ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS
Curtis W. Bowser

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STATUS OF INTERVIEWS:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH

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Interviews Conducted and Edited–1999
By Wm. Joe Simonds, Historian

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By Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian

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CURTIS BOWSER

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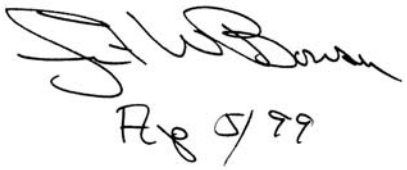

Aug 5/99

Date: 9/5/99 Signed: _____
Curtis Bowser

INTERVIEWER: _____
Wm. Joe Simonds

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Introduction

In 1988, Reclamation began to create a history program. While headquartered in Denver, the history program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

The senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation developed and directs the oral history program. Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to the senior historian.

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Oral History Interviews
Curtis W. Bowser

Simonds: It's March 12, 1999, and we're in Boulder City at the home of Mr. Curt Bowser. This is the beginning of tape one.

Bowser: I've been to Denver with cattle many times, up to the stockyards. There was a café not far from the stockyards, with a bunch of wild animal *heads* all over the walls.

Simonds: This was in the Denver area?

Bowser: I imagine it's still there.

Simonds: The only thing that comes to mind like that might be the Buckhorn Exchange. This was when? About what time, what period?

Bowser: When were you born?

Simonds: I was born in '59. (Laughter.)

Bowser: (Laughter.) Maybe '35, '36, '37.

Raised on a Ranch South of Cheyenne, Wyoming

Simonds: I didn't realize that the [Buckhorn] Exchange had been there that long. So you grew up on a ranch in Wyoming?

Bowser: Yes.

Simonds: Whereabouts in Wyoming?

Bowser: Just south of Cheyenne. The cows would go right straight, in a big truck, right straight down through Fort Collins, Greeley, Ault, Nunn, and on south, go to the stockyards and turn around and load if it was the right time of the year. I don't know where they'd come from. A farmers' exchange someplace, and we'd load up with peaches and pears and plums and head back north. It was certainly interesting.

Simonds: So back to growing up in Wyoming. It was a cattle ranch?

Studied Agronomy, Botany, and Zoology at the University of Wyoming

Bowser: Yes. I was born on a cattle, multi-purpose ranch about sixty-eight miles out of Cheyenne, and went to local schools there, the country school. Stayed there in that area until the school board came and said, "We'd like to close this school because he's the only individual that we have going to school, and it would be cheaper for us just to send him off to Hillsdale, and we'll give you a little part of the financial offset." There were five in the class that I graduated from in Hillsdale, and then I

finished high school there and went to the University of Wyoming, and graduated with a degree in agronomy, botany, and zoology.

Joined the Marine Corps and in 1945 Was Offered a Job as a Vegetation Management Specialist with the Bureau of Reclamation

And joined the Marine Corps and left ranch life and the antelope forever.

I was discharged in September 1945 and had several job opportunities here and there. One was in West Africa, to study the transportation or the introduction of rubber, *Hevea braziliensis*, into that area, because the United States did not want to have just *one* supply of rubber.

The other job opportunity was going up to the Great Lakes area and studying the placenta strength of peas. The placenta is what holds the pea in the pod. In the shelling, you would lose one pea or two peas, and if they could increase that to virtually all the peas, they would increase their profit. But it was a statistical job, so I didn't think that was for me.

I walked in the top floor of the Interior Building and met a man by the name of William Palmer, who said, "We'll give you a

job in any region that you want to go to as a vegetation management specialist," and that was agronomist, in a sense, but with emphasis on plant control and suppression. I thought, Boulder City, Nevada, that's not too far from the West Coast. My wife was in the Navy, a Navy nurse on the hospital ship *Tranquility*, and I knew she would come into the West Coast port. So I came here and she arrived and was discharged in Mare Island, and came here in January 1945. We've been here ever since.

Spent Entire Career with Reclamation in the Regional Office in Boulder City

Simonds: So then you spent most of your post-war life with Reclamation up until retirement?

Bowser: All of it. All of it.

Simonds: You came to Boulder City in '44-, '45?

Worked for Arleigh B. West in the Irrigation and Repayment Branch

Bowser: '45. January 5, 1945, and I was assigned to the Irrigation and Repayment Branch under A.

[Arleigh][1] B. West. He filled his staff out with Claude Nafsiger [phonetic], Charles Sweet [phonetic], and Tom Steele [phonetic], and Ned Thompson [phonetic].

Met the Head of the Ranger Force at Hoover Dam

On my first day here, I had to stay in Las Vegas, and then met with the regional personnel officer, Mitchell, the next day, and he said, "Oh, you go down to the government dorm and see Mrs. *Peterson*." She was the house mother. I went down to the dorm and I met Mrs. Peterson. And here an *enormous, large* man came in, and he shook my hand and said, "Where you from, boy?" And I said, "I'm from Wyoming." He said, "You been to Rawlins?" I said, "I've been to Rawlins

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.

hundreds of times," and bragged a little bit by saying out some names that I heard of but, of course, I didn't really know. (Laughter) And, he said, "I was on the state prison warden's staff there, and I brought lots of my men down here to work on the ranger force." We had a ranger force in Boulder City or the Hoover Dam. And I could do no wrong with "Chief Pete" after that.[2]

Simonds: Tell me some about what Boulder City was like in 1945.

Boulder City in 1945

Bowser: 1945, Boulder City was a typical town, but with a very severe impact of the government. It was probably 95 percent Federal or project employees, mostly project employees.

"There was no competition of the stores or anything in town. . . ."

There was no competition of the stores or anything in town. They just had one store here and one store there, and they pretty well set the prices.

Project Staff Resented Regional Staff

2. Hoover Dam police officers were originally titled "ranger."

The project had some resentment, probably, toward the regional people coming in.

Simonds: That was just after the–

Bowser: After the war.

Simonds: After the beginning of the regional system.

Bowser: Yes, after the beginning, the start of the regional system. And they knew that they– well, they were getting old, also. They were just not being replaced. They knew Hoover Dam would remain here forever, so there was always that element, and it was a very important function, of course. I got into wrassles with some of the shop owners when I'd say–my job entailed traveling to Yuma and Phoenix, and I could compare prices. Once I told a hardware manager or owner, "Hell, I can buy that down to Phoenix for–" It was a pair of pinking shears for an anniversary or something for my wife. "I can get that for $2.98 down in Phoenix." And he grabbed it out of my hand and slammed it down on the shelf and said, "You go to Phoenix and buy it, then." (Laughter.)

Bought a House after a Few Years in an Apartment

We lived in an apartment for a few years, then bought this house at 623 Avenue H, and we've lived here every since. I keep telling my wife we should move, but she says we could live here forever, so we're still here.

Simonds: Was this one of the houses that was built–

Bowser: No, this was not one of the houses that was built. There were several contracts of houses here. The original houses, particularly the brick houses, the bricks were brought in from Salt Lake, those were the government project employees. In conjunction with that, there were a few houses built by the Six Company groups. I don't remember which ones. And those more or less went into private ownership. They were up near the administration building.

Then during the war years, the Basic Magnesium complex was an important element in the war effort, turning out titanium and magnesium and so on and so forth, and they built a few houses here in town. Those were later then sold.

