

## **THEY MADE THE DESERT BLOOM**

**By Elaine Andrew MGary**

### **HOW A FAMILY OF DRILLERS AND INVENTORS PLAYED A CENTRAL ROLE IN IRRIGATING IDAHO**

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Joseph G. Andrew (also known as JG or Joe) needed a way to put food on the table. He had recently married Esther Ellis in 1907 of North Ogden Utah.

As time moved along the family started to grow with babies coming along with seven eventually filling the house.

Barely scraping by through the summer, the young family lived in a drafty shanty on the corner of a fruit farm Joe's father was leasing from a landowner in Ogden, Utah. But the cold months meant no farm work to occupy Joe's days. Even worse, no money would be coming in until after spring planting. To make ends meet, he set muskrat traps along his favorite streams, dried the skins on frames, and sold them at the local mercantile.

One day after delivering a bundle of hides, Joe came home brimming with joy. He announced he had landed a position as an assistant to an artesian well-driller in North Ogden. The young couple had no way of knowing that this simple off-season job would set in motion the direction they would follow for the rest of their lives.

Soon, Joseph G. Andrew would establish a prosperous well-drilling business in the upper Snake River Valley, which would help turn an arid desert into a blossoming miracle.

In 1911, the young family moved to Idaho farming in the Menan and Roberts area. The virgin land was clogged with sagebrush, and jack-rabbits, and they struggled for a meager yield. For a short time Joe went to Casper, Wyoming, to repair wells, and occasionally hired out to a local well-driller named Burns. In

1921, he heard of a job in Ruth, Nevada, drilling test holes for a mining company, Two-and a –half Years later, the job ended and he came back to Idaho, where Joe decided to open his own drilling business. Anyone traveling the Arco desert through the 1940s and 50s might recall that desolate stretch of highway. Joe took one look at the high valley wasteland and realized its potential. Today the landscape is dotted with farms, homes and green fields clear to the horizon, thanks to hundreds of wells Joe and his sons, Verl and Howard, drilled over the next sixty some years.

Joe had a knack for fixing just about anything mechanical. So with that confidence Joe decided to build his own rig. The homemade rig proved much less expensive to operate.

To provide space for a home and shop, he purchased twenty acres in what seemed to be “way out in the country on the Ammon highway.” Today, that land borders 17<sup>th</sup> St. in Idaho Falls, on the busiest street in town.

With a constant demand for new water wells up and down the Snake River Valley, Joe’s workload increased rapidly. When his sons became teenagers, the enterprising father trained each of his sons to run the rig alone. The whole family soon earned the reputation for productive wells that made farms more profitable and homes more livable in the high arid climate. The seemingly untamable desert began to bloom for miles in every direction.

During World War II both Verl and Howard served in the Navy, leaving Joe to run the business alone. At times Joe’s daughter Elaine Andrew lent a hand. But Joe had a bad hip, his health declined, and the company nearly closed down.

When the boys got home from the war in 1946, they decided to restructure the business, going into partnership to establish Andrew Well Drilling Contractors. They were so busy that they were running almost around the clock to keep up with the demand for water wells.

Despite continuing to increase their fleet of equipment and hiring new hands, including their own sons, Andrew Well Drilling was swamped with dozens of jobs. The irrigation wells were bringing much land into production.