." Reports of Tom Bell's 1880 ferry disaster were among the last and most sensational stories of the Snake River Chinese. Bell, a fiddle-playing Scottish miner, began a ferry above Shoshone Falls in 1879. Charles Walgamott, who knew Bell, recalled that the miner "was asked to ferry over several Chinamen and their cargo of groceries to the north side. ... All went well until the current was reached, when the Chinamen ashore noticed the boat with its human freight, swirl and plunge bow first towards that awful chasm. Some thought that an oar had been broken, others that the current was just too
strong. ... It was an exciting scene. All three men in the boat rose to their feet, cries could be heard and one Chinaman was sure Tom Bell sang or chanted. ... In a few seconds all was

over, not even a piece of the broken boat was distinguishable from the other drift below the falls. The Chinamen ashore immediately established a camp below the falls to wait for the bodies to rise and as they were recovered they were taken to the top and buried until they could be shipped to China." One of the victims may have been Mon Chu, who, according to Lucy Stricker of Rock Creek Station, was "the leader of the Chinese in the area." Edward Roberts's *Shoshone and Other Western Wonders* mentioned the accident and added that "one or two Chinamen have since shared Bell's fate."

As Chinese left the Snake River in the late 1870s, Euramerican interest revived. In 1875, Johnny Stewart staked a claim known as Mud Creek Bar at the mouth of Mud Creek, near Kanaka Rapids northwest of Buhl. After murdering two employees, Stewart fled to the Black Hills of South Dakota where Sioux Indians killed him in turn. Two miners, Andy Brown and Sid Smith, had placer claims along Billingsley Creek that "proved quite profitable." An old hermit named Jimmie Divilbiss built a cabin on a Snake River claim and kept burros to pack in his supplies. One day neighbors found Divilbiss dead in his bunk. Sixty dollars stashed in a
can uncovered from the hermit’s cabin helped pay for a decent burial in the local cemetery. Partners Will Justice and R.C. Smith, meanwhile, filed on a placer claim in the Salmon Falls district. According to one source, Justice recovered enough flour gold to mint forty $20 gold pieces. In May 1879, Sampson Reed told The Idaho Statesman that “claims adjoining his [near Malad] are making one hundred dollars per twenty-four hours for each claim, working only one man at a time. All that is needed is real work.”

The placer revival brought new techniques and more expensive equipment to the Snake River canyons in 1879. Burlap sluices now connected systems of ditches and flumes. Towering as high as seventy feet above the river, the flume-sluice networks flushed ledges and bench deposits. Increasingly the expense of these flume operations required corporate backing—at Salmon Falls and Dolman Island, for example, where the New York Mining Company worked placer deposits. Nearby at Birch Creek in the Hagerman Valley, the California Bar Mining Company planned an elaborate system of ditches and pipes.

Mining tied Idaho to a global economy in which heavily capitalized corporations depended evermore on flumes, pipes, ditches, and dams. Already in the 1890s an infrastructure invented for gold had seeded pioneer dreams of a wet and pastoral heartland. The homesteader’s task was to forge those dreams into tangible plans.
The range above those placers was gnarled with greasewood and sage when Lincoln and the Republican Congress made good a campaign promise of “free land to the homeless” with the Homestead Act of 1862. Already the Oregon-bound could follow the Kelton Road to Payne’s Ferry at Fishing Falls and west to a wooden-plank stage station that grew into an outpost with a post office and general store. The settlement that would become Hagerman commanded a valley of melon boulders. Temperatures ranged from subzero to 100°F. Winds were so steady and fierce that the people of the Hagerman Valley, even now, call their state “Idablow.”

The valley before irrigation typified the semiarid Great Basin with its green-gray cover of Wyoming big sagebrush, spiny hopsage, rabbit brush, and bitter brush. Juniper, willow, and black cottonwood lined cold streams in desert canyons. Rodents proliferated as hunting and grazing drove off the elk and other big game. Mice, rabbits, and ground squirrels lured hawks and golden eagles. Rattlesnakes thrived. So did toads, frogs, songbirds, waterfowl, and upland game birds such as sage grouse and quail. Diverse populations of insects fed abundant fish that were feasted on, in turn, by herons, kingfishers, and white pelicans. Homesteaders, however, were few until cattle filled the desert in the wake of the mining boom.