House Was Built by a Contractor for Sale, Rather than Being a Government House

Then there were a few contractors who built houses, and this was one that had been built

by–I think he built three on this block. And the housing, more or less, *boom* came, and more houses were built, and then, of course, the government, when it divested itself of Boulder City, those houses were sold at a very reasonable price, along with the houses a little later at Davis Dam. The employees, the government employees, were given preferential treatment, and it was argumentative whether the government got fair value. Probably not. But you have to look at it in its broadest aspect, that there was a minimum of disruption to the Boulder Canyon Project and to the regional office at the same time.

Simonds: Who was in charge of Boulder City when you came here in '45? A City Manager?

"It was kind of embarrassing for me to go and have to kind of kowtow to somebody to get considered for a Federal house, so I just said–heck with it. . . ."

Bowser: The chief clerk of Boulder Canyon Project, an elderly man, very fixed in his ways, was more or less the kingpin. If you wanted a house, you would have to go and–I believe his name was Anderson. It was kind of embarrassing for me to go and have to kind of kowtow to somebody

to get considered for a Federal house, so I just said–heck with it.

Simonds: So, Sims Ely was–

Bowser: He had already gone. Then, of course, after the town was–the government divested itself of its interest, a man by the name of Corbin, Hal Corbin, came in and was very effective in the transition from government to city. Of course, the regional director played an important role in it, a man by the name of [E. A.] Moritz, and his assistant, Douglas.

Felt A. B. West Gave Him a Lot of Leeway to Design Vegetation Control Measures

And the early years with Reclamation here were good. I had lots of leeway with A. B. West in developing the vegetation control measures on the irrigation projects.

Eventually Headed the Lands Branch

As I learned, I assumed more responsibilities in land, took over the Lands Branch. I liked that work because it was mid-management. I then stayed in land as compared to the water phase of the operations.

Headed Water and Land Operations for a Time Before Retirement

I assumed the job of Regional Supervisor of Water and Land Operations just before I retired in 1982, and never looked back. In fact, this is the first time I've even *thought* about the past. I'm not much to take pictures or think of things.

Simonds: When you say vegetation control–

Bowser: Yes, I'll get into that.

Simonds: –is that essentially weed control?

Bowser: Yes, essentially weed control. The regional directors were a good group of people, as a rule. There were some outstanding ones, of course. The project manager, Yuma Project Office, Boulder Canyon Project, was very competent. Of course, we had Moritz, [J. P.] Jones, [W. H.] Taylor, West, and [Edward A.] Lundberg and many more after that. And most were engineers and they were glad that they didn't have to directly supervise a lowly position like weed control. So I just went my merry way, more or less, and didn't pay much attention until I got into trouble, and then they knew who I was at times.

"My early experience was primarily tidying up after years of minimum maintenance during the war, and cleaning cattails from drains in Yuma. . . ."

My early experience was primarily tidying up after years of minimum maintenance during the war, and cleaning cattails from drains in Yuma. They were big fellas; they were eight-, ten-, twelve feet in height.

"There was also a plant known as water lettuce, was in the Yuma main drain. Chemicals had not been developed . . ."

There was also a plant known as water lettuce, was in the Yuma main drain. Chemicals had not been developed, and there was a lot of work starting on them, but they were not generally available. So we cleaned the cattail out by dragging heavy chain and hand labor. And the water lettuce, that's a plant that grows on the surface of the water, with roots extending into the water and possibly attaching to the soil, but not a *fixed* plant per se. We put a bunch of men, two in a boat, and had them go down and just physically pluck them out and throw them up on the bank.

Now, when I'm talking about plant suppression, plant control, weed control, don't

misunderstand me. I didn't dream up these techniques. I would simply go down to Imperial Irrigation District, which was very progressive. It was the largest irrigation district in possibly the world, certainly in the United States. Under Superintendent Hartzog [phonetic] and his right-hand man Oscar Fudge, they attracted a lot of attention because of their size, and people would come and say, "Oh, you should try this product," or, "We'll give you a thousand gallons of this and that." And then I would be a kind of a roving embassy, emissary. I would go around to the other irrigation projects and more or less tell them what they were doing. I was greeted with open arms, because it was a big project for the day.

"Finally, we got to where 2,4-D-type chemicals were coming in, and one of the first things we did was spray the cattail in the Coachella Canal, the unlined section of the Coachella Canal. . . ."

Finally, we got to where 2,4-D-type chemicals were coming in, and one of the first things we did was spray the cattail in the Coachella Canal, the unlined section of the Coachella Canal. I particularly enjoyed that because I got to ride–we did it with helicopter, and I particularly enjoyed flying fifty-, sixty miles an hour in the helicopter with no

cowling, and the wheels of the helicopter hitting the top of the plants.

". . . the cotton plants down in Coachella were getting deformed, but other fields had very marked increased yields. . . . that was the residual effect of 2,4-D in the irrigation water. So it became apparent it was a dangerous thing to do. We had to quit using 2,4-D-type materials in the cotton-growing areas. . . ."

Of course, a little later in that, the cotton plants down in Coachella were getting deformed, but other fields had very marked increased yields. No study was ever made of it, and nobody *knew* that that was the residual effect of 2,4-D in the irrigation water. So it became apparent it was a dangerous thing to do. We had to quit using 2,4-D-type materials in the cotton-growing areas.

Simonds: Did it only seem to have an effect on the cotton plant?

Removing Trees from Canal Banks to Save Water and Prepare for Lining Canals

Bowser: No, it would impact any broad-leaf plant, but cotton was *super* sensitive to it. And then removal of trees from the canal banks, in Salt River Project particularly. A. B. West was working on a rehab and development program

and it was obvious that the water loss from both plant evapotranspiration and seepage in mile after mile after mile of unlined canals in the Salt River Project was not the best thing to have. In addition to that, the trees, if you let them remain, would push up through the relatively thin gunite lining in a matter of a year. So they said, "Let us start taking them out," and I would go down there and I would talk with staff members at my level.

"There was some opposition. It was the most beautiful place you've ever seen. The early Mormons had planted these, row after row after row, every quarter of a mile . . ."

A man by the name of–I forgot his name–said, "We've got to do it." There was some opposition. It was the most beautiful place you've ever seen. The early Mormons had planted these, row after row after row, every quarter of a mile for, oh, I don't know how many thousand acres there were, laterals that served farmlands.

"Chain saws were a dream that hadn't materialized yet . . . cottonwoods, planted probably early 1900s, four feet in diameter, sixty feet tall . . . They used hand labor and just sawed them down and piled them in ricks. . . . four-, five

hundred feet long, fifteen-, twenty feet high, and then they would burn them. . . .”

Chain saws were a dream that hadn’t materialized yet, but, like I said, sometimes these trees–talking about cottonwoods, planted probably early 1900s, four feet in diameter, sixty feet tall, probably, branches that went clear out and met over the country roads. They used hand labor and just sawed them down and piled them in ricks. Sometimes the ricks would be four-, five hundred feet long, fifteen-, twenty feet high, and then they would burn them.

“. . . we took a couple of men and we dug some cottonwood roots out, followed them, followed them, followed them. Some of those roots went out into the field four hundred yards. (Laughter.) So it became obvious that they had to go. . . .”

