

Memory of my hometown, Robinette, now underwater, and photos preserving it.

Taken from an article on the website for IdahoNews.com:

Pictorial history of Robinette exists, and in rich detail, mainly because of one man and his affinity for photography.

Pete Basche was born on Nov. 23, 1913, at Home, another Baker County village, about 20 miles upriver from Robinette, that was also covered by Brownlee Reservoir. After marrying Ernestine Carnahan, the two moved to Halfway, but in 1942 they moved to Robinette. Over the next 15 years, Pete was the Standard Oil Co. fuel distributor, hauling gasoline and diesel and heating oil around Baker County's Panhandle. But he also used his camera to document life in one of the more isolated towns not just in Baker County, but in Oregon.

In the last few years before Robinette was submerged, Pete focused his lens most often on the very project that doomed his town, the construction of Brownlee Dam — from the ground on both the Oregon and Idaho shores of the Snake, from the steep slopes above, and in several cases from an airplane.

Pete died at 90, leaving a collection of at least 8,000 photographs, now at the Baker City Library, curated by Gary Dielman who became aware of this because of two people who grew up in Robinette: Betty, Pete's daughter, who lives in Richland in the very home in which she was born; and Richard Carrithers, a retired lawyer who lives in Bellevue, WA.

Betty inherited much of her father's photo collection — more than 1,000 images.

But many years before Pete Basche died, he had also given a box of photos to Carrithers.

Carrithers eventually decided to preserve those photos by having the negatives processed into digital positives.

Betty said that several years after her father died she was asked by the Baker County Historical Society to give a presentation about Robinette. That prompted her to call Carrithers, who knows much about the town's history, and he told Betty about digitizing her father's photos, some of which she used to illustrate her talk.

Carrithers, who graduated from Yale University and its law school, eventually got in touch with Dielman, which led to Pete's photos being added to the Library's collection.

Betty said she's "really happy" that those photos are now available to everyone.

Dielman said Carrithers' efforts, which included writing many of the captions that accompany the photos, was invaluable.

"I have a lot to thank Richard for," Dielman said.

Besides helping to compile Pete's photographs, Richard Carrithers also took recent photos from nearly the same place that Pete was standing when he made his images in the 1950s.

The purpose of these photo re-enactments was to show how far the reservoir rose on the canyon walls. Carrithers drew a red line across Pete's historic photos to approximate the water level when Brownlee is full.

Carrithers' sister, Diane Carlisle, who also grew up in Robinette and now lives in Baker City, also contributed to the project. Carlisle, who moved with her parents to Robinette when she was 6 and her brother was 4, said that although Robinette was isolated, it was also a much more active community than its population, which generally ranged between 25 and 30, might suggest. "It was an amazing childhood," she said.

Her parents, Ray and Frankie Carrithers, owned the grocery store in Robinette as well as a ranch on the Idaho side of the Snake River. Either her mother or her father usually operated the Robinette post office as well.