

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

HAROLD E. ALDRICH

March 7, 1995
Billings, Montana



**STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH**



Interview Conducted by:
Brit Allan Storey
Senior Historian
Bureau of Reclamation



Oral History Program
Bureau of Reclamation

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HAROLD ALDRICH**

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**Oral History Interview
Harold E. Aldrich
March 7, 1995**

Storey: This is Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Harold Aldrich, formerly Regional Director in Billings, Montana, Region 6. The interview is taking place at Mr. Aldrich's home in Billings, Montana, on March 7, 1995, at about one o'clock in the afternoon. This is tape one.

Mr. Aldrich, I was wondering if you would tell me where you were born and raised and educated and how you ended up at the Bureau of Reclamation, please.

Aldrich: Well, I was born in Decatur, Nebraska, and went to school in Rosalie, Nebraska, until the tenth grade. And then economic conditions forced us to move to Lincoln, Nebraska; so I finished high school in Lincoln, Nebraska. I

went to the university there and graduated in 1935, as a civil engineer. I worked three years for the Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation. At that time I received a job offer from the Corps of Engineers in Rock Island, Illinois; working there for just under a year, when I applied for employment with the Bureau of Reclamation in Denver.

Goes to Work for Bureau of Reclamation in Denver and Then Washington, D.C.

I worked in the Canals Division there for about six years, and was not transferred, but assigned to Washington for a temporary duty in the late fall of 1944, and stayed for four months, at which time I transferred to Washington, and stayed there for about a little over a year after that. (Storey: In D.C.?) Yes. I worked there as an assistant liaison representative. At that time all the branches

were located in Denver, and I was an assistant representative for the planning, but (chuckles) I did no planning work because where I was working was in design and construction for Ted Mermel at that time, under Goodrich Lineweaver, who was assistant to the commissioner.

Moves to Billings Office

I left there to come to Billings in the spring of 1946 as a member of the project development staff, attached to the Billings regional office, and headed by Bill Rawlings as assistant *to* him—primarily, because as I recall, I was the only man with prior Bureau experience. (laughs) They needed somebody to acquaint them with how the Bureau works.

Storey: Mr. Rawlings was assistant regional director then, I believe?

Aldrich: Later. (Storey: Later?) Yes. (Storey: Okay.)

At that time he was head of the Project Development Division, and I [was assistant to the]¹ Chief of the Project Development Division.

About [one year later], a reorganization commenced: [the region] wound up with [five] District Offices, [two in Montana and] one in each of the [other] states of Region 6 at that time.

Storey: That would have been about '46?

Transferred to Upper Missouri District Office in Great Falls, Montana

1. Note that in the text of these interviews, as opposed to headings, information in parentheses, (), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition. In the case of strikeouts, that material has been printed at 50% density to aid in reading the interviews but assuring that the struckout material is readable.

The transcriber and editor have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

Aldrich: Yes. Let's see, '47. I was transferred to Great Falls as head of the office there, at that time, and stayed there for thirteen years.

Storey: So this would be called the Great Falls District Office?

Aldrich: Upper Missouri District Office is what it was called. There were also offices [in Billings,] in Bismarck, and down the river in eastern South Dakota, and also an office in Cody, with project managers in each office. We were responsible for the work in those areas, and reported to the regional director.

Storey: So you were a project manager in Great Falls?

Aldrich: Yes, I was, for thirteen years, there. We had a pretty active time on that. Construction of Canyon Ferry Dam² was just getting underway

2. Authorized in 1944, Reclamation built the Canyon Ferry Unit of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program between 1949 and 1954.

at that time, so that was under my supervision.

We also built an irrigation project in conjunction with Canyon Ferry later, at Helena Valley,³ and a small pumping project up the river above Townsend, called ⁴. . . . I'll have to give you the name.

Storey: Was that the bench one?

Aldrich: East Bench⁵ was much later, [up] the river further [at Dillon]. Before that, we built Tiber Dam,⁶ and we proceeded on the basis of a resolution from the irrigation district that promised to sign a contract to repay the project, repayable costs by irrigation.

3. Reclamation built the Helena Valley Unit of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program in 1957 and 1958 after authorization in 1944 and 1946.

4. In 1952-3 Reclamation built the Crow Creek Pump Unit of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program authorized in the late 1940s.

5. The East Bench Unit of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program was built 1961-4 in southwestern Montana in Beaverhead and Madison counties..

6. Reclamation built Tiber Dam and Lake Elwell between 1952 and 1956 as the Lower Marias Unit of the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program. Congress authorized this unit in 1944.

Unfortunately, (chuckles) after a court hearing, it did not proceed—the irrigation part of the project. (Storey: At Tiber?) At Tiber, yeah. Lower Marias Project was the name of it.

During that time that I was up there, we had rehabilitation projects on the Milk River Project, which stretched from the dam up in Glacier National Park, through a transbasin diversion, the canal below the dam, from the. . . . Let's see, what the heck is the river [St. Mary River]?⁷ . . . over by canal to the Milk River, and then down, coming in above Havre with the water, and with separate irrigation divisions in the project or two—we built a little project at Dodson,⁸ at the head end—it was quite small, just a small division.

7. Lake Sherburne Dam on the St. Mary River in Glacier National Park provides water in a trans-basin diversion to the Milk River Project.

8. This is on the Milk River Project.

And also, during this time, we had a rehabilitation project on the two lower divisions of the Milk River Project. Later on, we had a rehabilitation project out on the Sun River [at Fairfield]. We had two bad floods. (laughs) (Storey: Um-hmm.) One bad flood while I was at Great Falls, which really damaged, heavily, the Milk River Project, and we got emergency funds to repair it.

Storey: So you would have been there from about '47 to '60?

Moves to Region 5 in Amarillo

Aldrich: Yes. In '60 I moved to Amarillo, Texas, as head of Operations and Maintenance, for four years. And there, my work consisted mostly of supervision of the maintenance of the operating projects, and negotiation assistance to the regional director in negotiating contracts

for the repayment of the reimbursable costs, most of which were municipal water. (Story: Um-hmm.) I should have said the real purpose of Canyon Ferry was to provide a means of water storage to permit the production of power, and to give water rights to irrigation lands that were proposed below, back for the Missouri River Basin Project, down to Fort Peck. (Story: Um-hmm.)

Becomes Regional Director of Region 6 in Billings, Montana

After the tour in Amarillo, which I enjoyed—it was very interesting, Leon Hill was a fine man to work for—I was offered the position here in Billings in the spring of '64, as I recall, about April or so, in there. At that time, of course, the function of the office was a great deal different than it has been since, because all the while I was Regional director

we had complete responsibility for the Bureau power production and the joint production of the Corps of Engineers and all their mainstream dams, plus our own in our region. So that was quite an additional thing. And the power, when I got here, had still—there was a great deal of it, which had still not been sold.

Storey: So you became regional director in the spring of '64?

Aldrich: In the spring of '64, yes.

Storey: Okay, and you retired in '73?

Aldrich: Right, a little over nine years—not very much—retired in July of ~~1964~~ [1973]. And when I got here, Yellowtail Dam was underway, and, of course, we had a flood almost the day I got here, practically. (laughs) (Storey: Uh-huh.) And it did a lot of damage throughout the region. It topped Gibson Dam on the Sun

River Project, for example. It was mostly—well, it was all in Montana. That was the second flood up there. But it did more damage to irrigation projects along the east side of the Rocky Mountains there, to projects that were really not built by the Bureau of Reclamation, but which we. . . . When the money was allocated to repair the flood damage, the Bureau assumed the emergency job of performing that work, and we did *all* of the rehabilitation work there, and also the Milk River Project was flooded again, so we did that too.

Storey: Is this where two dams failed and the water was “drunk by Tiber,” as they say?

Aldrich: Well, one little dam is a little one up there, but it really was never any threat to anybody, except right at where it happened. I’m not

quite sure now, but I think perhaps the Bureau of Reclamation built the dam that was overtopped and failed—but I'm not sure about that, I shouldn't say that, probably. Up in Glacier Park—that's the one you're talking about there.

Storey: The one I'm thinking of had a name like Medicine Butte, or something like that, I think.

Aldrich: Hm. The dam on the Sun River Project, Gibson Dam, was topped, but it was never in any danger, because it's a concrete arch dam. In fact, it was kind of a model for Boulder Dam when it was built—it's quite old now.⁹ (Storey: Yeah.) And we put in a very thin arch dam on the Project up just north of there that was built by the water [users]. We replaced the dam. Dick Fabrick was the local gentleman who sponsored most of the work

9. Reclamation built Gibson Dam 1926-9.

there. I think I've got a picture around here somewhere, as far as over in North Dakota, of signing a repayment contract with the Garrison Conservancy District, which never, of course, went anywhere. After I left, the project was changed. (Storey: Uh-huh.) Had lots of problems, but I'm not familiar with those at all. I left not too long after the contract there was signed. There were a lot of broken hearts over there.