I broke the opposition by [using] a man by the name of Dr. Pabloshenko [phonetic], who came out and said, “Why don’t you go into the fields and follow the roots, see how far they go.” So we took a couple of men and we dug some cottonwood roots out, followed them, followed them, followed them. Some of those roots went out into the field four hundred yards. (Laughter.) So it became obvious that they had to go. And it looked barren and the

wind blew more after the trees were down, but that's progress.

Work on the Salt River Project Used Primarily Yaqui Indian Laborers

A. B. West continued with his rehabilitation program, and the project is still functioning today. The project primarily used what was called Yaqui Indians. They were people who were neither [citizens] in Mexico or the United States when we purchased the Arizona lands, when the Federal Government did. Of course, as soon as their children were born, they were citizens of the United States, and the older folks, which I've met a few, they were hard-working men.

". . . A. B. West . . . looked forward, into the future, better than any man I ever knew, and said, 'We have to control these phreatophytes' . . ."

Then I was assigned to also the–A. B. West, who was very far-sighted, was beginning to think about water salvage and someday that we were going to run out of water. He looked forward, into the future, better than any man I ever knew, and said, "We have to control these phreatophytes," and that's a broad term. Phreatophyte is just a general term that was used.

The Salt Cedar Issue

The primary culprit, of course, was salt cedar. Salt cedar had been probably introduced–oh, I chased its origin back in the United States. I was limited; I couldn't read Spanish the best. And down in Texas and Louisiana, some of the Catholic parishes reported a plant that was already established and it seemed like it *could* have been or was salt cedar, so leading me [to think] that maybe even some of the earlier people had brought in salt cedar from the Middle East. Maybe the conquistadors had some effect on it–that I do now know.

But it was gaining rapidly and it would virtually crowd out anything else by its shade and the root system that would just take up our limited moisture.

". . . in moist areas like river bottoms, it spread prolificly, and even in my short tenure of ten-, fifteen years, I could see it migrating. . . ."

Of course, in moist areas like river bottoms, it spread prolifically, and even in my short tenure of ten-, fifteen years, I could see it migrating. Not only migrating, it was rushing. There were probably two species involved. One was *Tamarix pantandra* and the other was *Tamarix gallica*, but it was academic which one it is.

Evergreen Tamarisk Is Different Than Salt Cedar

You shouldn't confuse the salt cedar with the evergreen tamarisk, which is a the [*Tamarix*] *athel*. It was introduced by a man by the name of Dr. Trudeau–Trodeau? Somebody, from the University of Arizona, about 1905, and was taken to Coachella and was planted widely there.

Simonds: Why was it introduced there?

Bowser: Shade and salt-tolerant and possibly even more salt-tolerant than salt cedar. It was about the only thing that they had, and they planted lots of it. It did not reproduce with seed, so you [unclear] cutting out. So they had it controlled. There was no problem with that.

Simonds: This was set up for shade?

Department of the Interior Had a Vegetation Management Task Force to Deal with Phreatophytes

Bowser: Yes, the early date farmers set it up for shade and windbreak in the Coachella area, and some in the–all over the Southwest. Of course, evapotranspiration was a big thing. How much water do these salt cedar and other phreatophytes use to grow and exhaust into the atmosphere? And they established a vegetation

management task force in the department, in government agencies, and that was trying to coordinate every aspect of phreatophyte control.

We had about 150,000 acres later, mapping indicated, of salt cedar and mixed phreatophytes in Arizona, and many, many times more than that in New Mexico and Texas. The refuge manager, a man by the name of Berkeley, in New Mexico, a wildlife refuge, did more work than anybody else in chaining them down, burning the residue, plowing, discing, everything. And then, of course, we all worked together on development of new products with chemical companies– Dow Chemical and others, these products called 2,4-D, 2,4,5-T, and so forth.

Region 5 and Phreatophyte Control

The best record of salt cedar, or phreatophyte, control would be found in Region Five. I was a member of the phreatophyte task force, and West gave me a lot of leeway and funded me, and we set up cooperative studies with the University of Arizona and had several fellowships that young botanists and entomologists would study the effect of *insects* on salt cedar and were there any pathogens that would attack the plant. It

was academic, but it could not be overlooked. I think maybe somebody in later years, in the last ten years, may have found some organism in the Middle East that would attack–that's the original home of salt cedar–that would slow it a little bit, but it's passé. It wouldn't be of any practical value, I *think*, today. It would require further study, anyway.

Studies to Determine How Much Water Salt Cedars Actually Use

Then, of course, there was always this problem of, let's determine how much water a salt cedar plant actually used. So in cooperation with [U.S.] Geological Survey, down near Waterman Wash near Buckeye, Arizona, we built four lysimeters. They were forty feet square, ten feet deep, and they were lined with polyvinylchloride, with controlled water inlet, and then we could measure the amount of water that they used. The man who ran that was T. E. A. van Hylckama from Geological Survey, with Tommy Robinson, also GS, and I think there were seven more tanks established at a later date to study the water use by phreatophytes using different salinity water, water of different salinities. The results of these studies, of course, were published as USGS water supply papers.

Moss in the Canals Was Another Issue

Of course, moss in the canals, potamogeton-type growth, was very prevalent all through the Southwest, and had excellent warm water, lots of sunlight, and it just grew prolifically, as it does in all Southern states. Of course, there was the usual techniques of drying canals out and letting the moss just bake in the sun, chaining, and some chemical, but with the lining and the better maintenance, there's no big problem except from the element of it. You interrupt the food chain and the organisms that depend on it, including fish, have to suffer. But it's one of those things, it's fish or farming, and farming seemed to be more practical.

Simonds: You mentioned that they discontinued or reduced the use of 2,4-D type [unclear] because of the effects it had on the cotton?

Bowser: Not necessarily. As people began to understand its use better, you could minimize the possibility of damage by not spraying in the wind, by not putting it in the water, directing it on the plant itself rather than spraying it wholesale. And it's still used, although it is restricted in use to qualified operators now.

Simonds: Was there any concern about the–

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. MARCH 12, 1999.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 12, 1999.

Concerns about the Safety of 2,4-D

Bowser: That was always of concern, and I think there was a demonstration once at one of the conferences or a meeting of some type in the East Coast, where a man took a glass of water and poured X amount of 2,4-D in it and drank it right there in front of the people, and that dramatically reduced any thoughts that it was harmful. As far as I know, yes, some people developed a rash to it. They may have developed a rash to other things, too, and we just wouldn't assign those people to the weed sprayers.

Simonds: Was there any concern about potential harm to fish or wildlife or environmental consequences?

Bowser: No. We kind of had to always separate ourselves from those concerns, because the irrigation was primary. Although we tried our darnedest to cooperate with them and at one time we considered even bringing in Tilapia, another large-type plant-eating animal that would–I forgot its name now. But those posed problems in what do you do with them when

we dry the canals in the wintertime, so on and so forth. So it never really got off the ground.

Weed Control on the All-American Canal

The biggest challenge, of course, was taking the vegetation from the All-American Canal from Imperial Dam down to where it diverted into the Imperial Irrigation District. That's the largest canal in the country until they may have built some larger ones up in Delta-Mendota area. It's 144,100 cfs, I think, and it's big, and we couldn't reach the plants, the weeds down near the waterline, so the engineers put the weed spray and/or weed-burning equipment on what's called ducks, amphibious trucks, and we sprayed from the water's edge.

