When Congress passed the Flood Control Act of 1944, most people in the ten states affected by the Missouri River Basin Development Program expressed excitement about the prospects for improved flood control, hydroelectric power generation, navigation, irrigation, and recreational opportunities. However, for the citizens of Pollock, a community of less than five hundred, the future did not look as bright. The people in this north-central South Dakota community realized that with the construction of Oahe Dam, one of the five “big” dams proposed in the Pick-Sloan Plan, their town could be completely inundated. This possibility became a certainty in October of 1953, when town leaders received official word that the United States Army Corps of Engineers was ready to “proceed with the acquisition of Pollock.”

Residents had begun to deal seriously with their problem in January of that year. Eldredge L. MacKay, editor of the Pollock Pioneer, chronicled the events that followed as the townspeople determined their course of action: “To prevent anything that might upset some of the people in the future, most of the decisions were made by the people themselves, at big community meetings. Every problem would be aired, and a majority decision reached. On January 2, 1953, Pollock’s residents elected a committee, called the Pollock Flood Association, to organize the people and do the planning for the coming ‘flood.’ ” The six-man committee called a community meeting for 27 January 1953 to decide “whether to stick together and build a new home, whether to move to some other nearby town or just give up with everyone continuing on his own.”

After residents voted unanimously in favor of keeping the town together, “a vote was then taken by ballot to determine which direction the town should move from its present location. The vote was: West, 2; north, 20; east 39; and south, 139.” North and west were quickly eliminated, leaving the south and east locations for reconsideration. “The Flood Association’s recommendation,” MacKay continued, “was to move the town south and in the next round of voting, 167 residents voted for the southern location, commonly
called the old golf course, as compared to only 34 favoring the eastern location. A unanimous vote was then cast for the southern site for new Pollock.

Seven men then formed the nonprofit Pollock Development Corporation to buy the site one mile south of old Pollock and subdivide the land. After much discussion, the committee settled on a method for distributing both residential and business lots: “The people studied the plat of the town, looked over the land itself (there wasn’t much to see then) consulted their relatives and friends, and selected their choice of a lot. They sealed the lot number of their choice in an envelope, and the envelopes were placed in a box,” MacKay recorded. A second mass meeting was held on 26 May 1955, when the “envelopes were drawn, one by one, and the names posted on the appropriate lot on a big map of the town. Somewhat to everyone’s surprise, as the draw went on and on, there appeared to be no duplicate choices. At the end it was found there were only two or three cases where two people had drawn the same lot. The ‘ties’ were settled by the toss of a coin.” A period of trading followed among those who wished to have different neighbors. In the end, “practically everyone was satisfied.”

In general, Pollock residents viewed the financial arrangements made between the Corps of Engineers and the local people as being fair. Property was appraised at what the Corps of Engineers considered fair market value. If a property owner did not agree, he could go through condemnation. Once property had been appraised in a fair manner and sold to the Corps of Engineers, its former owners were allowed to purchase the property back for a much lower salvage value (as low as twelve cents on the dollar). People could then use the difference between the appraised and salvage values to defray the costs of moving and relocating. Most homeowners found they could buy back their homes, move them to the new town, and fix them up under this arrangement.

Recalled MacKay, “The first few years of the new town was a time not soon to be forgotten by those living here. There was the sight of the water tower—replacing the old town pump—rising up and up. There was the sidewalk superintending to look after as the construction of the town itself, the homes and buildings went on. . . . There were hundreds of visitors to talk to about the new community.” The town board and committees shouldered many of the community responsibilities, but each householder had individual concerns as well. Building new basements, moving or constructing homes, and planting new lawns and trees kept the residents busy. “And all the time, of course,” MacKay remembered, “there was the element of sadness as vacant areas began to appear in the old home town. The march of houses continued on and on, and what for many had been a lifetime home began to disappear. In only a couple of years there was scarcely anything left. But as the new town, at the same time, began to grow, the sadness also began to disappear in the excitement of rebuilding a brand new town.”
In September of 1955, Mr. and Mrs. Wesley Ryckman became the first residents to spend the night in their new location. An Associated Press report gave this account of the Ryckmans' move: "Life is still a little primitive for the Ryckmans at the new site which they occupied for the first time Thursday night. They moved their house and are not yet connected up to facilities. Among other hardships, they will have to haul their water for household use until the water tower is installed, which will be sometime in the next few weeks" (Sioux Falls Daily Argus-Leader, 11 Sept. 1955). The following January, the Pollock Pioneer became the first business to open in the new town.

