

Hanford-White Bluffs reunion may be the last

Don Sorenson, *Fluor Hanford*

Life in the Priest Rapids Valley was simple before World War II. People worked hard for the things they needed, and they appreciated the hard work of others. With water from the Hanford Power and Irrigation Company, the valley had been transformed from arid desert land to lush farms in the early part of the century.

A line from an article in the *White Bluffs Spokesman* summarized life in the small towns of Hanford, White Bluffs, Cold Creek and Vernita: "The people in this valley are so happy here they really don't have a need for lawyers."

Their paradise was lost in March of 1943. The federal government, in a race to develop atomic weapons, issued a condemnation order. Residents were given 30 days to accept the appraised value of their homes and move away to make room for an important war project. There was no time to nurture crops already planted, or even to say proper goodbyes to lifelong friends.

They started coming back in 1968, when the secrecy surrounding Hanford's defense-production mission was relaxed enough to allow visitors to the old town sites. Annual reunions have been held since then.

Many former residents who are still living are no longer able to attend these annual get-togethers, however, so the Hanford-White Bluffs reunion this year, on the weekend of Aug. 2, may be one of the last.

At Richland's Shilo Inn, the families shared memories and photographs. Former residents — with sadness in their voices — told younger generations what life was like in the valley before the war. From a bus, they pointed out where their farms and orchards were, and got off the bus to stand where their homes had stood.

As their children and grandchildren listened to their stories, the displaced people of the Priest Rapids Valley knew their small place in history will be remembered long after they're gone. ■



Participants in this year's Hanford-White Bluffs reunion pause to examine displays and take a close look at the bank building that is still standing after being abandoned 60 years ago.