Simonds: You'd actually get right out on the water?

Bowser: Oh, yes, it was a big truck, a two-and-a-half-ton truck. It was an amphibious truck, is what it was, and we put probably a thousand, two thousand gallons of material in the tanks, built into the truck, and just had built ramps and drove in and sprayed down, then drove out. It was quite an operation.

I spent a little time studying the viability of salt cedar seeds and how many

seeds there are per plant. It was mind-boggling, so I did that on my own, more or less. It was a futile job. And along with the weed control, or the plant problems along the canals was diminishing, of course, just by better maintenance. I took more control and responsibility in the field of land use, which I was primarily interested [in] anyway, and I spent virtually the last twenty years full time on that.

Residential and Agricultural Trespass along the Colorado River

One, of course, was the illegal use of land along the Colorado River. That was perhaps the worst in the United States. And the squatters occupied many sites. There was agricultural land. There was a relatively few commercial sites. A special consultant, or a special assistant to the Secretary of the Interior, called Theodore Stevens, now senator from the state of Alaska, came out several times and said, "We have to clean this up."

Trespass Was Most Serious Between Parker Dam and Parker, Arizona, along the Colorado on Both Sides of the River

So the job fell on me, or I took it, I guess, and the problem was most serious below

Parker Dam to Parker, Arizona, and then farmland in the Palo Verde Valley, the lower end of the Palo Verde Valley, and in Cibola, and at Yuma, and in Arizona below the bridge crossing at Blythe.

BLM Had to Complete Cadastral Surveys in Order to Deal with Trespass

We were handicapped to some extent that these people had been there for years. All the land had not been surveyed, and the river had swung back and forth through the years. So first thing that had to be done was had to get BLM in to make the cadastral surveys, which they did over a several-year period. Of course, as I said, some of these people had stayed there, lived there many years, and some even were the original people who had worked at Parker Dam. There were no facilities at Parker for workmen, and the construction engineer allegedly just said, "Go out along the river and do what you have to do." (Laughter.) He didn't encourage it, nor did he discourage it, and his job was to get the dam built, and that was the objective. And then these folks stayed on.

Some People in Trespass Had Quit Claim Deeds

Of course, they had what they called a quit claim deed, and they would transfer that quit claim deed to their children or to the next buyer when they moved on, and he got to thinking, or they got to thinking, "That applies to land, too. I have a right to the land." Well, a quit claim deed doesn't mean anything; it just deeds any right and interest you may have. And we never objected to their buildings; it was just their land that they couldn't transfer.

Simonds: These were public lands?

Bowser: Oh, yes, public, withdrawn Federal lands.

Simonds: So then the laws that might allow them to–

Bowser: Nonexistent.

Simonds: –acquire private lands through adverse possession don't apply.

"There's no statute of limitation by occupancy against the Federal Government. . . ."

Bowser: No, *do not apply*. There's no statute of limitation by occupancy against the Federal Government. So the department then said, "Pick out some *test* cases and we will start action against them."

Had to Go to Court for Judgements Against Trespassers

So I worked very closely then, of course, with the regional solicitor's office and, in turn, with the U.S. attorney's offices both in Arizona and California. We picked out a–I won't mention the names, because that's passé. One was a farmer below Yuma, one in Cibola Valley, and one below agricultural land in Blythe, and then a residential one in the Parker strip. We went to court and got judgments on *all* of them.

The residential case was a heartbreak. It was an elderly man and woman had lived there for years, had a quit claim deed, as we discussed, and the woman worried, "If we were evicted, who would feed my quail?" And the quail were just like chickens in her yard. I had sympathy for her, but that's about as far as it could go. And we went to court in Los Angeles, and the family came in. These attorneys that you hire, you know, they're clever. If you go to court, hire a clever attorney, because he's got it in his hands, both ways. (Laughter.) The trespass family came in, a man in bib overalls and a woman in a calico dress, and one son in civilian clothes and the other in Marine blues. They listened. These were not trial by jury; these were judge

only. The judge, in two days or so, ruled that "I have heartfelt sympathy" and so on and so forth, he may even have had tears in his eyes, I couldn't tell, and then he said, "But I have no choice but to rule for the government. You have no right to the land."

And, of course, the agricultural trespass below Blythe were also clear-cut as far as the government was concerned, and we went to court. Their attorney was pretty good. It was a younger man, and he argued valiantly about the rights of his clients. There were two brothers. Toward the end of the trial, the judge asked one of the brothers on the stand, he said, "Why did you occupy the Federal land, and why did you then resist when they served notice on you to vacate?" And the man looked up and he said, "I guess I just didn't care." And the opposition just folded right at that moment.

Simonds: I can imagine these proceedings made you guys pretty unpopular around there.

Bowser: Yes, and I'll get into that. Previously, these two brothers' mother had said to me, "Mr. Bowser, during these weeks of trial, I have looked at you, smiled, and said hello, and tried to get acquainted. You ignored me." I'm a kind of brusque individual. Without thinking or consideration, I said–I paraphrased a little

bit here. I said, "The path of the trespasser (rather than the transgressor) is frequently rocky," and I walked away. I didn't have stomach to look at her after the verdict was rendered. I fled. (Laughter.) I also kind of mentioned to her that I could not let the personal problems interfere with the job, and I couldn't take them home with me at night. You can't. I mean, you have to wear two hats. Sometimes I wore three hats.

"Those cases, then, broke the organized resistance. They had some political support. . . . The Secretary then established the Lower Colorado River Land Use Office in, I think, about 1961, and Reclamation then phased itself out of the trespass problem. . . ."

Those cases, then, broke the organized resistance. They had some political support. But the lower Colorado River land use, it was getting too big for Reclamation, too big for me, and it wasn't Reclamation's *role*, really, to be doing this. I guess Reclamation was probably responsible for it by not taking action, but it was getting pretty political. The Secretary then established the Lower Colorado River Land Use Office in, I think, about 1961, and Reclamation then phased itself out of the trespass problem.

The Issues of Avulsion and Accretion due to River Movements

There was also another element coming in here. Some people were contesting that, "We have a right to this land by what's called avulsion and accretion of the river movements," and that brought in a–in other words, there was a no-man area. So with the Land Use Office and Reclamation, they made a very, very comprehensive study of the river movements from aerial photographs and maps and things that we had fairly good record of, and brought in new cats, engineers like John McCuen [phonetic], Reclamation, and Jim Simpson of BLM, and they did the testifying then of saying that this is the way the river was, so on and so forth.

Then the attorneys then settled the cases on compromise, and we established then ownerships and recognized them in state records and taxes and everything. Some of these people, you know, had paid taxes in Arizona and California, just state tax, or local property taxes, which they thought gave them a right, too. But the state government will take money if you go and offer it to them. (Laughter.) I think a person could still go talk to Mr. Simpson. He became really certainly

the United States' expert on accretion and avulsion, and he's still alive.

Simonds: In those cases where you get accretion and avulsion as the river meanders, was a fixed boundary point ever established, or was it still run of the river, basically?

Bowser: Yes, the cadastral surveys performed by BLM established–brought it down as far as they could, and then by these court actions and adjudication of claims, they established–and the state line. Of course, at the same time we were *dredging* the river, so we had a fixed point of where Arizona-California intersect.