Cattleman Elmer Cook’s relatives ranched the only known homestead on the west side of the Snake River on the site now preserved as the Hagerman Fossil Beds. Born in 1887 in Glenwood, Utah, Cook was orphaned one month after reaching the Hagerman Valley. His grandfather had
been an immigrant from Germany, where the family name was Koch. His father, Wil, had worked gold mines in California and Utah before traveling to Idaho, but little is known of his mother except that she died in Utah when the boy was eight. Returning to Idaho by train at age thirteen after a season of lead mining in Eureka, Utah, Cook attended school, shoveled coal, and worked as the night bellhop at the McFall Hotel in Shoshone City. He also ran his own cattle and freighted for rancher and future father-in-law John Schooler.

Elmer's son, Dick Cook, and his neighbor Asahel Gridley, in tape-recorded conversations with National Park Service ranger Bob Willhite, pieced together their recollections in a history of those wandering times. Cook said:

"My father Elmer started running cattle here in 1903 as an orphan boy. He went into Charlie Gridley's bank to borrow some money to run cattle on the west side of the river. 'Kid,' Charlie asked, 'Where are your parents?' My father told him that they were dead and that he had been on his own for two years already. Charlie
loaned him the money to buy cattle even though he was running them on the same ground that Charlie grazed his horses!"

Asked if the stockmen ever took a break from work during the heat of the day, Asahel Gridley responded, "You're talking about the people that grew up in this country. The goddamn weather didn't bother nobody here. That was just part of living. They never cared what it was." Cook added:

"My dad had some tough times early on, but he was able to buy ten acres and eventually increased it to forty. He did a lot of fishing and looked for arrowheads. Oh, he liked to hunt. Times was too hard to travel. My folks went to the mountains with teams and wagons and stayed some in the summertime. We ran about two hundred head of cattle on the west side of the river; it was good range. My dad and I ran cattle there into the 60s, when the irrigation pumping took over. It was a great, carefree life with lots of work and damned little money. I look back and I think my experiences were worth more than the highest paid job."

Dick Cook still lives on the family ranch in the twilit shadows of the fossil quarries. A collector of cowboy artifacts—diaries, wagons, rodeo buckles, Charley Russell drawings, a miniature windmill, a fire-blackened cast-iron pot that his own people hauled west on the Oregon Trail—Cook can follow the family back five generations on his mother's side:

"My mother's name was Lydia Ann Schooler. Her great-granddad was born in 1813. Her granddad was born in 1842. He came west in 1858, I believe with the Iowa Regiment. They got snowed in at La Grande, Oregon, and almost starved to death there one winter; he wasn't married then—he was fairly young. He went back and got married. They crossed the plains in a wagon in 1862 and come to Fort Boise. Two kids died eating grain, one a Schooler. Don't know who the other boy was. They were basically freighters. They freighted the first lumber into Boise to build the first lumber building. They also freighted the first grain-threshing machine into Boise. They left there and went to Texas for awhile. When they returned here they settled on the Gridley Island. Then they freighted from Kelton, Utah, to Boise before the railroad came. They went from there up to Wood River and came back to Hagerman about 1890. Then they freighted from Gooding to Wendell and Bliss to Hagerman. They also broke horses..."
and cowboye—anything they could to make a living. The Schooler Hotel was eventually built in Hagerman. Mom was born in 1894. She was very short and only weighed about 98 pounds. Didn't really talk that much—unless she was mad. She had quite a temper. It took quite a bit to rile her up, though. Oh, she was a hard worker. I can say that for her. Took good care of her family. She liked to cook. She canned quite a lot of fruit and she sewed some, not a great deal. Had a treadle sewing machine and washed on a board."

As asked if his parents were strict, Cook replied, "Yeah, in a way they were and in another way they weren't. I didn't have any kids to play with, you know. I played alone, but took real good care of my stuff. I've still got what few toys I had. But I'm real sure that if they had ever caught me stealing anything or told a lie they'd have killed me. I know they would've."