During this period of upheaval and uncertainty, townspeople showed imagination as well as tenacity. Scott Engineering Company of Watertown, South Dakota, had been hired by the Pollock Development Corporation to lay out the model community. However, when the first draft of their plans showed conventional narrow streets, the corporation told them to go back to the drawing board and design wide streets. These unusually wide streets, along with the one-legged water tower, have become the town's trademark.

In 1956, residents again demonstrated their determination to achieve the best for their new community by pressing the Corps of Engineers for another project—to make the north crossing into a dam that would hold the runoff from Spring Creek, thereby creating a small lake that would not fluctuate with the rise and fall of Lake Oahe. Because much of Pollock's trade area is in North Dakota, the Corps of Engineers had already agreed to build a crossing over the reservoir going north from Pollock, but their original plans called for a bridge that would let the reservoir water through when it filled. Pollock residents thought that a solid dam that provided them with a lake would work just as well. When the people of Pollock took up the matter with the Corps of Engineers and with South Dakota's legislators in
Washington, D.C., the first answer was a flat "no." The townspeople persisted, however, and after a few more meetings it began to appear that the project might be feasible. Finally, in December of 1956, the Corps of Engineers agreed to allow the building of a dam. In June of 1960, bids were let for what was then called the "low dam." A contract was awarded in early September of 1960, and work began before the month was out.

A contest was held to name the new lake, with the winner announced at a big celebration held to mark the completion of the causeway in August of 1961. Wilmer Kirschenmann submitted the name of Pocasse (Po-cah-see), an Arikara Indian chief whom Lewis and Clark had met in the area in 1804. It was selected from over four hundred entries.

By the spring of 1962, the people of Pollock were completely moved, the old town had been leveled, and Lake Pocasse was nearly full. (It was not until seven years later, in April of 1969, that Lake Oahe would reach the 1,614-foot level, bringing it about a foot lower than Lake Pocasse.) The town now had two lakes literally on its doorstep, a modern water and sewage system, paved streets, a new school, new churches, and a future much brighter than that of most towns its size.

In an editorial in the Pollock Pioneer, dated 24 June 1965, ten years after community leaders broke ground in an alfalfa field, Eldredge L. MacKay expressed these thoughts about the rebirth of Pollock: "Although there were times of sadness when the time came to move, there is likely no one who

Pollock Pioneer editor Eldredge L. MacKay took this panoramic view of old Pollock from the top of an elevator before the town was moved and the site flooded. Above the train depot in the lower left of the picture is the lumberyard; the large building located in the far upper right is the school. Buildings, trees, and other debris were either moved or flattened by bulldozers. By the spring of 1962, Pollock had been moved to its new location on a gently sloping hillside approximately one mile south of the old townsite in Spring Creek valley. Most of the area pictured now lies under the waters of Lake Pocasse.
is not glad that it came about.” The people “who wanted something better and were willing to work for it,” had made it happen. “It was not unlike the spirit of the early pioneers who pulled up stakes and set out for new homes, in a new land,” MacKay suggested. “The people also found, in their own ranks, the leadership which was necessary to bring the move to completion. Although Pollock’s move was only a mile, it took a pioneering spirit to make that move, and to keep the community together while doing it.”