"We had to establish protection and security areas around Hoover and Davis Dams, and National Park Service was establishing the Lake Mead National Recreation Area . . ."

Along with this work, I did quite a little activity. It seems like it's all "I," though, but I guess maybe that's what your career is. We had to establish protection and security areas around Hoover and Davis Dams, and National Park Service was establishing the Lake Mead

National Recreation Area[3] in 1968 and wanted to get as close to the water as possible. I don't blame them. They were running the recreation and had a very difficult time. Reclamation wanted a *barrier* back from highwater line, and, of course, they wanted to crowd up as close to the water as they could. We used the phrase that you would take a long staff and put

3. Lake Mead National Recreation Area was formally created in 1964, primarily for recreational purposes, by "An act to provide an adequate basis for administration of the Lake Mead National Recreation Area, Arizona and Nevada, and for other purposes" (Act of October 8, 1964, Public Law 88-639, 78 Stat. 1039).

Formerly the Boulder Dam Recreation Area existed *de facto*, if not in formal congressional authorization, as a result of the National Park Service's desire to establish national recreation areas and the Bureau of Reclamation's desire to not have to manage recreation at its facilities. Several attempts to enact legislation formally establishing the recreation area failed. Then, in 1936, using existing authorities, the two bureaus developed a joint memorandum of agreement dividing up territory and responsibilities at Lake Mead. In spite of the unofficial status of the recreation area, Congress appropriated to the Park Service $10,000 in 1936 for planning for recreation at Lake Mead, and subsequently Congress appropriated large sums for development of facilities. Between 1945 and 1965 the Park Service and Reclamation used joint memoranda of agreement to establish nine additional national recreation areas.

For additional information see: Douglas W. Dodd, "Boulder Dam Recreation Area: The Bureau of Reclamation, the National Park Service, and the Origins of the National Recreation Area Concept at Lake Mead, 1929-1936," in *The Bureau of Reclamation: History Essays from the Centennial Symposium*, volume 2, (Bureau of Reclamation and the Government Printing Office: Denver, Colorado, 2008), pp. 467-94.

it in at high waterline and then you'd go up on top of the bluff and go back four hundred feet, so you'd have four hundred feet for the waterline, regardless where it was in relation to the bluff or anything. And they felt sometimes our protection and security zones were a little *excessive*, but it's what the engineers wanted, and everyone more or less concurred.

The superintendent here with National Park Service was a man by the name of Ritchie [phonetic], a very dynamic man. He called me just before he went into a hearing on his bill to create the recreation area and ask if any compromise was possible on it, and I told him no. I didn't check on it, but they supported me, so I don't know who else he called. I never heard from him again.

Mining Claims as an Issue

And had many special problems. Stan Seigel said his first job with me was digging out information on a widow claiming a mining claim in the vicinity of Parker Dam. He wrote me a letter here not long ago on that. Well, I had forgotten it, more or less. I had met this woman and her brother-in-law, they were driving a big white Cadillac, and I was very impressed. They were out of the L.A. area. She came once into D.C., and then I met with

her and her attorney in L.A., but we couldn't find any evidence of any valid claim. I had used the experiences I had gained in the Lake Mead National Recreation Area on mining claims, and her attorney just advised her not to pursue it further. Poor old girl. I always thought her late husband had something and the government denied her that right. But it was very marginal, even.

If a mining claim is not perfected, you are obligated to make certain assessments on a yearly basis for a number of years to keep it valid and then prove up or leave it go, and if they do not do that, they find them–I think they call it–it just has not proved up, *ab initio,* I think is the legal term they use on that.

". . . I don't think A. B. West was in the office more than ten minutes . . . 'What's this about mining claims?' I said, very quietly, 'I don't know,' and I was instructed I'd better know, and he'd like a report tomorrow. Well, that was impossible, of course, but West was that way. If he wanted something, he wanted it yesterday, and he would chide you about not being on top of it. Very, very efficient man. Hard. Some up and downs with him. . . ."

A. B. West went to a Rotary meeting in Las Vegas once, and Jim Cashman, the

Cadillac dealer in Vegas, cornered him, said he, Cashman, was going to develop a mining claim down in Lake Mojave area, and A. B. West listened, and I don't think A. B. West was in the office more than ten minutes than Curt Bowser was in the office with him, and he said, "What's this about mining claims?" I said, very quietly, "I don't know," and I was instructed I'd better know, and he'd like a report tomorrow. Well, that was impossible, of course, but West was that way. If he wanted something, he wanted it yesterday, and he would chide you about not being on top of it. Very, very efficient man. Hard. Some up and downs with him. (Laughter.)

"So I went down to Boulder Canyon Project and dug out the old . . . acquisition files . . . I thumbed through them and came to a funny little notation at the bottom of several of them, that said, 'This case not closed. Gone to war.' . . ."

So I went down to Boulder Canyon Project and dug out the old files. Files lose themselves quickly in government offices. They go to archives or they get behind something or they're thrown out. But they had them there, and I reviewed the land files, the acquisition files, and I found several. I think there were seven or eight. I thumbed through them and came to a funny little notation at the

bottom of several of them, that said, "This case not closed. Gone to war." Signed–I forgot his first name–Williams. And there they were. (Laughter.) A comprehensive record of what was not finished.

Simonds: [unclear] war.

Bowser: "What's this?" (Laughter.) So I went to Reno and talked to BLM. They said, "Get proof that they were not being worked." Well, some of them were very obvious they weren't being worked; they were underneath the lake. And some that were on the shore were not being worked. So I went around and I talked to–I got, in a sense, deposition, but not a *sworn* deposition, from old-timers here. I enjoyed talking to them. One was a barber here, and he'd lived here all his life. He also was a constable, I think, once. Then the chief guide, Schwartz [phonetic], that had lived here virtually a lifetime. They were interested in–the Schwartzes, on their off time, were interested in mining. I'd go out and meet with the two brothers and they'd talk. I'd give them the man's name, and, "Ho, ho, ho, you won't find him. He's been dead now for twenty-two years." (Laughter.) So we squeezed them out pretty easy and never heard anything more from Cashman. And we did that in Davis Dam, too.

I had a little rhubarb from one of the trespassers in Nevada, he's very prominent family, and they had used the Federal lands for several generations. I told him that a little black boy in Harlem had as much right as he had to that land. He looked mad, and I left. (Laughter.)

Then had another set-to while in Yuma. I met with a Yuma employee–

Simonds: A Reclamation employee?

Sealing Hazardous Mine Shafts

Bowser: A Reclamation employee. A. B. West heard of a motorcycle rider on the Mojave Desert riding into an open mining shaft, and he asked me if there were any hazards like this on Reclamation withdrawn land. I said probably so. I knew of a few. And the directive was blunt: "Get rid of them." And I said, "I'll need some equipment." Under my breath I thought, "Is that rascal thinking I'm going to go down and seal some of these shafts with a shovel in my free time?" So when I said, "I need equipment," he grabbed the phone and called, I think, Project Manager Steinbergen [phonetic], or maybe Project Manager Miller at the time, and said, "The Yuma Project Office is to send

equipment out at Bowser's request, and no record or no work orders."