Rancher Charlie Gridley, a successful rancher and banker by 1903, had been one of the first settlers to capture and breed some of the thousands of feral horses that a century or two before fled north to the sage plateau. Asahel Gridley said his grandfather Charlie released a herd from California that went wild on the Snake River Plain. "He [grandfather Charlie Gridley] had a lot of wild horses on the desert. I was busy with them most of the time—helping them out with the wild horses. We had about ten thousand of them over the years." According to Cook:

"The Gridleys had a large range horse operation on the west side of the river that started near Glenn's Ferry and ran to Three Creek. I saw with my own eyes twenty-five hundred head in the stockyards at Bliss about 1935. You could see dust coming on a horse trail, mostly about sundown. A line of horses would be in a slow trot, maybe a hundred head in a bunch. They would range out a good fifteen miles from water so they did a lot of traveling in a day."

Asahel's father, Frank, was "kinda quiet." Mother Jamie was "a wonderful woman" who rode sidesaddle and straight saddle. She had six children, including a son who died as an infant. The family constructed a rock and
The Union Pacific Railroad's Oregon Short Line reached Shoshone in 1883, Gooding and Glenns Ferry in 1884. Branching north and south to Oakley, Declo, Ketchum, Hill City, and Wells (Nevada), rails opened rich international markets for Idaho livestock and crops. Pictured: Glenns Ferry with its eating house and stock yards become an Oregon Short Line divisional headquarters. Right: terra-cotta detail from the U.P.'s Shoshone depot; an Oregon Short Line timetable, about 1900.
pole corral adjacent to Tuana Springs a few miles northwest of the fossil beds. Cook remembered that the springs were “just a trickle” yet enough to water the horses. Almost a century later, Cook showed a park service archaeologist the remains of a larger wood post and wire corral west of Hagerman. “People would come over and watch us brand,” said Gridley, recalling the one hundred-by 150-foot heavy gauge wire corral. Cook added:

“There were a lot of branding irons out there. Some of those young kids wanted to ride a colt. They’d jump right on ‘em. Buck like hell! People would come over and pick horses they wanted right out of the corral. We’d halter break them and take them across the river whenever they wanted them. We didn’t get much out of them; everybody got a horse if they wanted one.”

Because animals full of water were easier to herd, the Gridleys would hold horses off for a day then let them drink their fill. Cook explained:
"They had a pole corral on a ridge flat with a long wire netting wing running downhill towards the river. On the wing they tied white rags all over it so the horses could see it even when it was dark. They'd herd 'em right in. I remember one time we rode up to the corral when Gridleys were working colts; someone wanted to know if I wanted something to eat. Sure, I said! There was a branding fire with a lot of colt fries [testicles of gelded colts] roasting in it. I was only about six years old so they thought colt fries would turn my stomach, but the joke was on them. I ate them and wanted more. I had eaten hundreds of fries by then."

After branding, the Gridleys swam a few range horses across the river below the corral. Explained Cook:

"We swam our saddle horses there back of a boat, usually three or four at a time. I saw a few horses drown. If they give up and get their head under, that is it. We swam a lot of cows there but a cow won't drown; they float. Gridleys branded with a CG and in later years a box on one side of the jaw, then a box on both jaws. We branded with a pitchfork on the right ribs of our cattle."

Branded horses were sold at the rail yards. "Took 1,500 off [to market] the first year," said Gridley. "Got six bucks a head for 'em at Bliss. They shipped them out of there for meat."

Once, Gridley continued, "a posse came across my dad workin' horses. He had a hell of a time convincin' those S.O.B.'s that he wasn't a robber. My dad was a good shot, but they didn't lose anybody." Cook expanded on the story:

"Two teenage boys robbed a hardware store in Wendell and stole a few things including some..."
guns. The two boys came down to the Owsley Ferry and crossed to the west side of the river. In the meantime, Wendell organized a posse to hunt down the two boys; they were well armed and mounted on horses. The posse split into two groups on the west side of the river to cover more country. Each group rode around each side of a small hill in a fast lope. When they met, panic took over and they began to shoot at each other. Lucky there wasn't a good shot in the bunch so no one was hurt. Next they went to the bottom of Yahoo Canyon where Gridleys had a horse camp, opened fire, and ran all of them into the brush. They didn't hurt anyone at that camp, but later on they ran into the two boys and shot and killed one of them. By this time the people of Hagerman had had enough of Wendell's posse so they got...
together a posse of their own and went after Wendell's posse. They found them headed back to Wendell with the boy's body in a wagon. Hagerman's posse told them not to say or do one more thing wrong or they would shoot all of them. I guess they made a real quiet trip being escorted by Hagerman's posse all the way back to Wendell.”