We built several transmission lines—the biggest one in the basin, from up there down to Nebraska. One of the things that I'm quite proud of there is. . . . They say the [sale of the] power had been tried before, and I wasn't given much encouragement when I said I was going to try it again, to split the power that was available—it would use up most of the

remaining capacity that the Bureau and the Corps had in their dams. But between Nebraska and Basin Electric, but we *did* do that, and we did get it sold and we did get it signed, and it's being used today. (Storey: Um-hmm.)

The East Bench Project probably gave me more satisfaction than most of the irrigation projects, because it was a project I had to work [on] with my assistant in Great Falls. We did it directly with the water users. We had about a hundred water users on the river who had water rights of some kind. We evaluated them, and we had to get those people to agree with how much water they *really* had on a continuing basis, and by what we considered to be the shortage, before we could make the project go. And we did that, except for a few

whose water rights were such that it didn't affect the project one way or the other, because they were so close to even—and probably, in total, they were even, that the result would have been zero requirement anyway. And *through* that, we got a little more than 20,000 acres irrigated on the bench down there, that's still being irrigated there today.

Storey: So the East Bench Project was an irrigation project?

Aldrich: Yes. And that's a quick run-through. There were lots of events and lots of celebrations, lots of nice things happened. (chuckles) We got to know people over there, probably better than anybody else, working closely with everybody from the governors of those four states, on throughout down through the projects. So it was a very interesting experience.

Storey: Good! Well, if I may, let's go back to the beginning of your career (Aldrich: All right.) when you were working for the Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation. Were you working on roads, or irrigation, or both?

Aldrich: Well, actually, it was in the Culvert Division for most of the three years that I was with them.

Storey: So largely roads, I guess.

Aldrich: Largely roads. And then I moved into, shortly before I left, the last year perhaps, or eight months maybe, into the Bridge Division—the design of bridge and concrete structures.

That's what I did when I first went with the Bureau: I was in the Canals Division out in Denver.

Storey: I jumped a little too soon: It was Decatur, Nebraska, where you were born, right?

(Aldrich: Right.) When were you born in Decatur?

Aldrich: January 17, 1914.

Storey: Did you happen to be living on a farm then?

Aldrich: No, my father was just starting up a business. He was a graduate from Creighton Law School, and he purchased a paper. And we lived there, I suppose, my guess—I should know, but I’ve forgotten—about three years, I think. And then his father and my mother’s father started a bank in a little town called Rosalie.

“My father and his brother and their father ran the bank . . . And they worked there until ‘29, and then it was hard times in the bank business . . . and they felt pretty good about getting out with ninety-five percent payoff . . .”

My father and his brother and their father ran the bank, and my other grandfather was a principal supplier of money (laughs) to the

thing. And they worked there until '29, and then it was hard times in the bank business, and they paid up about ninety-five percent and just got out of the banking business there.

There wasn't no government to take care of your deposits then, and they felt pretty good about getting out with ninety-five percent payoff (chuckles) on the contents because things got really bad.

Storey: Did you work in the bank at any time?

Aldrich: No, when we left there, I had just completed my sophomore year in high school. So I wasn't close to the bank at all.

Decides to Become Civil Engineer

Storey: Why did you decide to become a civil engineer? What caused you to do that?

Aldrich: That was the course of least resistance.
(laughs)

Storey: The course of least resistance?

Aldrich: The subjects were easy for me.

Storey: For *you!* (laughs)

Aldrich: And so that's what I went into. Now, I'd been told I should have been a lawyer as I went along, because I was an anchorman on the high school debate team, and everywhere we went after I got promoted to be the (chuckles) wind-up speaker, and we had an impossible debate, our team had to argue that the British system of government was superior to the United States, and we could never win that argument!

(laughs)

Storey: Yeah, that *would* be tough! Well, after the Nebraska Department of Roads and Irrigation, you went to the Corps for about a year, I think.

Works for the Corps of Engineers

Aldrich: Right. Not quite, but about a year.

Storey: What were you doing for the Corps?

Aldrich: Just drafting.

Storey: Drafting what?

Aldrich: On their right-of-way over there for their river control work.

Storey: Oh, okay. And where was that work located?

Aldrich: On the island right at Rock Island.

Storey: That's Illinois, isn't it?

Aldrich: At the armory over there, yeah. We lived in Davenport for the first six months, and in Rock Island for the second six months. (chuckles)

Storey: And then you got wind of a job, I guess, with the Bureau of Reclamation in Denver?

Moves to Bureau of Reclamation Canals Division in Denver

Aldrich: Some friends were going, and so I wanted to go to Colorado, and the idea of working for the Bureau of Reclamation appealed to me. And so I applied and I got an offer in almost no

time. (chuckles)

Storey: Why did the idea of working for Reclamation appeal to you?

Aldrich: Oh, I liked the idea of the type of work that we'd be involved with—the irrigation and the power, and natural resource development.

Storey: Why was that?

Aldrich: It was just something that appealed to me.

Storey: Were Decatur and Rosalie in arid Nebraska, (Aldrich: No.) or humid Nebraska?

Aldrich: I still have part of my grandfather's homestead— my sister owns the other half, that's up there. He lost a lot of land, but he held onto *that*.

Storey: So you accepted a job in the Canals Division. (Aldrich: Yes.) Now what were you doing in the Canals Division?

Aldrich: The design of canal structures, largely.

Storey: When you say “structures”

Aldrich: Oh, concrete culverts. Big, big stuff, like for the Coachella Valley, if you’ve ever been down there (Storey: Uh-huh.) you’ve seen those canals there. The design of the whole Project, and the layout of a system, was our job there.

Storey: And you worked on the Coachella Canal?

Aldrich: Yeah, quite a bit of the time. (Storey: Any other) Well, there were lots of other ones, but I can’t think of too many (laughs) right now.

Storey: Do you remember who your supervisor was?

Aldrich: Yeah, I do, I can see his name. . . . McBurney was the chief of the division, and his assistant, Howard (chuckles) Maybe Frances can remember. They were good friends, all of them.

Storey: What was it like working in the Denver Office then?

Aldrich: Well, the office was separated. The Chief engineer's office was over in the Customs Building. Brig [Walker] Young was the chief engineer at that time.

Detailed to Washington, D.C.

Had to get his permission for the detail to Washington. (Storey: Uh-huh.) I reached a point where I had been on detail for a while, and it was over Christmas, and he came in, and I told him, "I want to go home." (chuckles) I went back after Christmas. He did, but then I'd just been promoted when I left Denver—the day I left, in fact. (chuckles) (Storey: Uh-huh.) And I think that probably held up a job offer back there for some time. But he came in, and I said, "I still want to

come back.” So he went to Lineweaver and the Commissioner, and Bill Warne at that time was assistant commissioner—I was trying to think who the commissioner was, he was an oldtimer. I got another promotion there, four months after the one I had when I left. So I went up pretty fast there because I was only there a year, after that. Then I got a promotion to come back out here.

Storey: So now you went back to Denver for a year?

Aldrich: No, I stayed in Washington for a year after. I was on detail for four months, and then I stayed there for about a year. This new office was being set up, and oh, the head of O&M [operations and maintenance] and Lineweaver wanted somebody there that they were familiar with and who worked for the Bureau before. So Bill Warne didn’t want me to go. In fact

(laughs) he told me I *couldn't* go, but it came up while he was on a field trip one time, and I was gone before he got back, I guess.

Storey: (laughs) Now, when you say "Warne," did you mean assistant commissioner, or assistant secretary?

Aldrich: Assistant commissioner at that time.

Storey: Okay. Tell me about Mr. Warne, what was he like?

Aldrich: He was fine for me to work with, I enjoyed him. He got things done, and he had a good understanding of what the job was.

Storey: What was his management style?

Aldrich: Well, he gave you a job and . . . I didn't work for him directly, it was just that I worked for Lineweaver, [and he] was really a step above *my* boss, but I kind of got to be . . . Oh, I wrote most of Lineweaver's letters after I got there,

and he taught me how (chuckles) he wanted them, so I wrote them all. And it could be some pretty touchy stuff.

Storey: Now how did it happen that you were asked to go on a detail to Washington?

Aldrich: Well, I knew a fellow that was there in the Canal Division, and he went, and he just thought of me as a prospect for this job that came up. The next thing I knew, I didn't ever ask for a job in Washington, or apply for a transfer—I just got an offer, told I was being detailed to Washington for a couple of months, a little before Thanksgiving (laughs).