I coordinated with the heavy-duty equipment boss, and I called him on quite a few occasions. "I'll need a Cat at so and so point below Needles," or Blythe, wherever it was. One of the first several times we'd just fill these shafts in. I arrived at the designated time and the Cat driver, a man, was there, and a trailer and a Caterpillar. This old Caterpillar was on the ground. So I chitchatted with this man for a couple of minutes. He was very small in stature, maybe not much over–he'd stretch to be five feet tall, and this was a big Cat, probably a D-7. I was getting a little– "Let's get the job done," and I said, "I wish that–deleted–Cat driver would get here so we could get this job done." Well, when I looked up, he was way above the Cat, although to get on the Cat he had to climb up on the cleats like a kid going up a ladder. (Laughter.) And he said he was the Cat driver. I apologized. His name was Tanner. He jumped pretty high and his face was as red as mine. When he cooled down, he filled in the shaft, and over the next several years we filled in quite a few more. But he was never really–I always stayed behind or at the side of the Cat. I never got in front of the Cat. (Laughter.)

And he was a very interesting man, though, for his size, his stature. He had served in North Africa with the Tank Corps and was commended by the Department of Interior for hauling hay to ranchers in northern Nevada after a heavy snowstorm one year. Yuma had sent trucks and heavy equipment up there to assist the ranchers as a goodwill gesture.

Simonds: His name was Tanner?

Bowser: Tanner. He's probably long–he would be a little older than me, so he's probably deceased.

". . . one of the prerequisites to get a job in Yuma before the war was to join the National Guard. . . . It was also the same at Las Cruces, New Mexico. When the war came out, the National Guard was called up and virtually decimated both towns. Lots of the Yuma people came back, but I understand Las Cruces lost a disproportionate number. . . ."

Yuma had a very–one of the prerequisites to get a job in Yuma before the war was to join the National Guard. My understanding is, you had a job application and sign up for the National Guard, and they didn't put one on top of the other, but it was nice to have them both signed. Most people signed. It was also the same [at] ~~as~~ Las Cruces, New

Mexico. When the war came out, the National Guard was called up and virtually decimated both towns. Lots of the Yuma people came back, but I understand Las Cruces lost a disproportionate number. But Tanner was a remarkable man.

These are just incidents that come to mind. Are we running over time?

Simonds: No, we're fine.

"Once an elderly man came to my office to talk about a gold vein he'd found near Hoover Dam . . . When I told him it was closed to prospecting, he was devastated. . . ."

Bowser: Once an elderly man came to my office to talk about a gold vein he'd found near Hoover Dam when he'd worked there in the thirties and forties. It was closed to prospecting. When I told him it was closed to prospecting, he was devastated. Of course, I'd always heard rumors that there was gold present above what is now known as Gold Strike Inn down between here and the dam, but he wouldn't divulge the location of this site to me, although I felt that he was competent enough and could remember well enough that he would know the valley it was in and the hill. But I guess he didn't have a trust then of government

employees, so I don't know why I needed to know anyway, but he wouldn't tell me. He left, and I never heard from him.

Helped Find a Training Location for the Apollo 16 Moon Vehicle and Subsequently Met Astronauts

In January 1972 a man had checked in with Regional Director Lundberg, and Lundberg shuttled him off to me. Lundberg called me and said, "This is not to be discussed." I said, "Okay," and here come a nondescript man, like me, in, and said, "I'd like you to help me locate an area for the Apollo 16 moon vehicle training." So I agreed to help, and I picked out areas that would be isolated or suitable, whatever they thought, and they picked out one west of Dry Lake. I never thought anything more about it. I went out with him a couple of hours on a couple of days, and said, "You don't have to check with anybody, but refer them to this office in case you run into somebody who's saying something to you."

And all of a sudden, one day there was nothing in the papers, all of a sudden the phone rang and it was–I don't remember if it was the man I'd originally met with or somebody, and he said, "Would you like to meet the astronauts?" I said, "Why, sure."

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. MARCH 12, 1999.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. MARCH 12, 1999.

Simonds: [This is tape two of an interview with] Curt Bowser, on March 12th, 1999.

Bowser: ...in on it. I thought it would be only proper that I call him and ask him if he should participate. He was absent, and in his stead, acting, was Byron Miller, and Miller said, sure, he'd like to go.

So on the designated next day, I'll say, the next day we drove down, went to the designated area, and nobody came. Ten, fifteen minutes went by. Miller's kind of a– he's getting antsy and kind of quizzing me what it was, and he was kind of irritated that he didn't know about it. Well, pretty soon here came a convoy of cars, and he brightened right up. We went up with the bigwigs to the actual site and met the astronauts. I always look back at going up there was an ordinary little Jeep, men in it in their astronaut uniforms, and they waved and everything. Then we went up and we met the real astronauts. I was very impressed with them. They were, "We've got to get on our plane at so and so. I'm going this way and he's going that way and this way." They were going to meet in Houston

tomorrow. It was just zoom, zoom, zoom, zoom.

I got a nice letter then from them. I'll give you the letter, if you want. Why don't you *read* those two letters. I'll stretch a little bit, and then we'll proceed.

Simonds: We'll take a break, then.

Bowser: All right. [Tape recorder turned off.]

Selling Small Tracts of Land

Another function of my career was disposal of small tracts and homestead program. We had a number of small tracts scattered on Reclamation projects throughout the western states, and legislation was passed that we could sell these tracts, and we sold tracts in the Wellton-Mohawk, Yuma Auxiliary Project, and Yuma Projects, probably sold more land than any other region. I particularly like to sell land. I like to buy and sell.

Then, of course, we had a homestead program on Coachella and Wellton-Mohawk, no problems were encountered. Ed Nance [phonetic], now retired, is on special assignment at Yuma Projects Office, and he has probably the best record of any of that

work. Bob Cucci [phonetic], of the Land Office, and his appraiser, Bob Budie [phonetic], were instrumental at the project level in doing it, and I just coordinated from the regional office.

Retired Land in the Wellton-Mohawk Division of the Gila Project

We also bought several thousand acres of land for retirement in the Wellton-Mohawk Division of the Gila Project, and one time Commissioner Stamm pigeonholed me at a conference someplace and said, "What's this I hear about you buying land from excess land owners?" That's always been a Reclamation project, is the 160-acre limitation. I said, "Conceivably, there is a little problem here, but the companies that I have been buying from only own 160 acres and it's a willing seller and a willing buyer, and we negotiate without any trouble." I didn't tell him that the mailing address of every company was the same law office. (Laughter.) And never heard anything more about it.

Working with Creed George

I traveled the region. I traveled regionwide for thirty years and enjoyed it very much. Got deflated once by a man called Cliff

Pugh, a Phoenix planning officer. Seemed I was always going out with an older man at the time, Creed George [phonetic], they regarded him as an old-timer when I first came here. I thought I was being trained, and I certainly was. I seemed to go everyplace. He and some of his counterparts knew every *acre* of land, Reclamation land. We had some three million acres of land. Their counterparts were Warren Turner and a man by the name of Robison [phonetic]. But I'd go out with Creed George and, oh, they'd assign me to go with him, "Oh, when you're down here, you'll go with Creed George." I said, "Yep." And years later I found out he was a diabetic that was liable to pass out at any time, and I was going with him just to have somebody at his side. They didn't give a damn about me and the heat. But it was a learning experience. It was good. It was good, because it was my responsibility, too, though.