Though Gridley recalled only one Indian—WWI-veteran Buck Nelson who lived on one of the islands—the valley remained wild enough for the first generation of homesteaders on the desert near Wendell and Bliss. “There was a steep sandy bank just before the trail reached the top that was hard for me to climb,” Cook remembered.

“Unbeknownst to me I had cornered a large rattlesnake against the bank that could not get away. He was getting ready to fight. I didn’t see the snake but my father who was back of me did; he let out a yell that would have put a steam whistle to shame. He then grabbed me by the arm and threw me down the bluff. I must have sailed a good fifteen feet landing on my face with my mouth full of sand. It scared the hell right out of me but it was better than being bit by a rattlesnake. My mother was mad as hell at my father for throwing me so far, but he was excited.”

Gridley also commented about snakes: “Pretty near everyday I passed rattlesnakes going up there. In those days there were lots of rattlesnakes; there was lots of bitter brush.” Most of the farming back then was on the Hagerman side of the river where pioneer irrigators had converted the placer canals. Below the fossil bluffs on the monument side the sandy terrain defeated irri-
tion until the 1920s when settler Fred Conklin contrived an ingenious way to ferry creek water across the river with a cable-suspended pipe. "Fred Conklin was my mother's uncle," Cook explained. Conklin's pipeline tapped water that ran through the flat where Lydia Schooler was born. There on the east (Hagerman) side of the river the Schoolers had a dugout cabin. Cook continued:

"Early people here would just kind of dig a hole in the side of a hill and put a roof over it. Fred [Conklin] built a shack on that flat. For a few years a man by the name of Lou Day and his wife lived there. Mrs. Day was related to my mother somehow, but I don't recall how. The house exterior was covered with tarpaper, and on a hot day you could smell it a mile away. There was also a root cellar dug into a bank, and up the canyon was a little spring box to get water and keep food cool. A road extended west past the house and up a ridge to the top of the plateau. It was actually a well-traveled horse trail."

Near the site of the future pipeline, Conklin and his neighbors, the Brailsford family, first built a cable ferry. Sheep ferried across the river grazed fresh grass on the east-side bluffs. Asked if cowboys used the ferry, Gridley said, "Nah, we'd just jump the horses into the river."

Irrigation, however, benefited farmers and ranchers alike. "My father, Elmer," said Cook, "helped Fred [Conklin] build
The neighbors borrowed a chain block and tackle from Idaho Power Company. "It took a full day to winch the heavy cable only a few feet. They anchored the cable in good, up in the rocks, not far from the dugout where my mother was born."

Two ditches split water from the wooden pipe. One ditch skirted a ridge and ran south about a quarter mile to a small patch of alfalfa. A shorter ditch cut through some placer deposits and went about 200 feet northeast. But the system was never completed. "One winter," Cook explained, "students playing hooky built a fire in the end of the wooden pipe and burned it all down." The fire destroyed the pipe. Cut off from water and broke, Conklin abandoned the homestead. Rabbits ate the alfalfa as grass reclaimed the corral.

No one remembers exactly when Fred and the Conklin clan gave up on the Hagerman homestead. Eventually the ferry sank. Fences collapsed. Sand filled the shanty ditches. Wind and time and neglect dismantled tarpaper shacks. A 1934 photograph shows the ruin of a swinging pipeline—a single broken tripod, an iron ferry cable still sagging into the Snake.
Thomas Gray rode herd in a desert of snakes and badgers in the dawn of the golden era made magic at Milner Dam. A wrangler with a frowning mustache—broad hat, buttoned vest, silk scarf, silver spurs looped to his sharp-toed boots in the style of the Idaho cowboy—Gray, in 1902, was Nebraska-bound near Kelton with 400 Idaho horses when a Central Pacific train spooked and ran off the herd. “The engine,” Gray recalled, “came around the curve and whistled. The whole herd came back against me. I had to out run them for about half a mile with the leaders trampling on my horse’s heels.” The stampede hit a barbed wire fence and raced through tall alfalfa. “I could see hay shocks rising 20 feet high,” wrote Gray. Passing trains kept the stampede running. Gray, his herd crippled and scattered, lost forty-two horses in all.