Storey: And what was it they wanted you to do there?

Aldrich: Well, I worked in the Liaison Division, actually, in design and construction, for anything that came along. The decisions that were made there, like when we're reviewing

the budget . . . Well, like for instance, one year the [assistant] chief accountant, Wendell Bramwell and myself, we did the Bureau of Reclamation's whole budget, just the two of us. I did the language on the appropriation, and "Bram" did all the accounting work, putting the numbers together. And the two of us did it for the whole Bureau—jobs that were Bureauwide. So I got a good picture of what was going on. And Lineweaver would give me a letter, the construction engineer out in the Columbia Basin, they were having an argument over how much his program could be, and it was my job to write the letter—which I was just a "draftee," (chuckles) I guess you'd call it, to write the response saying he couldn't have it.

Storey: Uh-huh, this was when Harry Bashore was

commissioner.

Aldrich: Yeah, I was trying to think, right.

Storey: What was he like?

Aldrich: He was fine. He was very quiet and to himself.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. MARCH 7, 1995.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 7, 1995.

Aldrich: . . . the names there.

Storey: Yeah, we were talking . . .

Aldrich: _____ a lot, yeah.

Storey: We were talking about Harry Bashore. You said he would go out and tour the projects?

Aldrich: No, in the office there, up and down the hall—talk to most everybody in there. I didn't know him well. I knew the rest of the staff a lot better. That would be the usual for somebody in my level, of course.

Storey: Well, when you left, Michael Straus was there.

Aldrich: Yeah.

Storey: What was *he* like?

Aldrich: Oh, I've got a picture of him out there on the wall. (Storey: Yeah.) He was an operator! (chuckles) I recall the Bureau's chief counsel retiring one night, and we were at a party in Washington there, and the chief counsel told Straus that some of his interpretations weren't the way he'd meant them to be when he wrote the legislation. (laughs) So that was the chief counsel's retirement party! (laughter)

Storey: And the chief counsel was who?

Aldrich: Oh . . . I can't help you.

Storey: Okay. Tell me how, in those days, Reclamation's budget was put together. Do you remember?

Aldrich: It came in from the regions, even then. Well, not really—it came in from like the big Projects, they did their own. And then accounting was still in Washington. And then the Design and

Construction Division of the liaison staff would do the broad numbers part and the write-ups on what the work was, *from* material sent in with the budget, of course, from the field. And the accounting department would put all the numbers together, and total costs and that sort of thing. That's how Wendell Bramwell and I got into it—we were the doers that one year, without much supervision.

Storey: Do you remember how the Denver Office participated in the budget process at all—if it did at all?

Aldrich: Well, they would have a review. I think they had direct control of the numbers and the construction engineers at that time, so that nothing would come in from there.

Storey: Now of course this would be just, oh, maybe two or three years after the Regions were

created.

Aldrich: Yeah, and the Denver office had a big voice in things. The regions, of course, did too.

Actually, I guess the budgets must have come in from the Regions at that time. But they were so new, even when I got out here, I don't think the region has been here very long.

Storey: Abe Fortas signed the reorganization memo in 1944, as I recall.

Aldrich: In '44, you see, and I got out here in '46, so the regional director here, I don't think, had been here very long. Glenn Sloan had been here a *long* time as a planner, and he was assistant regional director, and author of the Plan [Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program] for the basin.

Storey: Now was Ted Mermel your direct supervisor?

Aldrich: Yeah, he was.

Storey: Tell me about Ted Mermel.

Aldrich: Well, Ted was a hard worker, and I enjoyed working for him. He got to be, I think, assistant to the commissioner, before he was through. He was a good friend.

Storey: Yeah. He's still very active. You know, he works for the World Bank full-time now.

Aldrich: Oh, does he still? My God, he must be ninety years old, isn't he?

Storey: He's eighty-seven. He retired in 1973. I interviewed him about four or five weeks ago for the first interview. And then he and his wife went to Florida. He thought he was going to retire in Florida, at least *part* of the year in Florida. And he said that lasted a few months, couldn't stand it, came back to Washington, and in '75 he started working for the World Bank and he's been there full-time ever since. (Aldrich: I'll be damned.) So he had worked

for Reclamation for forty years, from '33 to '73, and he's had twenty years at the World Bank now.

Aldrich: I'll be darned! (laughter)

Storey: He gave me a little lecture about "retirement isn't for everybody." (laughs)

Work in Retirement

Aldrich: Well, I went at it a little different: I didn't have any desire to come back. I was lucky. Bechtel [Corporation] was trying to get underway, a transfer of water from Wyoming to the south— Texas and states to the east—for a coal slurry pipeline.

Storey: Yeah, ETSI, maybe.

Moved to Texas Eight Years after Retiring

Aldrich: Yeah. And I worked on that as a consultant for Bechtel [Corporation] for eight years. The only reason I quit was because we decided to

move to Texas. And we did move there, and it just was too far away—although I could have stayed on working for them. But it was a strange project. The railroads were pretty adamant (chuckles) that they weren't going to let Bechtel . . . It got to be so that every crossing was a major court case, of the railroads. It was also obvious that there was a lot of collusion among the railroads. So Bechtel ultimately sued the railroads on that. Don't quote me on this part of it! (laughter) But it's no secret, really. They got a \$750 million settlement for collusion.

Storey: Oh, really?! Well, that's all in the public record, right? (Aldrich: Uh-huh.) What about—let's drop back just a little bit—Brig [Walker] Young? Did you ever know him when you were in the Denver Office?

Aldrich: Yes, I just saw him when I reported for duty.

And I saw him, I had to go over and clear [with] him to go to Washington. And then when he'd come to Washington, he'd always look me up. So I really didn't know him, as such, or do much work for him.

Storey: Do you have any sense of how big the Denver Office was in '39 when you went there?

Aldrich: It was big. I don't have any idea, because we were only in the Canals Division, but I suppose it [Canals Division] was a hundred people all by itself, maybe more.

Storey: What about Goodrich Lineweaver? Tell me about him.

Aldrich: Most loved man, I think, that I've ever worked with, by the people that he worked with there. (Storey: Really?) Uh-huh. Leon Hill in the field was the same type of person.

Storey: But he got crosswise with, I believe it was the Eisenhower administration, later?

Aldrich: I don't know. We were out here, and I didn't know what was going on there.

Storey: What was his personality like?

Aldrich: Well, it was different. He was pretty jolly. I never saw . . . He'd sit there back with his eyes shut, and you'd think maybe the guy's asleep, but he wasn't. (laughs) I did a lot of work for him directly, but it was just like I said, the writing of letters that were aimed at reaching decisions. He had a pretty free hand inside the Bureau on the thing.

Storey: I think somebody told me he was politically well-connected. Know anything about that?

Aldrich: I think so, but I don't know anything about it.

Moves to Region in Billings

Storey: Well, how did it come about that you moved

from Washington, from the liaison representative's staff, to Billings, to the Project Development Division's staff?

Aldrich: Well, I was trying to think of who was chief of O&M. He was Lineweaver's assistant. Does that help you any? Lineweaver was that for a while, and then he moved over as the Assistant to the commissioner, and Gene Oh! I can't think of his name. I knew him real well. He got the idea, and he was the guy that pushed to get me out here.

Storey: So what was the project development staff all about?

Aldrich: Well, it was agricultural people, primarily, that were sent in here to do the work on the lands, the soil examinations, and agricultural economists. And they took over all the repayment work, and finally they consolidated in the regional office then, into one division,

with Bill Rawlings as the head of it, after Ole Johnson, who was an oldtimer here—you may have heard about him—came from the Milk River Project in here as head of O&M. And after he died, why then Bill was made chief of that, and they consolidated them at the same time.

Storey: Was the Project Development Division looking at new projects, (Aldrich: Yes.) or O&M, or what?

Aldrich: New projects was their business—the Missouri River Basin. It was the Missouri River Basin Project only. (Storey: Oh, okay.) And O&M was largely the old projects.

Storey: So they were doing the studies to find out what ought to be built as part of the Missouri Basin program?

Aldrich: No, not that—just the agricultural part of it. See, the Planning Division still was involved

with an equal voice in what should be built. And the [Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin] Plan, roughly, of course, was in existence—it was in the authorizing documents. They worked through the field offices then pretty much. We had a pretty free hand in the field.

Storey: I'm still having trouble figuring out what you were doing. You were studying what?