Creed always told me to drink more water, but I prided myself not to need water, and, of course, I always wondered why my urine looked like molasses, and I should have listened. It was said in good advice. It was good advice and given with concern.

Just a note on my associates and personnel both up and below my position. Of

course, you have to give them full credit for their cooperation and support. The work wasn't too hard, and quite enjoyable. I looked at other jobs, but my wife would always say, "How about insurance and retirement?" So we stayed with Reclamation.

". . . they said, 'Cut one of your two men,' and I went to them and said, 'One of you has to go, and I'll let you decide that between yourselves.' About a week later, they came in, both of them came in and said, 'We're both leaving.'. . ."

I had a good staff, and at one time they had to cut the staff down in Boulder City, and they said, "Cut one of your two men," and I went to them and said, "One of you has to go, and I'll let you decide that between yourselves." About a week later, they came in, both of them came in and said, "We're both leaving." They had got jobs and they were real elated. They got promotions, too, and they went right on to the top and retired at my grade level or even above. Very proud of them.

I had a job opening then, and I asked a man that I'd been looking at for years, not in 400, and he said, "No, Curt, I don't believe I care to work for you. You drive your men too hard, and you're not too tolerant." I said, "Thank you for being frank with me." Later,

he said, "I made a mistake," which was pretty big of him, I thought, to have said that.

Hired Stan Seigal to Fill His Vacancy on the Condition He Get a Higher Education

So I went to another man called Stanley Seigal, and had always kind of admired him from the back, the sideline, I should say. He said, sure, he'd like to try it, and I offered him the job on a condition that he get a higher education. He buckled right down and went to night school and got a degree, as far as I know. He's had a spectacular career, really, a very good career. He seemed to tolerate my approach to job assignments. I was kind of accused of saying to the men, "Let's get your views, and then I'll tell you how we're going to do it" type, but someone has to be responsible, and someone has to take the lead.

". . . I would have liked to have influenced the development of the east and west mesas . . . and Pilot Knob mesas in California, with . . . bubblers or drip systems. Would have been the greatest citrus-growing area in the United States. But we weren't ready for that . . ."

Career regrets. I have virtually none. In hindsight, I would have liked to have influenced the development of the east and

west mesas, particularly the east mesa and Pilot Knob mesas in California, with trickle or drip irrigation, and with bubblers or drip systems. Would have been the greatest citrus-growing area in the United States. But we weren't ready for that, and I had to wait for the development in Israel, coordinating with the University of California, to get that technique more or less perfected.

Rather than Use Arizona's Colorado River Allocation for Developments down the River, it Was Determined the Water Would Go to the Central Arizona Project

Then the decision was made that the water would go to the Central Arizona Project, and the big projects in metropolitan and so on and so forth.

Impressed with the State Land Commissioner of Arizona, Bruce Babbitt

I have a couple more little thoughts here that I thought about just before you came. Let me see if I can find those. When I was shaving this morning, I thought about the outstanding men and women that had impact on my tenure in the government, and most of the supervisors in the chain of command were exceptional men. I was very impressed with State Land

Commissioner of Arizona [Bruce] Babbitt, who's now the Secretary of the Interior. He would drive an old Volkswagen to the YMCA in Phoenix and work out, and then eat with the staff. Creed George knew them all, and we would lunch with them. He just seemed to be one of the men.

Then, of course, all the attorneys in the regional solicitor's office and the U.S. attorneys in L.A. and Phoenix were exceptional men. I met with them probably three times a month for nearly twenty years on land use, trespass, acquisition, and so on and so forth.

A Ploy Once Used in Court on a Trespass Case by a Company's Representative

Just to give you a demonstration or an indication of that mode of life, we had a little land problem with a big company down near San Luis in Arizona, and they had an attorney, of course, and a field representative. The field representative was carrying the load on the company's position, nice, about my age, and we dined with him, or ate lunch with him several times, pre-trial conference-type things. He would talk fluently about art and his travels particularly to Europe. Next couple of weeks, he was on the witness stand, dressed very plainly, a little better than just work clothing,

and the U.S. Attorney asked him a question, and he interrupted and asked the judge to have the United States Attorney rephrase the question and make it simpler so he could understand it. (Laughter.) Kind of a good little ploy, I thought.

Chief Justice William Rehnquist Once Represented a Large Holding in the Yuma and Needles Areas

Chief Justice [William] Rehnquist was once the attorney for Sherrell and LaFollette [phonetic], a large landowner both in the Yuma area and in Needles area, and that was one of the accretion cases that came up. In pre-trial meetings, Chief Justice Rehnquist seemed to be very down to earth. He tried to cooperate.

"But that was more or less my approach, of just hitting it head on . . . no one seemed to pay any attention to what I'd do. I just plowed ahead at a reasonable course. . . ."

Another man that impressed me very much was state land commissioner of Arizona. We were crossing state land with a power line and had the land appraised, and we knew what money we could offer, and met in the state land commissioner's office to discuss it with the commissioner, and met with the administrative

assistant. The administrative Assistant said, "The commissioner's a very down-to-earth person. I don't think we're too far apart on value, but the commissioner's very reasonable. When he gets up in the morning, he wants lights when he turns the switch on." That was kind of the clue that I wanted, and we went in there and I laid out our position, and he laid out his, and I said, "We're not far apart. How about just going down about the middle?" And he said, "Yes," and I was out of there in three minutes. But that was more or less my approach, of just hitting it head on, ~~but try to have it~~–no one seemed to pay any attention to what I'd do. I just plowed ahead at a reasonable course.

Robert Austin

You should probably consider interviewing a man by the name of Robert Austin. He started to work in Yuma on the All-American Canal Project, and finished his career in Boulder City as regional engineer. He has a very good insight to work in the early years, and probably got closer to personnel than I ever did. Shall we say his tenure in life is not–well, he's getting old. I think he would contribute probably more of those early years than anybody I know that's–

Simonds: Where does he live?

Bowser: Here in Boulder City. Very likeable, presentable man. I'd be glad to make the initial contact with you, if you so elect.

Simonds: I'll certainly look into it. I'll check with the boss and see what he thinks.

Bowser: I certainly want to thank you for even considering me in your interview of "old-timers." I hope that my thoughts and recollections were of some interest.

Simonds: Certainly.

Bowser: I don't know why. (Laughter.)

Simonds: I do have a few questions.

Bowser: It seems like I've monopolized it, and I'm not sure that's what you had expected. We have plenty of time.

Simonds: That's fine.

Bowser: Shoot. I'll make up answers as you go.

Simonds: Make them up as we go.

Bowser: Right.

Simonds: One thing comes to mind, I think that Stan had mentioned that you had Floyd Dominy as a college professor. Is that correct?

Experience with and Memories of Floyd Dominy When in Grade School and While at Reclamation

Bowser: No. When I went to Hillsdale Grade School, at mid-year, there was a man came in to assist the teacher on teaching mathematics or something, and one of the most dynamic men I've ever seen at the time. He was virtually–I don't think he ever slept. He was just a whirlwind, and his wife. My brother and a man by the name of Teddy Boyd had cars, and when it snowed, they would tow this man, Floyd Dominy, and his wife behind the cars on a tow line. Of course, the wind would blow the snow into the borrow pits, and they would ride in the barrow pits, just getting it. I was very impressed with that, because the wind always blew their snow off. In the borrow pits you could ski for maybe half a mile at a time. It was very good.