Gray dodged fences and trains on Idaho’s middle landscape. A geography first explored by historian Leo Marx in *The Machine in the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Ideal in America*, it sat in the middle between ranching and modernization where Middle Snake civilization wrangled with two ideals. One ideal, always, was efficiency through engineering—the machine. Another was escape to a tranquil heartland of ranches and farms—the garden. Idaho pioneers felt compelled to dominate wild country, yet they pined for a simpler, greener, more chaste and pastoral America. They turned to nature for inspiration without wanting to return there on a permanent basis. They fretted about modernization without losing faith in tools and machines. Technology—a sacrament, a panacea, a high expression of agrarian virtue in Gray’s America—would regenerate the farming republic according to God’s masterful plan. “God, a sort of Chief Engineer, had drawn up the blueprints and built the framework,” historian Mark Fiege explained in *Irrigated Eden: The Making of an Agricultural Landscape in the American West*, his excellent book about Snake River irrigation. Technology alone was no match for a lava desert. Eden came only to those who respected nature enough to develop the creeks and draws where water naturally drained.

In Idaho the dream of industrial Eden rose like a watery phoenix in spiritual and secular forms. Under the leadership of Thomas Ricks, a Mormon bishop and delegate to the National Irrigation Congress, the Great Feeder Dam supplied the world’s most sprawling network of gravity canals. Built on the South Fork of the Snake near Rexburg in 1894–95, the dam showcased what could be done by church guidance and family labor. Five years later another church-sponsored project used timber and rock and the same
kind of family labor to
impond the mainstream
Snake above Idaho Falls.

Mormons saw the land
as a province of Zion.
Intensely materialistic yet
communitarian and anticapi-
talist, they repudiated the
factory city, embracing
instead a bucolic Canaan
reborn through sophisticated
engineering. Their gospel
found secular words in a fed-
eral program for free-enter-
prise reclamation called the
Carey Act of 1894. Boosted
by entrepreneurs or “silk-hat-
ters,” the Carey Act resem-
bled federal aid to the rail-
roads: land grants of up to a
million acres for construction
too monumental to be
financed by states or the
farmers themselves. Silk-hat-
ters made a distinction
between “rainfall farming”
and the precise agricultural
“science” that reduced recla-
mation to a series of stan-
dardized steps. Rainfall farm-
ing was gamble and guess-
work.
Science
allowed the
Idaho
farmer to
“laugh at the
cloudless skies” because “the
much needed moisture [was]
under perfect control.”

Where rocky and mar-
ginal land sank traditional
farming, this gospel was
especially strong. Engineer E.
B. Darlington saw canal construction in Jerome County as the seed of an industrial hub. "There will be better transportation facilities and therefore better markets," wrote Darlington in 1920. North-side irrigation would bring "great industrial plants, such as sugar factories, cheese factories, creameries, ice plants, dehydrating plants, flour mills, alfalfa meal mills, canning factories, great elevators, and warehouses. Train loads of cattle, sheep, wool and farm produce will roll out, and returns will roll in." Silk-hatters had already raised more than one hundred million out-of-state dollars for at least twenty-five major projects. Southern Idaho had become, said the Denver Post, "The Land of Opportunity." Even the long-detested Artemisia tridentata, the desert sagebrush, now symbolized bountiful nature. In 1911, in the China Creek highlands of Twin Falls County, a soil scientist found "a healthy growth of sagebrush." One monstrous plant stood a foot taller than a man on horseback. "This is extra-ordinary," the expert reported. "Both scientists and laymen agree that sagebrush growth is an index of the general character of the land."