Sources

This photograph shows the west side of Main Street in the old town of Pollock in the mid-1950s. In January of 1953, once it became certain that the town would be inundated, residents held a community meeting where they voted unanimously to keep the town together and relocate.
"Old Town"

The largest building relocated from the old town was the Pollock Lumber and Implement Company. The building was split into two sections and rejoined after being moved up the hill to the new town. The South Dakota legislature passed special legislation that allowed Pollock to continue its existence during the move by annexing the new town site to the old.
During the late 1950s and early 1960s, the sight of a house or business being inched off its old foundation and moved to a new site was commonplace. Here, the Soo Line depot is being moved in 1960. Below, townspeople gather to greet the first train to arrive in the new town at 4:40 p.m. on 11 October 1960.
Many of Pollock's residents elected to tear down their old property and use the difference between the appraised and salvage values to build anew. Here, two Main Street businesses—the Tracy Restaurant (right) and the Bucklin Hotel (above), photographed in 1956—are torn down for salvage.
Above, the main street of old Pollock lost a landmark when the Pollock State Bank building was destroyed. Built in 1926, the building was used as a bank until 1938 and later housed a store and cafe. Here, one of the big steel I-beams is lifted out by a crane. Below, the chimney falls as the Pollock School is destroyed during the summer of 1959 in preparation for the coming flood.
Built in 1937 at a cost of seventy thousand dollars, the brick school in old Pollock was one of the finest in the area. Murals by Works Progress Administration artist Bill Lackey decorated the walls of the assembly area, but were not saved. In 1954, the school board set up a special planning committee to insure the building of a suitable school at the new townsite.
“New Town”

This photograph shows work in progress on the new Pollock school. When the Army Corps of Engineers would pay no more than two hundred thousand dollars for the old school building, about half the cost required to build a new school, the school planning committee appealed to the state’s congressional delegation. In July of 1956, Congress passed a bill providing another two hundred thousand dollars for the facility. Equipment was moved to the new building during Christmas vacation at the end of 1958, and classes opened 6 January 1959.

Members of the Pollock Development Corporation looked on in early 1954 as an army engineers’ crew drilled a city well for the new town. A municipal water system was one feature that the old town did not have. From left to right are John Pollock, I. H. Dornbush, Ed Knudson, H. C. Hanning, Horton Devan, and Wes Atkinson.
Construction workers pour cement for sidewalks on the south side of Main Street in new Pollock.
These photographs show the town’s main street as it looked under construction in July of 1956 and today. The unusually wide streets, along with the first one-legged water tower built in South Dakota, have become the town’s trademarks.
During the upheaval of moving, neighbors worked together on community projects. In October 1958, volunteers (above) laid footings for the new American Legion building. At left, workmen complete the roof on the Dakota Cheese Company, a new business that opened in June of 1960. The plant, still in operation, employs eighty-five people and produces sixty-two thousand pounds of cheese daily.

The construction of Highway 10 into Pollock was a major project that gave both residents and visitors greater access to the area's excellent fishing, hunting, and other outdoor opportunities.
Workmen pour concrete curb and gutters in a residential area of the new town, where homeowners had a chance to pick their own lots and their neighbors, as well.
This panoramic view includes old Pollock in the distance, with the new town in the foreground.
Local people initiated the idea of making the north crossing over the reservoir a dam rather than a bridge, thereby creating a small lake. The photograph at right shows the paving of the wide residential B Street, which goes directly across the causeway and provides the main link to the large North Dakota trade area Pollock serves.

Standing on the concrete platform of the control gate of the new dam (opposite page), United States Senator Francis Case addresses a crowd gathered on 25 August 1961 to celebrate the completion of the causeway project. The flat area in the background, currently under the waters of Lake Pocasse, is the site of the old town. Below, Senator Case, followed by a Shriner scooter team from Mobridge, leads the first official trip across the causeway. Oahe reservoir would fill the area to the right of the causeway.
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