Aldrich: In the project development staff here? (Storey: Yeah.) For a while we did that before they set up the offices—that was just a short while. I was only here about a year, and then I went to Great Falls. And they were getting underway with all the economic studies and the repayment contracts and the land classification, to set up the irrigation districts and get the thing rolling, is what they were supposed to do.

Storey: So that's what the Project Development Division was doing? (Aldrich: Right.) They

already knew they had a project in “X” area,
(Aldrich: Yeah.) so then they would go out
and do all this legwork in preparation?

(Aldrich: That’s right.) I see.

Aldrich: They didn’t do the engineering work, they just
did the agricultural end of the work, and the
organizing of it.

Storey: Determining whether or not things could be
repaid (Aldrich: Yeah.) and all of those kinds
of things?

Aldrich: Yeah, and organizing the irrigation districts,
assisting in that.

Storey: And you were Bill Rawlings’ assistant?

Aldrich: Well, assistant *to*

Storey: So what did you do as the assistant to Bill
Rawlings?

Aldrich: Well, anything he wanted me to do, is about
what it amounts to. When he was gone, I acted
as the chief, even though there were people

there that were a higher grade than I was. I was just a Grade 12 at that time. Progress is slow in Denver, you know—always has been. I remember McBurney telling me the day I reported for work, “Well, Harold, if you *are* successful here, you can expect to make \$100 times your age by the time you retire.” And that was a lot to look forward to in those days.

Storey: What grade did you start at, at Reclamation?

Aldrich: Well, the Bureau had a different system then: chopped it into a GS . . . I don’t even know whether it was that, but the professional grade, what started at \$2,000, which was as a P-1 in ordinary professional Grade 1 in the ordinary classification. But theirs was a grade . . . I’m trying to figure . . . I’ve got it over there on a thing that shows my record. But you went up in \$300 steps. In those days \$600 was the difference between a P-1 and a P-2, so that it

would be \$2,000, \$2,300, \$2,600, \$2,900.

After six years I'd gotten up to \$2,900 when I left for Washington.

Storey: And then they gave you another promotion in Washington?

Aldrich: Yeah, to go to a Grade 11, I guess it would be, on a non-professional deal. I still was rated as an engineer. But when I came back here, for a while I got out of the ranks because of my boss. I worked for Ralph Workinger for just a very, very short while, when they put the staff—they consolidated the staff of the region, and had one person in charge of this.

[Kenneth] Vernon did that when he came here—he and George Pratt. George Pratt was the brains, and they had a staff here in Billings that Ralph Workinger headed up—that's all the workers in all the divisions of the regional office, except the heads of the sections there,

practically. There were a few . . . And I was his assistant on that, assistant chief of that staff.

Storey: So when you came from Washington to Billings, you went from a [Grade] 11 to a [Grade] 12? (Aldrich: Yes.) And then about a year later you went on up to Great Falls? (Aldrich: For a [Grade] 13 there.) For a [Grade] 13.

Aldrich: And I was supposed to go to a [Grade] 14 in another year, but a problem developed—(laughs) the assistant commissioner came out. I can't remember his name—he's a real nice fellah. He's from Amarillo, you may have his . . . I'm [almost] sure you have his name there.

Storey: I don't remember.

Aldrich: And he was making a speech in Havre, Montana, and on the way he wanted to look at

the Lower Marias Project. And so we took him up, and he'd brought his wife along. I left my personnel chief to take his wife up to Havre, directly, and she could shop a little, and he'd take her up there. Lo and behold, when we got there, she wasn't there, and he was really fretting and fuming because she always laid out his clothes when he got dressed for a speech and so forth and so on, and tied his necktie, I guess. Anyway, it developed that (chuckles) there was a storm going on when we left town, and he [the personnel chief] drove up to his house and told the assistant commissioner's wife that he was sorry, but his wife was terribly frightened of storms, that he had to go and comfort her. So he left her sitting in the car! (laughs) So you can imagine her reaction! She told me several years later, "You know, I was frightened too!" (laughs)

So the other three boys all got their promotion, but I didn't get mine. I never could find out why, but it turned out that he and the chief of planning were just tossing it back and forth. Well, Ken Markwell came out—this was about three years later—and I took him around and showed him our operation, and he was very impressed, especially with what I knew about Canyon Ferry and how it operated and what was going on there. When we came back, he told me he was impressed and he was going to get back and see that something was done about my grade. And he did—within a month, I had my raise. [laughter] So strange things happen.

District Manager in Great Falls

Storey: Yeah, they do. How did you go from Billings to Great Falls? What happened?

Aldrich: I was just told that Ken Vernon and his

advisors—I think it was Bill Rawlings, maybe, and George Pratt, and maybe Johnny Walker who was the power man at that time—they had a staff meeting and it turned out that . . . Well, they picked the four district project managers in that meeting, and I was told at the end of that meeting that I was going to Great Falls.

Storey: A promotion. They can't do that nowadays!
(laughter)

Aldrich: How do you mean?

Storey: Well, you know, they have to offer it for competition. You hadn't applied or anything?

(Aldrich: No.) Is that what I'm hearing?

(Aldrich: That's right.) Okay.

Aldrich: There was nobody to compete with me, though— not for *any* of us. There was nobody with qualifications.

Storey: And these were basically project offices?

Aldrich: Right. We had about, oh, I'd say 500-600

people working for us at that time. (Storey: In the) In the area. (Storey: In the Great Falls area?) Uh-huh.

Storey: So we're talking about Sun River, Milk River Is the Lower Yellowstone in this state?

Aldrich: At that time . . . I forgot, by golly, they had a project office here in Billings too, headed by the regional power supervisor's assistant, and he was the other project manager, operated out of here. And he had the power in Fort Peck—we didn't have that. We had the Milk River Project, which is right across the river. And then he had the Project that came out of Fort Peck and the Yellowstone River on that thing. (Storey: Okay.) But they didn't ever have too much to do, outside of power, but they had quite a bit to do as far as the power went.

Storey: So you had 400 or 500 people (Aldrich:

Yeah.) out of *your* Project Office, as a GS-13 and a 14.

Aldrich: No I never got to . . . Yes I did too! I got to 14 after three years.

Storey: What were the kinds of things that came up for you up there? You mentioned Canyon Ferry, for instance. Now, if I'm understanding correctly, the chief engineer's office was responsible for construction. So how were you involved as a project manager?

Aldrich: I was the guy who was in charge of the money, and so I pretty much had charge of everything on the thing. I had to work with the chief, and I never had *any* problem with any of the chief's people at all.

Storey: Who was the project engineer, do you remember?

Aldrich: Yeah, Bill [Price]. Yeah. And he did real

well, but he got into a little trouble. They were going to give him a downgrade—he was a Grade 14 and I was supervising him, and he was a good man. Actually, he went up there, to begin with, for about six months—he was there as my acting project manager, and I was assistant project manager. (Storey: Up at Great Falls?) Yeah, but then Canyon Ferry came along, and he got *that* job, which is what he wanted on that thing. He would have built the diversion dam below Fort Peck if it had ever gone, but it didn't. He was a consulting engineer in California for a while after. And when Canyon Ferry was done, he just didn't get a job anymore. Well, he fought [L. N.] McClellan.

Storey: McClellan was the chief engineer?

Aldrich: Yeah.

Storey: What was that about, do you remember?

Aldrich: He was unhappy with the settlement with the contractor on the thing. He argued a little too long.

Storey: Oh, the contractor made claims on the contract?

Aldrich: Yeah, uh-huh. The chief approved them and Bill was adamant against them, and so his star went from the top to the bottom, right away.

Storey: Canyon Ferry was a pretty major project?

Aldrich: Yes, it was.

Storey: I've never seen that dam.

Aldrich: It's a concrete gravity structure. But the district had charge of the money and the budget. But we didn't have any problem with the chief at all.

Storey: How did you get involved, for instance, in this claim that came up?

Aldrich: Which claim?

Storey: You were saying that Bill . . .

Aldrich: *I didn't get involved in it. That was between the chief engineer and Bill, the construction engineer, on settling the prime contract. They'd had a problem. They just diverted the whole river, which was a good-sized river, you know, up there—in flood season, especially—around the dam. It collapsed during a flood, so there was a big claim.*

Storey: *And the chief engineer let some of the claim go through, I guess.*

Aldrich: *Yeah, well, he gave him more than Bill wanted him to give the contractor.*

Storey: *Well, there's an art to knowing when you're done!*

Aldrich: *When you're done, that's right! (laughter) I was surprised at Bill, because he was a pretty astute person, but he just got his back up, and he just would not I saw [Grant] Bloodgood take him out several times and talk*

to him about it, that if he had any regard for his future in the Bureau, he'd better be quiet, it'd been settled. The chief had made a decision, and he'd lost. (chuckles) Of course Bloodgood was not for him either, at that time, but he was one of Bloodgood—Grant's boys.