Thomas Gray, the wrangler, caught a glimpse of the transformation on his return trip from Nebraska. Traveling by train to Shoshone Depot and then by stage to Rock Creek Station, Gray stopped for supper in a canyon oasis where a dairymen from Indiana had built a fine hotel. There on the banks of the Snake was a clover meadow with English sheep. Thousands of trees, all transplanted, heavy with prize-winning fruit. The farmer was Ira Burton Perrine, a visionary. Modest and balding and physically small, Perrine had colossal plans for a gleaming city sustained by Carey Act reclamation. Already the farmer had partnered with Salt Lake banker Stanley Milner, Pennsylvania industrialist Frank Buhl, Chicago financier Peter Kimberley, civil engineers Walter Filer and Mark Murtaugh, and hydro developer Harry Hollister—all of whom would earn place-names in the future valley. Incorporated in 1900 and reorganized in 1903, the Twin Falls Land and Water Company selected a dam site at the southern-most loop of the Snake where lava islands constricted the channel. A Perrine subsidiary sold lots in a rabbit-infested barren that became, in 1904, the "magic city" named Twin Falls.
At the dam named for Stanley Milner, the excavation began with a ripping blast that killed a workman and threw rocks for almost a mile. Completed in 1905, the dam was a rubble sensation. Concrete piers anchored three great stony embankments with ninety-nine spillway gates. About 500 men and almost an equal number of horses built a nine-mile raised canal to Dry Creek Reservoir, now Murtaugh Lake. On March 1, opening day, a thousand spectators lined the river below the spillway where rumor had it that golden nuggets could be scooped from the empty Snake. Within a year some 15,000 acres had been ditch irrigated. With 130,000 southside acres under cultivation by 1908, the Twin Falls project, said its promoters, was "the largest and most intricate system of irrigated canals in the world."

By then the city of Twin Falls was a branch stop on the Oregon Short Line. Billed as the Chicago of Idaho, the instant city sprouted two hotels, three banks, nine churches, paved and lighted sidewalks, piped water and modern sewers, a monumental yellow-brick classical revival courthouse, and abundant hydroelectricity from the Perrine-Hollister powerhouse at Shoshone Falls. "Just to think that this entire city has been hauled over the Blue Lakes grade," said Sen. Fred T. Dubois in 1905. "It is wonderful." Twin Falls was "a happy trinity of soil, sunshine, and water, ... a veritable Paradise," said the Chamber of Commerce in 1909.

Twin Falls was also a businessman's city and pridefully white. The black and Hispanic cowboys once common in Twin Falls County made no mark in the city census. Twin Falls
boasted a higher percentage of American-born citizens than any western boomtown. The *Twin Falls Weekly News*, reporting on local Greeks in 1909, denounced the immigrants for the un-American practice of hoarding farm wages for families abroad. Five years later two Chinese attempted to lease a restaurant site on Main Street. The Chinese were "invading the city," the *News* reported. A mob soon drove the two out of town. Protestant Twin Falls also discouraged Irish, Italian, and Basque immigrants by prohibiting liquor in Catholic enclaves and punishing saloons with a $2,000 annual tax. Twin Falls, nevertheless, was self-consciously "progressive" and "undoubtedly the most metropolitan, most flourishing and busiest little city of its age and size in the country," said boosters in 1910.

Above Twin Falls the desert buzzed with construction wherever rushing water in vertical canyons brought out-of-state dollars for dams. The U.S. Reclamation Service used 14,000 barrels of concrete and almost a mile of rock to impound the Snake at Minidoka, creating Lake Walcott. Completed in 1906, Minidoka Dam became the centerpiece of a seven-dam project that irrigated more than a million acres through 1,600 miles of canals and nearly 4,000 miles of laterals. The 1909 Minidoka powerhouse with its five great generators pioneered rural electrification. Rupert, a planned city named for its engineer, gained national fame for its brick, three-story, electrically heated high school.

Where the Big Wood River met Camas Creek, meanwhile, the Idaho Irrigation Company used 450 kegs of blasting powder and 500-man crews of mostly immigrant labor to build one of the world's largest earthen dams. Magic Dam, so-called, gave rise to a company town called Richfield, founded in 1908. "The dam is as deep up and down the stream as three city blocks, almost a city block high, and more than two blocks long," according to the *Richfield Recorder*. Some 400 miles of canals and a wood-stave, five-feet diameter pipe forked water to Dietrich and Gooding. Dietrich, a Carey Act land rush town, captured the buoyant mood when a wag blocked out the "t" on the railroad's welcoming sign. "Die rich" the sign now advised. The desert, no longer "hopeless" and

