

Museum

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held in 1956, and the exodus of workers and their families led to the closure of the hospital, theater, recreation center and most retail facilities. The school graduated its last class in 1968, and the school demolition and removal of surplus facilities began in 1977.

Pickstown was put up for sale in 1985. The town held a dedication ceremony in 1986, and the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers transferred the deed to the town and its residents. Pickstown currently has a population of about 210 residents.

Brokaw's family moved to Pickstown in 1948, when his father began work on Fort Randall Dam. The family would later move to Yankton when the elder Brokaw worked on Gavins Point Dam.

For the Brokaw family, the dam construction meant a good job, good pay and the best home they had owned. The job also meant a car and the opportunity for the younger Brokaw to attend college.

"We had arrived at Nirvana," Tom Brokaw said.

The workers saw their jobs not as hard work but as golden opportunities, with many World War II veterans taking advantage of the GI Bill to educate themselves for the jobs, he said.

"My parents were the product of the Great Depression and World War II. For the Greatest Generation, this was the greatest life there could be," he said. "The people who worked (on the dams) didn't sit around and whine (about the difficult job). They were glad for the opportunities they had."

The engineers and their families took that same attitude and work ethic into their personal lives. They formed a tight-knit group, gathering for social events, and they helped each other during difficult times such as a hail storm that created major damage.

The Western Contracting Corporation, which hired the workers, was owned by the Everist family, who shared the same values as their employees, Brokaw said.

In separate comments, Hubert Everist — who is turning 97 later this month — recalled for the *Press & Dakotan* his family's construction of all four Missouri River dams in South Dakota, starting with Fort Randall.

Everist's father owned the company, and Hubert served as vice president. The company had established itself in the dam construction business, completing a Kansas dam before turning its attention to the proposed Missouri River dams.

"The Corps of Engineers put out bids for the first dam construction job. We submitted the low bid and received the job," he said. "We were working every day and night. We worked two 10-hour shifts every day for nine months. Over the winter months, we would park the equipment, but we started up again in the spring."

Western Contracting



Hubert Everist, 96, the son of the man who owned the Western Contracting Corporation, the company that helped build the Missouri River dams, was on hand Friday for the museum dedication in Pickstown. "We were working every day and every night," Hubert Everist recalled. "We worked two 10-hour shifts every day for nine months (of each year during the construction)."

ended up winning the bids on all four Missouri River dams in South Dakota, moving from Fort Randall to Oahe, Big Bend and Gavins Point, Everist said. The company enjoyed a continued advantage with its knowledge and experience on the Missouri River dams, and the easy accessibility of workers and equipment with its location in South Dakota, he said.

The four decades following World War II produced a heyday for infrastructure, Everist said.

"From 1940-1980, we had all this heavy construction of dams, highways and canals," he said. "For 40 years, if you had a heavy construction business, you could go all over the United States."

Friday's program included special remarks by Col. Joel Cross, Commander and District Engineer for the Omaha District of the Corps of Engineers, and Lt. Gov. Matt Michels of Yankton.

Cross paid tribute to the workers who moved millions of cubic yards of earth to make Fort Randall Dam a reality and a continuing source of hydropower, flood control and other purposes.

"This museum is a tribute to the people who built (the dam) and created this quality of life," he said.

Michels recalled his childhood visits to Fort Randall Dam and Pickstown.

"This project transformed the state in ways not comprehended, and we wouldn't have it if it wasn't for you," he told the audience, noting they personified his mother's motto of "If you can dream it, you can do it."

Fort Randall Dam remains an amazing structure, Brokaw said.

"They got done in amazing order. The dam was finished in 10 years at a cost of \$200 million," he said. "That's how much the (New York) Yankees are paying (Masahiro) Tanaka now. It's a different time in America."

Fort Randall Dam reflects one of many "big ideas"

throughout the nation's history, Brokaw said. Those "big ideas" include the Founding Fathers' democratic ideals, conquering Hitler during World War II, the civil rights movement, landing on the moon and opening diplomatic relations with China and the Soviet Union.

But Brokaw said he isn't sure Fort Randall Dam would be built today. He cited the political bickering and the opposition to spending money on such projects. He noted the U.S. was running a deficit — revenues of \$39 billion annually and spending of \$52 billion annually — when Fort Randall Dam was built in 1946.

"We didn't have a divided country with a Congress that was coming after each other's throats," he said of the 1940s. "They got to make America a better place through public works projects with good jobs and good pay."

Pickstown itself became a planned community with a population at one time of 3,000-4,000 residents, Brokaw said. With its amenities, Pickstown became the envy of neighboring communities with area residents paying weekend visits to watch the dam and town construction.

"We were living in a post-modern town. There were people who had never been in a town where the streets were curved," he said. "We had an air of superiority. People were driving ... to see this community of 4,000 persons. And we would say, 'Yes, we live in Pickstown.' This was small-town South Dakota. We were lucky to be in the right place at the right time."

As a youngster, Brokaw said he benefited from living in a town that attracted residents from different cultures across the nation.

"I think how much we have become better people because we lived here," he told the current and former Pickstown residents gathered Friday. "I hope we live with a renewed sense of pride and determination to continue in



Memories and artifacts from the early days of the old Fort Randall outpost are featured in the Pickstown and Fort Randall Dam Museum, which was dedicated Friday.

that same spirit. We are moving into challenging times. People here (in Pickstown) can provide a template for how we can deal with those issues."

Brokaw said a part of him will always remain with his Pickstown home, and he re-

mains grateful for the sacrifices of the Greatest Generation of World War II that made his life possible.

"It was a thrilling place to grow and see beyond the borders of South Dakota," he said. "I was one of the luckiest members of the Lucky

Generation."

You can follow Randy Dockendorf on Twitter at twitter.com/RDockendorf. Discuss this story at www.yankton.net/.



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