Storey: Now [Grant] Bloodgood was chief engineer later then?

Aldrich: Later, uh-huh. And then came Barney Bellport.

Storey: Yeah. Tell me more about Tiber Dam, if you would.

Aldrich: Well, we had a problem with the spillway right away, after the first big flood—that had to be repaired. You're getting the story from an adverse position (laughs) if you could find—I used to have the article that was featured in *The Saturday Evening Post*, if you're familiar with that magazine. (Storey: Yeah, I remember that

magazine.) They didn't take the Bureau's side, they took the prospective water users' side. And actually, we lost a decision, due to some misunderstanding, because it was an engineering thing, and the judge made the decision—he didn't know what he was doing—and they had a smarter lawyer—the water users had. But he got pretty confident in that thing—he beat us. His name was Randall [Swansberg], from Great Falls, and he [didn't really have] a case. [Unrelated material deleted at request of interviewee]

Storey: Now what are we talking about now?

Aldrich: The Helena Valley Project. There's a pumping system that pumps water out of Canyon Ferry into a little off-stream reservoir. And the Project supplies municipal water to the City of Helena and then irrigates about 12,000 acres there, right around Helena. So you learn as

you go along—we weren't prepared too well
[the first time on Lower Marias].

Storey: Now what was this lawsuit about?

Aldrich: Just they were opposed on the thing. It don't
come to me exactly, the problem, which was
there at the time. But Randall Swansberg lost
this case. [Additions and deletions at request
of interviewee].

Storey: Uh-huh, but why did we proceed to build the
[Tiber] dam?

Aldrich: Because we had a group of people[, more than
sixty percent of the people owning sixty
percent of the land,] who said they would see
that it was taken care of, the repayment
responsibility, and it turned out they couldn't.
[Deletion at request of interviewee.]

Storey: Tiber, I think, is a fairly large reservoir.

Aldrich: Yeah, it is.

Storey: So was that a problem for you as Project

manager, that you had a reservoir and nobody wanted the water?

Aldrich: Well, it hadn't died yet, even by the time I left there. They were still trying to get it worked out, but it didn't work out on that.

Storey: Now the irrigation project that was going to come out of Tiber was called the Lower Marias Project? (Aldrich: Yes.) And that's because it was on the Marias River? (Aldrich: Yes.)

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 7, 1995.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MARCH 7, 1995.

Storey: This is tape two of an interview by Brit Storey with Harold Aldrich on March 7, 1995.

I was just saying that you mentioned rehab projects on Milk River and Sun River, I think.

Aldrich: Sun River. Actually we had one—there's a picture in the other room there of Heart

Mountain¹⁰—we had one down there too.

[Where it] improved the project. Some were lining [canals] down on Heart Mountain, they were going to lining pretty much, or pipe, on some of their distribution systems. And the first one was while I was still regional director, but they kept going. And then later on they did the same thing up on the Sun River Project. I don't think they did any pipe there, but they did some waterproofing in the canal so they wouldn't lose so much.

Storey: Now who paid for this? Were these O&M things?

Aldrich: They were contracting, they were being paid for under the contract—should be—repayment contract.

Storey: Oh, so Reclamation paid for this?

10. The Heart Mountain Canal and Heart Mountain Powerplant are on the Shoshone Project. The Heart Mountain Division was completed in 1947. A rehabilitation and Betterment program began in 1967.

Aldrich: No, the water users. Well, they appropriated the money, they got the money, and the water users contracted to pay for the costs.

Storey: Oh, okay. What kind of interest do we charge on those?

Aldrich: None. Irrigation don't pay interest.

Storey: Okay. So who decides whether or not they need a rehab project, an R&B project, rehabilitation and betterment?

Aldrich: Mostly the water users, in those days. If the water users decided they needed one, and would sign a contract to pay for it, then we could get the money under the R&B program. There was a master Bureau program that had all these projects in it, in *every* Region, and you'd just get them. When you got the need for it, why then you'd just put that in the program, or recommend it. If it got approved, why then you built it. In *some* cases, like down

at Heart Mountain,¹¹ that was the start of it, while I was still director. The district did the work: instead of contracting it out, they did it themselves, and we supervised. Just a one-man deal, so that our overhead was quite small on the thing.

Storey: When Reclamation became involved, how did Reclamation decide whether or not it was appropriate? (Aldrich: For what?) To do an R&B project.

Aldrich: Well, there might be a little investigation money in some cases; but most of the time, as I recall, why, you had them wanting it and then you paid to help them figure it out, what it would cost. And then you contracted. And you'd get some planning money out of the R&B. It would all be reimbursable.

11. The Heart Mountain Canal is on the Shoshone Project in Wyoming. The Garland Division of the Shoshone Project entered into a rehabilitation and betterment contract with Reclamation in 1969.

Storey: Yeah, but I'm wondering . . . One of the responsibilities, when a district is running the Project, is to O&M the project.

Aldrich: Right, for the district to.

Storey: Right. How do you determine that they need an R&B project, instead of just to do their O&M?

Aldrich: Well, we had a program, where if the district decided they *wanted* one, and you agreed with them, then you could ask for money to make a study. And that would be part of the project costs. Then they'd contract to pay for that plus the cost of the work.

Storey: And typically, what would an R&B project involve?

Aldrich: Mostly lateral systems, sometimes more.

Storey: Improving them? Or water conservation?

Aldrich: Drainage, and yeah, some of it would be, on Heart Mountain, especially, it was water

conservation, because they put in pipes down there. And of course it would be on Sun River, because they had sandy soils too, but they couldn't afford pipes.

Storey: Okay. You mentioned that while you were at Great Falls there was a flood.

Aldrich: Two, really. I know about the second one, because that was just a short while after I came up from Amarillo on that thing. And on *that* one, it was a bad flood on the Sun River, bad flood up the . . . Oh, darn, the name of the project is the same as the town, up north of there. They'd washed out their water supply reservoir—we replaced that. But that was all non-reimbursable money, whether it was on a Bureau project or privately, and it was allocated by the . . . What's the name of it, the disaster relief office out of Washington—I think it was then? A fellow by the name of Creath

Tooley was the regional director. He finally moved to Billings—I got to know him pretty well.

Storey: Do you know how to spell his name?

Aldrich: C-R-E-A-T-H T-O-O-L-E-Y. I played golf with him here, since he retired. He came through and the Bureau and the Corps of Engineers would survey these things with some technical people, and they would agree on a cost to fix it. And then the public facilities would be all that would be involved—publicly owned—and we replaced those, free of cost.

Storey: In other words, the government just said, “Take the money?”

Aldrich: On any flood work, yeah. We got the money with very little . . . Oh, we had people seeing that we were doing the work, that we weren’t spending it, that would come from Tooley’s

office. But it was emergency work. But we had some people who were gifted in that area.

Storey: Now, when you were head of the project office and you had the flood then, what kinds of things had to be done in order to repair the damage, do you remember?

Aldrich: You know, whatever. Drains had to be re-excavated, because they were filled up, to drain the projects. And structures were washed out, and that type of thing. The first one wasn't bad. In Great Falls, it was either two or three days, but we had thirteen inches of rain, and that's a hell of a lot, up in this country.

Storey: Yeah, considering that's more than your average rainfall for a year, probably.

Aldrich: Yeah, up there it is. It's just about the average. And I know my own house was caught in a little local flood. Water was running around, not in *my* house, but my neighbor's house, it

was running around a house, (chuckles) down an old railroad embankment.

Storey: Did we do anything in the towns? Or was our work . . .

Aldrich: No, we didn't do anything there—that would be the Corps would do those kind of things. It was only on the irrigation works. Flood control work, the Corps did.

Storey: So for instance, I believe you said we replaced a small dam or two? (Aldrich: Yeah.) They paid for that also?

Aldrich: Yeah, the water users didn't have to pay for it.

Storey: Okay. But Reclamation was asked to do it?

Aldrich: Uh-huh, we were designated to do it, because we *asked* for it.

Storey: Yeah, I don't think the dam that failed was a Reclamation dam at the time, at least.

Aldrich: Well, we had quite a bit of work to do on Gibson, on the last one, because where the

water went over the top, it washed off some of the stuff on the downstream face. A lot of the project works required work, out in the irrigation part of the Project, (Storey: Uh-huh.) with the big dam. It was a beautiful little thing, just a little dam, but it's a thin concrete arch that the chief came up with on that.

Storey: One of the things I'm sort of interested in, is at what level in Reclamation you begin to see politics coming into the way decisions are made. When you were at the project office in Great Falls, did you have anything like that going on?