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*Magic Dam on the Big Wood River set off a land rush to Richfield, a Carey Act township platted in 1908. Right: Peruvian sheepherders on the Camas Prairie have adopted a lonely vocation once dominated by immigrant Basques.*
Secrets of the Magic Valley

The miracle transformed Idaho demographics in ways the boosters expected and ways many did not. Canal construction diversified labor, luring immigrants from Greece, Ireland, Italy, Austria, and Spain. Basque masons and carpenters found welcome escape from the sheep camps on irrigation projects. Polkas and the button accordion came to the Buhl-Castleford area with an influx of Czech-American farmers in 1907. Swedes dotted the eastern desert in an experimental colony named New Sweden and another named Firth. In beet country, however, Amalgamated Sugar preferred low-paid seasonal labor. Wartime demand for potatoes and beets brought stoop labor from Mexico, the Philippines, and India in 1917. Japanese immigrants, many of them railroad workers, joined the Idaho harvest with the hope of raising capital to lease or buy farming lands. In 1921 the Idaho Senate defeated legislation to exclude the Japanese irrigators from owning farmland. Two decades before the U.S. Army confined some 9,500 Japanese Americans at the Minidoka Relocation Center, the "thifty" Japanese allegedly had "an absolute genius for the reclamation of bad land." Population boomed in the wake of big irrigation. From 3,143 people in 1890, the eight-county census jumped to 77,000 by the end of World War I.

Had all the valley been like Twin Falls, had Jerome County been less porous, had the summer of 1919 not been one of the driest on record, had potato prices stayed buoyant after World War I, then the miracle might have continued. Jerome's north-side system of reservoirs and canals would have prospered had nature truly been "very kind" in providing what Perrine and company called "a system of drainage that cannot be duplicated by man." Hundreds had rushed for land near the town of Jerome as the North Side Canal raced west in 1907. At Big Sugar Loaf Butte, however, a reservoir disappeared through porous strata. A second attempt to hold water in Jerome Reservoir likewise failed. "I had a nice little bunch of money when I came here," wrote a settler from Jerome in 1919, "[but] today I have just 50 cents left." Four out of five Jerome-area settlers had already abandoned their farms.
The Carey Act project on Salmon Falls Creek, meanwhile, was an even greater fiasco. Spearheaded by James and William Kuhn of Pittsburgh, the same brothers who financed Jerome, the Twin Falls Salmon River Land and Water Company had raised $2 million from the sale of 73,000 acres before farmers saw through the con. In 1907 the Kuhn engineers planned a $3 million concrete-arch dam with a 180,000 acre-feet reservoir. Shareholders forfeited land as seepage throughout the tract sank the Kuhn corporation. Dutch immigrants had worked five years to develop a parcel called Amsterdam. In 1916, a descendant recalled, “they just walked out.” Sagebrush overcame fields more profusely than ever before.

Farmer Perrine, age 82, had built and lost and rebuilt several waterborne fortunes by the time of his death in the Twin Falls Hospital in 1943. “His monument is a rolling carpet of lush vegetation,” the Times-News reported. His legacy, added National Geographic, was “fat bank accounts” and “beautiful homes” and “seven hundred bushels of potatoes to the acres” and “a thousand bushels of sweet Spanish onions” and “enough carrots with their vitamin A to strengthen for night-flying the eyes of all the airmen in the war.” Indians defeated, civilization planted, wealth created, savagery subdued—it was a flag-waving tale of seamless progress, of defiant farmers and ranchers who refused to accept nature’s terms. Always the tellers of those tales assumed—like Thomas Jefferson, like the frontier historian Frederick Jackson Turner—that settlement meant agriculture, that the snowmelt was virtually boundless and its rush through vertical canyons was a gold mine of national wealth.

No matter that every action caused a reaction on Idaho’s middle landscape. No matter the seepage, the droughts, the cheat, the rodent and insect plagues. “Truly magic it is,” said National Geographic in a 1944 article that politely ignored migrant workers and the Japanese American “camp” called Minidoka. “In each irrigation-born town old timers told us they remembered when a particularly rich tract belonged to sagebrush.” The machine in the garden, it seemed in the 1940s, kept the sun and the windblown soil and the power of water in motion under perfect scientific control.