Aldrich: All the time. (chuckles)

Storey: Can you give me a couple of examples?

Aldrich: Well, I was a pretty good friend of the senators and congressmen on that thing. They would call and inquire.

Storey: And you would understand that they were

inquiring because they were interested?

Aldrich: Right, on that thing. I would report what went on to the boss, but we had that authority in those days.

Storey: Who *was* the boss?

Aldrich: Ken Vernon, when I first came out.

Storey: The regional director, then?

Aldrich: Yes, and then Frank Clinton was here for quite a long time after that. And then I got exiled to Amarillo. This is kind of a funny situation, because the situation had come up six months before, and I had been picked to be the regional director, but when this came up, they picked Bruce Johnson, (laughs) which was fine with me. I didn't even know it at the time. But he didn't get along with Dominy, so that's why he was replaced.

Storey: Bruce Johnson? [Deletion at request of interviewee] He was regional director *after*

Frank Clinton?

Aldrich: Yes. Frank went to Salt Lake City.

Storey: Do you know if either of them are still alive?

Aldrich: Frank's dead, and I think Bruce is gone now too. Bruce went overseas, like Ken Vernon did, with . . . Oh, what the hell is it? It's the agency that does the foreign relief work [A.I.D.], and builds projects in foreign countries, actually.

Storey: Now did I understand you to say that somebody had decided you would become the regional director in Billings?

Aldrich: Dominy did.

Storey: But before you went to Amarillo, I mean.

Aldrich: I was told I'd get the next opening. (Storey: Oh.) It was a lateral transfer. Floyd [had] decided it was time for me to move on, and Leon [Hill, regional director in Amarillo] [needed] some help with some of the

[repayment] contract work. So he said he was going to exile me to Amarillo.

Storey: This was Floyd. How did you meet Floyd Dominy?

Aldrich: Oh, over the years I just got acquainted with him, when he'd come out.

Storey: He visited the project office in Great Falls then?

Aldrich: Oh yeah, we'd have him out for conventions and things, you know. He was well known to all our water users, the organizations, and well-liked.

Storey: What was *he* like?

Aldrich: He was a very strong leader. He knew what he wanted, and by God, if you didn't do it, you were in trouble! (chuckles) I never had any argument with what he wanted to do, myself.

Head of O&M in Amarillo

Storey: So he decided that you should move from

Great Falls to Amarillo?

Aldrich: Yeah.

Storey: That's quite a move! (laughs)

Aldrich: Yeah, right!

Storey: As the head of O&M down there. (Aldrich: Yeah.) What kinds of issues . . .

Aldrich: Well, he had already cleared it with Leon Hill, of course. The big project in Amarillo was the dam down there, north fifty miles out, and border.¹²

Storey: Out of where?

Aldrich: Out of Amarillo. We supplied water to Amarillo and Lubbock and about ten other little towns around there.

Storey: *North* of Amarillo?

Aldrich: On the river up there, and the water is terrible,

12. Sanford Dam impounds Lake Meredith on the Canadian River Project just north of Amarillo. It is a municipal water supply dam which provides flood control, recreation, and fish and wildlife benefits. Congress authorized the Project in 1950, and Reclamation constructed Sanford Dam 1962-5.

and everybody knew it to begin with. It runs about 1,400 parts per million of salt, among other things, and so is not really drinkable. They just use it to water the grass and stuff like that. They have wells in town where you can go get water, there, in a bucket or container.

And then we had the project out of Colorado with the big reservoir, transmountain diversion there. And one of our big things there, we sold . . . You see, that's a closed basin, the river, the Rio Grande. Albuquerque needed water—well, they *had* to have water to divert from the river at some time, and so what we did, we sold them water out of this dam, which permitted them to pump out of the river then, you see. And so it was quite a deal. Fred Gray and I did all the—he was the field solicitor in Amarillo, did all the backwork on that one.

Storey: This was part of your contracting

responsibilities?

Aldrich: Yeah.

Storey: Now we're talking about the Closed Basin Project, or that came later, didn't it?

Aldrich: The Rio Grande in New Mexico *is* a closed basin, and you can't divert water from the river, or even dig a well, unless you have a source of water other than those.

Storey: Oh, are we talking about the diversion over—was it at Chama¹³ or someplace?

Aldrich: Yeah, that's it.

Storey: Okay, I'd forgotten the exact name of it.¹⁴

Aldrich: Yeah, I had too. And then we got, of course, a little later on, why, they changed the regional boundaries there about that time, and the

13. In 1962 Congress authorized addition of the San Juan-Chama Project to the Colorado River Storage Project originally authorized in 1956. Reclamation designed the San Juan-Chama Project to divert about 110,000 acre feet of water from the upper San Juan River, a tributary of the Colorado River, for use in the Rio Grande River basin.

14. San Juan-Chama Project.

Navajo Project¹⁵ became [included in] the Regional Office down there. Now it's back the other way, I guess. (Storey: Uh-huh.) As the Navajo Dam got done, why, that was the last thing that the Salt Lake office had to do with it, and we were in charge of irrigation at the time I left there.

Storey: Tell me about O&M. How did you oversee the O&M function?

Aldrich: I had a staff in Amarillo.

Storey: And what did they do in order to oversee the O&M function in the Amarillo Region?

Aldrich: I had technical people, they're professionals—economists, engineers, and some land classifiers, and right-of-way people. And they didn't do the work, they just supervised the work in the field—they didn't direct it. They

15. Congress authorized the Navajo Indian Irrigation Project (NIIP) in 1962. Water comes from the Navajo Unit of the Colorado River Storage Project authorized in 1956 with Navajo Dam constructed 1957-63.

established criteria, that type of thing, for the various categories. What we did, like the economics, we did right there in the Amarillo Office.

Storey: But how did they know what needed to be done?

Aldrich: Well, you were given a plan—you're always given a plan, by the Planning Division, you know. (Storey: Uh-huh.) And so then you got to put the meat on the bones: sometimes it passes, and sometimes it don't—when you get into the gritty part of the work.

Storey: I don't think I'm asking this question so that you understand what I'm trying to get at. What did your division do to oversee O&M in the Region so that Reclamation felt comfortable that it's projects were being properly O&M'ed?

Aldrich: Well, in that region there, they were our people

on the projects—the Bureau was operating them.

Storey: Oh, we were?!

Aldrich: Yeah.

Storey: Oh, okay.

Aldrich: I think you *still* are down there on that thing. I didn't have direct supervision, but I was able to control things pretty much, because Leon [Hill] trusted me, (chuckles) frankly.

Storey: Yeah. So each project would report on what their O&M needs were for the year?

Aldrich: Yeah, and it was paid for by the water users all right, except *some* was construction.

Storey: Did we have O&M reviews out on the projects?

Aldrich: Sure, every year.

Storey: Every year, okay. Now you mentioned that there were a lot of municipal projects.

Aldrich: Yes, over there. I sold water all over

Oklahoma, like to the city of . . . Oh, for heaven's sakes! Well, an island in Oklahoma City and Norman,¹⁶ and then some of the western towns¹⁷—they have their own projects there. The two western ones were pretty well done with. I had to work with Leon and clean them up, and Fred Gray.

And then up in Kansas, too, we did. We got a project there out of Wichita,¹⁸ on that one. Leon and I did that one—as far as the contract goes.

Storey: Now, if I'm recalling correctly, the lower Rio Grande would have been in the Amarillo

16. Congress authorized the Norman Project in 1960. Reclamation built Norman Dam on the Little River just east of Norman, Oklahoma, between 1962 and 1965. Lake Thunderbird, behind Norman Dam, has a total capacity of 196,200 acre feet with 105,900 acre feet of active storage and 76,600 acre feet of flood control storage.

17. The Washita Basin Project, authorized in 1956, was built 1958-62. Foss Dam and Reservoir and Fort Cobb Dam and Reservoir provide water to the towns of Clinton, Cordell, Hobart, Bessie, and Anadarko, Oklahoma, as well as for other purposes.

18. Reclamation built the Wichita Project, authorized in 1960, between 1962 and 1965 as a supplemental water supply for the City of Wichita, Kansas.

region. (Aldrich: Uh-huh.) Did that region have a number at that time? (Aldrich: That was five.) Region 5. (Aldrich: Right.) Did you become involved in any of the things like Falcon Dam and the international parts of the Rio Grande?

Aldrich: In a way, I suppose you would say, down on the lower one. What the heck was the name of that? Diablo, was that? (Storey: I've forgotten the names of the lower ones.) The last one on the lower stem of the Rio Grande, we had the power production. Although the Boundary Commission¹⁹ built it, we sold it. It wasn't very damned much, but we did it.

Storey: Now, did the O&M responsibility also include power?

Aldrich: It did, only at . . . Oh, what's the dam on the Rio Grande at Truth or Consequences? Do

19. International Boundary and Water Commission (IBWC).

you know where that is?

Storey: I know where Truth or Consequences is, but I don't think I know the dam.

Aldrich: There's a big dam there that serves the Rio Grande Project down in El Paso there.

Storey: We aren't talking Elephant Butte? (Aldrich: Yes.) We are, okay.

Aldrich: And that's a Bureau dam, and they operate the powerplant there.

Storey: And so you had oversight over the power function there also? (Aldrich: Yeah.) Okay, good. Tell me more about Leon Hill.

Aldrich: A wonderful person -- easy to work for, but a stickler for detail. He got things rolling in that region. It was dead on its feet when he took over, and he was the force behind the new projects, because he could sell them, and he was well-liked by the people there.

Storey: Do you know if he's still around or not?

Aldrich: No, he's not, he's dead. Now, his assistant is still alive in Albuquerque, and you might want to talk to John [Thompson]. He would be eighty-five now. He's an artist that can sell everything he does. But he was head of the project over in Albuquerque, and he moved back there and he lives there now.

John [Thompson] a southern gentleman, comes from Arkansas. His brother was mayor of Little Rock, I think. Thompson! John Thompson. And you should talk to him, because you'll get a really good picture. He worked with Leon for a good long time. John was in charge of the Middle Rio Grande Project, and Leon was supervisor of operations and maintenance in the regional office there then.

Moves Back to Billings

Storey: How was it that you went from Amarillo back

to Billings? What happened there?

Aldrich: I just got a call one day and said, “It’s time to go.”

Storey: This was Floyd again?

Aldrich: Yeah. (laughter)

Storey: Floyd had his own way of management!

Aldrich: Quite a kick. Did you know Bill Palmer

(Storey: No, I don’t think so.) I never told—he was the assistant commissioner at the time—had been chief of O&M and Floyd’s assistant there. He’s a Mormon. I don’t know if he’s still alive or not. But he called me up one day and said, “You’re being offered a job.” Well, I got an offer, is what it was, over the teletype, said I was being offered a job as head of the Operations and Maintenance Division in Washington. So I said, “no,” I wasn’t going to take it. Well, he called me, (chuckles) and he thought I should go. And I said, “Well, I’ve

got a promise that I'll be the next regional director, wherever the opening is. And I'm going to stay with that."

"Well, I don't know whether you should or not. You'd better call Floyd, but I warn you, I don't advise it."

But I did, and I reminded him that he promised me that, and he said, "I haven't forgotten it."

Storey: (chuckles) "I haven't forgotten it"! (laughter)
And did you know Billings was open then?

Aldrich: No, it wasn't open then, but it was in about . . . He preferred the guy that they put in the job anyway—Floyd did, for Washington—Maury²⁰ . . . You may know him. He's retired now too.

Storey: Maurice He lives in the Washington, D.C. area, I believe. I've forgotten his last

20. Maurice Langley may be the person referred to.

name, right off the bat.

Aldrich: But he's the one that got the job then.

Storey: Uh-huh. And so then finally Billings came open?

Aldrich: Yeah. So I moved.

Storey: Did somebody give you a call?

Aldrich: Floyd [Dominy] did.

Storey: Do you remember how he put it?

Aldrich: No, I think it was just straight, "The job's open." Actually, I heard that he and Bruce didn't get along at all. I don't know why.

Storey: Bruce?

Aldrich: Johnson.²¹

Storey: Bruce Johnson. Yeah, sometimes the chemistry doesn't work.

Aldrich: Well, it didn't, and it actually got to the point where Bruce was just frightened to death that

21. Bruce Johnson served as regional director in Billings from 1960 to 1964. In 1964 he became the planning officer for the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program. Harold Aldrich then became regional director.

damned telephone would ring, I'm told, by some of our staff members—I was, when I came in. He just didn't have the guts to say what he thought—I guess because he'd been wrong too many times, I don't know. It's too bad—Bruce was a damned good man, he did a good job in North Dakota.

Storey: Working on the Pick-Sloan Missouri Basin Program?

Aldrich: Yeah, he was in charge over there.

Storey: Over at Bismarck, maybe?

Aldrich: Yeah.

Storey: So he would have been a project manager?

Aldrich: Yes. Joe Grimes was the guy, and that was at . . . Oh, south of Aberdeen, the big town over there I can think of the newspaper guy's name, but I can't think of the . . . My assistant finally came from there: he was the project manager over there. Did you know [Jim

Bradley]? He's a dear friend. (chuckles) He went out from power manager's job in Washington, to be regional director after Leon²² passed away. (Storey: No.) Well, after Leon retired—let's put it that way—because Leon didn't die right away, but not too long after he retired.

Storey: So you moved to Billings in the spring of '64. And at that time, Yellowtail was under construction. (Aldrich: Right.) What kind of issues was Yellowtail confronting the regional office with?

Aldrich: Really, I didn't have any trouble. The construction engineer and I became very good friends. He was an oldtimer, and so was the contractor, a dear friend. The three of us just got along like "three bubs in a tub."

Storey: Do you remember the name of the construction

22. James A. Bradley.

engineer?

Aldrich: Yeah, I do, but I can't say it.

Storey: Then you were flooded! You walked in the region, and here came the flood again.

Aldrich: Yeah. And we had a situation right away on Yellowtail that wasn't good, because I don't know who the hell made the decision, but the highway at the upper end of the reservoir there, across from Sheridan to Powell, it was designed for a twenty-five-year flood, and we got about a seventy-five- or hundred-year flood the very first year, so it went right under water. And there was a loud howl, of course. They didn't want water going down the Yellowstone. A congressman came in to see me—now a retired Federal judge here. And he wanted the water shut off. (Storey: In order to keep the . . .) . . . flooding from below downstream. So finally we had to hit a happy

compromise, and we held for a few days, and it worked itself out. In the process, the spillway washed out (laughs) on the first time it was used. (Storey: At Yellowtail?) Yeah.

(Storey: Oh my!) So it was cavitation from the water rolling over. So it's fixed now, but they haven't really had to use it since then.

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Storey: I had asked you what other problems developed out of the flood that year.

Aldrich: Well, we've been over those, really, where the water went over the top of Gibson Dam, and the dam washed out up north of Fairfield there. The name of the town is the name of the project, and I can't think of the name of the town. I could get a map out.

Storey: We're not talking Toston?

Aldrich: No, Toston is where What bench?

(Storey: East Bench?) No, East Bench is Clark [Canyon Dam].

Storey: There's another project there anyway. Well, there was a lot of damage to irrigation, east of the mountains in Montana. (Aldrich: Oh yeah, terrible.) Was there another appropriation from Congress, or from the emergency . . .

Aldrich: No, we got money . . . All the money came—they had it, it was in an emergency fund—it was just a matter of the Office of Disaster allocating it. Actually, we got the basic decisions done in one day. I went up with the Corps people in their plane and the director in charge of the money, and came back with an agreement. What it amounted to was simply that they did the flood work and we did the irrigation work, and that was about ninety percent of what was damaged, that we had out of it.

- Storey: And we had to repair both public and private facilities, is that right?
- Aldrich: Well, not any private—it was all public, (Storey: Oh, okay.) that money. If your farm got hurt, unless you had insurance, why, you didn't get helped—unless it was accidental. If it was a project facility that washed out, like a turnout, then that would get replaced on that thing.
- Storey: You mentioned that we built several transmission lines. (Aldrich: Yeah.) Who was running the power branch at that time? Was there a branch or a division?
- Aldrich: George Hm. You mean in Washington?
- Storey: No, I mean in the region.
- Aldrich: In the region. . . I can see his face.
- Storey: It wouldn't have been a Bill Lloyd, would it?
- Aldrich: Bill Lloyd was the assistant. Before he left here, he was *my* assistant. Tom Weaver was the other top man in the Power Division, and

then their boss was Oh damn, I can't tell you that right now. But I think he's about to retire from WAPA [Western Area Power Administration.] You ought to talk to Tom a little bit.

Storey: What's his name?

Aldrich: Tom Weaver. You see, Bill went on to Boise, as regional director, from assistant director here. And I think he got along fine for a while, but then I think something happened, and I'm not so sure what happened to Bill.

Storey: Yeah, he retired quite a number of years ago now. I think it was one or two regional directors ago, up there. Do you know where Tom Weaver is living?

Aldrich: He's in Denver. He was about, here, to retire—or he *has* just retired. And I don't know if he'll stay in Denver or not. But he's been down there, oh, since they moved the Power

Division out. He went down with the fellow, McPhail, who was regional director after me here. And he, I guess, is retired from Basin Electric, and I think he's probably gone back wherever he was on the thing.

Storey: Bob McPhail?

Aldrich: Yeah.

Storey: I didn't know he had retired. Let's see now, according to my notes, you retired in (Aldrich: '73.) '73, so you had been thirty-five years in the Federal government?

Aldrich: In government service—thirty-four with the Bureau.

Storey: Why did you decide to retire?

Aldrich: Well (laughs), I'd been having some problems with the boss. Frankly, I thought that the Bureau's mission was about over. I wasn't wrong on that. But when I left, everything was just hunky-dory. I mean, I was having no

problems of any kind. But I had trouble with the Commissioner after Floyd.

Storey: This is Gil Stamm? (Aldrich: No.) Ellis Armstrong?

Aldrich: Ellis, yeah, that's it. But fortunately, he got fired before I did.

Storey: (laughs) Well, that job is pretty political!

Aldrich: Yeah. (laughs)

Storey: When the administration changes, *it* changes.

Aldrich: And Gil, of course, he ran into trouble with the failed dam—it was just a matter of time.

(Storey: With Teton?) Yeah.

Post-Retirement Activities

Storey: What have you done *since* you've retired? You mentioned you were eight years with ETSI, working on ETSI.

Aldrich: That's all. I had enough by then. So we travel, and we moved south for six years, down fifty miles north of Austin there, while our daughter

was in Houston. He [her husband] works for Dow Chemical. They're now in the Philippines. He took voluntary retirement last year, because their project came to an end—was over helping them build a thermal powerplant on Leyte. But their company had just been taken over, so (laughs) by, [the] Peter Kiewit outfit out of Omaha.

Storey: Well, as you look back over Reclamation, how would you characterize the way it evolved while you were working for Reclamation?

Assessment of Reclamation During Career

Aldrich: I think I was at the peak of the Bureau activities. During the time after I came to Billings, that was just beginning to go. And the people were excited and full of vim and vigor. That's gone now.

Storey: You mentioned that you thought we'd sort of "reached the end." What were the signals that

were telling you that?

Aldrich: Well, when you get into projects in dicey areas like eastern North and South Dakota, you start to have some doubts about “Is this really a good thing?”

Storey: What do you mean “dicey areas”?

Aldrich: About whether they would succeed, whether it was good to irrigate the grounds. We were finding out some things that maybe it wasn’t as irrigable in some areas as had been previously thought.

Storey: Jim Rawlings mentioned that when he became the head of—I want to say O&M, but that may not be the right thing—that he did twenty-some studies of potential new projects, and not one of them was ever built.

Aldrich: Well, I don’t know why he would even be doing that, as head of O&M.

Storey: I’ve forgotten. It must have been some other

thing [office].

Aldrich: Could have been. But there were very few, and there are problems . . . One of our jobs—my job and Tom Weaver’s and Phil Gibbs who was the hydrologist for the Region—we’d sit down once a year and decide what projects might go in the future. And that was the way the costs were allocated, between irrigation and power. I think probably since I’ve left, and Tom has left, and Phil is dead, that hasn’t been done at all—and here we are floating with costs going out of hand because nothing is being built and the power rates have stayed about the same. And at the very least, I don’t understand why nobody has ever even suggested in the Bureau that the costs should be reallocated.

Storey: From . . .

Aldrich: To present-day costs. (Storey: Oh, you mean re) Redone. We did it every year. Well,

not *every* year, but every three, maybe.

Program [Budget] Sessions

Storey: That reminds me of something I *do* want to ask you about. Reclamation was famous for its gatherings to plan its program and its budget. I believe they were two separate gatherings during the year—or were they one? (Aldrich: One.) Tell me about one of those. Do you happen to remember one of them? (Aldrich: Yeah, most of them.) Or characterize them. Where did you go for these?

Aldrich: Oh, went one year to Palm Springs, one year to Austin. It just rotated the regions. I took ‘em one year to Rapid City. That’s the only one I had up here. There was one year in Salt Lake, I think, and Boise.

Storey: And how long did these sessions last?

Aldrich: About three working days.

Storey: Who went with you from the region?

- Aldrich: The program engineer and anybody else that you thought you needed.
- Storey: What was the purpose? What were you trying to achieve at the meetings?
- Aldrich: To get your program budget approved.
- Storey: So you were going and saying, “This is what I need”?
- Aldrich: Yeah. You had an authorized project and “this is the schedule we’re on.” Sometimes you wouldn’t get it, but almost always you would.
- Storey: What kinds of negotiations went on?
- Aldrich: Well, if you were lucky, none. That is, where you sat before everybody else. All you did was go ahead, and as far as some group meetings were concerned, everybody got to sit-in on the other guy’s meeting. But when it come down to the end, why, it was just the commissioner and his assistants that went, that decided that—and the chief engineer.

- Storey: How were the meetings conducted? Did everybody from all the regions and the chief engineer's office and the commissioner's office meet in one room and discuss the programs?
- Aldrich: Separately too. Individual items would be taken up separately with the commissioner's staff members if you had other problems. There was a program conference every year in Washington, too, of course, (Storey: Okay.) just before the hearings.
- Storey: Which one was called the "skull session"?
- Aldrich: That was it. The skull session was the one in Washington.
- Storey: The one in Washington. That was trying to put together the year's programs and priorities?
- Aldrich: Well, yeah--what you were going to get and what you weren't.
- Storey: Okay, good. Now, I'm going to send you a

deed of gift eventually, well, probably within a week or so, and my understanding is that you don't want anything to be released until after you have reviewed the transcripts and looked at . . .

Aldrich: Uh-huh, _____ some things I've said, like I thought there would, because you may not find this any other place. I wouldn't want them to get out.

Storey: Okay. We can then revise the transcripts. What I'll probably do is write the deed of gift to say that the material will be available for research after you have reviewed and approved the transcripts?

Aldrich: That's right.

Storey: Is that okay?

Aldrich: That's all right.

Storey: Okay, good. Well, I appreciate it. Thank you very much.

Aldrich: And review with a little common sense, because my confession about having troubles with Armstrong and stuff, I wouldn't want to get in there, because that's not generally known.

Storey: Okay, good enough.

Aldrich: Well, you know, silly things happen. The assistant secretary during the Republican days one year was named Smith, and he had decided to fire Armstrong. That was the year we had our conference in Salt Lake City. This maybe would have been the National Water Users—I think maybe it was, National Reclamation in those days. The Commissioner was trying to fire somebody, and the assistant secretary was telling me at the same time that he was going to fire Armstrong! (laughs) Well that turned out that the assistant secretary got fired before he could get around to it . . . He was from

Omaha— his name was Smith, and our latest casualty worked for him as his assistant. He was secretary of the interior here, a Republican. You know who I mean. Was he indicted here recently for using his influence to get money?

Storey: Oh, Jim Watt?

Aldrich: Yeah, Jim Watt was his assistant. They both got laid off at that time, for some little thing.

Storey: Well, another one of the regional directors who was appointed by Dominy was Bob Pafford from the Corps. I'll bet you must have had some . . .

Aldrich: Oh yeah, he and I are the only two left, when I retired, that are alive, I think.

Storey: Yeah, Bob is there.

Aldrich: I [was from] the original group, because that group, we were a different group, we worked different. After that, these people weren't

inclined for brotherhood or something.

Storey: Of course there's Ken Vernon who's still around.

Aldrich: Yeah, but I'm talking about the group who when I had been there, after I got to be director, and then before I got to be Director it was the same way—they always were a well-knit group. We would take up issues as a group. If we had a strong feeling, we would argue with the commissioner about a decision we didn't like, and we'd get some overturns, some reversals. After (unintelligible) left, that didn't happen any more.

Storey: Yeah. Well, you know, Floyd Dominy, for instance, it seems as if there were a lot of people who were very, very afraid of him. (Aldrich: Yeah.) And it also seems as if the people he liked were the people who stood up to him. (chuckles)

Aldrich: Yeah. Well, I think every one of us did. He didn't like it if you didn't tell him what you thought. He might give you hell. It wasn't all "love and kisses" working for Floyd.

Storey: Yeah. Well, I really appreciate your taking time out to talk to me today.

Aldrich: Well, I hope it will find something, but some of it I want to take out (Storey: Okay.) because I knew I'd talk more than I should!

Storey: I'll get the transcript back to you.

Aldrich: (laughing) It wasn't your fault, it's my fault!

Storey: Good. Well, thank you very much.

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