Simonds: They'd be up on skis?

Bowser: Yes, snow skis. He was my teacher there for a while, and then suddenly–he was there part of the summer, too, and I always remember one little incident. Oh, boy, you're going back–

pretty quick it's going to be last century. (Laughter.)

Mr. Dominy's interest and his career was in animal husbandry, agriculture, so on and so forth. A family by the name of Burkett [phonetic], who lived not far out of town, had a Holstein bull. I'd better be careful–Holstein or Angus bull, I don't remember which. The ranchers there did not like the Holstein or Angus bulls because they were strong, big rascals and they'd jump over the fence and breed the purebred short-horn Hereford cattle. That didn't set too well. So a common practice was to take a .22 rifle and shoot the dingus off of the invading bull.

They called this young agricultural man in the school system out one day. I was not there. This is virtually hearsay, but I guess it's true. The bull's scrotum was as big as a washbasin, and Dominy took one look and said, "Obviously the bull's testicles have to come out. Give me a knife." They threw the bull down and removed them, and the whole community was very impressed with Mr. Dominy. Everyone was sorry to see him go. He took a county agent job in Natrona County, I believe, and that's the last I ever saw of him until I met him one time in Reclamation in repayment after the war.

I went out to his farm in Virginia, very impressed that he was in intelligence. I'm going to say the Navy, but it could have been the Army. He had learned Japanese in the course of this work and had got fluent in it in a period of three, four weeks, which was phenomenal. I think I saw an article or something he had, a commendation, of how nobody could do that, but he did. He was quite a gentlemen.

Shoot.

Simonds: Then you worked under him when he was Commissioner?

Bowser: Well, I was here, but I had no direct–Dominy was a very strong man, both in testifying to the Congress, and he demanded a lot, but he didn't *trust* a lot of people. So he had–I don't want to use that word "stooges," but he had friends that he could rely upon–A. B. West, Leon Hill, regional directors, even before they were regional, when they were coming up, and several others who I don't believe I recall. And they were pretty close-knit, and they just about ruled the roost.

Two or three incidents, also hearsay, come to mind that'll demonstrate how he operated. He was out on one of the big canals

in California and was driving on an inspection trip. One time he said the project manager was looking at the signs to see if they were up, "No Fishing," "No Trespassing," and Dominy said, "Why are we not fishing here?" "Oh, operating roads, liability." Dominy got out of the car and kicked the sign down, said, "Now it's open for fishing." (Laughter.)

Someplace up in Utah once, he got into a rhubarb with a project manager, and two days later the project manager was no longer there. (Laughter.)

One time I got a call here from somebody, I don't even remember who it was, and said that, "Floyd Dominy did not get up in time to get to the airplane to go to Grand Canyon, so he drove the car to Kingman. Can you get to Kingman and get the car and return it to the rental agency?" And I said, "Sure." And I went over and got the car and drove it back to the rental agency. He never forgot me, but I never asked him for anything, and as far as I know, he never gave me anything. (Laughter.)

Shoot.

Arleigh B. West

Simonds: You worked under A. B. West for quite a while, it sounds like.

Bowser: I worked under A. B. West technically until he retired as regional director here and was succeeded by a man by the name of Wade Taylor. I could have that wrong. Yes, I worked here all the time with A. B. West as regional supervisor of water and land operations, and then as regional director.

Simonds: It sounds like he was pretty much, when he wanted something done, you went and got it done.

". . . we were all from the old school. 'It's a job. If you want it, do it.' The boss says 'Jump,' you say, 'How high?' . . ."

Bowser: Oh, very definitely. Same with Dominy and same with Leon Hill. All of those men had that exceptional–you couldn't dislike them, nor could you like them. (Laughter.) It was a job. Of course, we were all from the old school. "It's a job. If you want it, do it." The boss says "Jump," you say, "How high?" I don't know.

But he also gave you–at least A. B. West would give you credit where credit was due. I don't think he was selfish in that way.

The only place I felt that he was selfish was, I worked for–not selfish. That's too strong of a word. I worked with McCullouch [phonetic] when McCullouch was buying up the Army's recreation area down at Lake Havasu City. There was land deals, and the London Bridge was coming in, and all that. We had problems here and there. It took quite a little time with their attorneys and our attorneys, and one time when it was all over, McCullouch invited–a celebration, an opening, a get-together on it. They came up and they flew A. B. West down, and they never did mention me, but I did get a letter from my counterpart saying how nice it was that I worked with them on that. But I guess if I'd have asked A. B., he would have said, "Yes, I'll go with you," but I'm not much to want recognition. (Laughter.)

Pet Cemetery on Federal Land

Simonds: Stan was telling me about some little things around the area that I always thought were kind of interesting. He mentioned that there was a person who had a pet cemetery out on the Searchlight Highway.

Bowser: Yes. Boulder City had a veterinarian–not a veterinarian, a man who cared for pets, knew quite a good deal about them, and if you had something wrong with your dog or cat, you'd

call him and ask him, or he'd put it to sleep or whatever. Almost a community service. If you wanted to give him something, he might take it to buy something, but I don't think he ever used it for his personal gain or anything. "Oh, I've got a buy a leash for her. I'll tell her that you bought it for her," and stuff like that.

This man then kind of followed along with the semi-vet, and would bury animals down in the Dry Lake area. He would have services for them, and some of the headstones were quite elaborate, and some were quite famous show dogs from Vegas. It was well-kept, maintained, and had a nice little fence around it, and was discreet for a pet cemetery. There was some opposition to a pet cemetery being kind of on the not deluxe, adequate side.

Everything was going smoothly until somebody's pet died in Las Vegas, and the individual called his caretaker of the cemetery and said, "I'd like to bury him there," and he said, "There isn't a fee, really, but for upkeep I do kind of like to have a contribution." The guy said, "Hell, it's on Federal land. I'm not going to contribute anything to you." And the caretaker said, "Well, you're not going to bury it here." I do not know whether the animal was buried there or not. But the first thing the–I'm

going to say Commissioner's office wrote a letter through the Personnel Office–

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BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MARCH 12, 1999.

Bowser: Of course, I knew about it. And what can you really say to a co-worker? (Laughter.) So the personnel . . . West called, naturally, and said, "Get rid of it." More discreet than that, though. And I was to work with Giles Anderson, the personnel officer. I wrote a little–I penciled a little digest of the ownership of the land and how this man had wanted to buy it from Boulder City, but it was premature, it wasn't quite in the cards, and said that it had no–he was a trespasser, in other words. So they gave him a choice of going on with it or–I do not know how it was settled. He rarely spoke to me since. He always blames me for not assisting him in some way, but my hands were tied. I had no legal way of doing it. It would just have implicated more people.

Simonds: So did it come down to he had to remove it?

Bowser: I think it just deteriorated, and I think he notified the people, "We can no longer care for it." I've never gone back there. I *rarely* look back.

Simonds: As far as you know, it's still out–

Bowser: I would doubt it. I would doubt it. If it is, it's not maintained anymore.

Shoot.

Simonds: Stan also mentioned that you were–

Bowser: I'm going to get after this guy Stan.(Laughter.)

Likes to Buy and Sell Things

Simonds: You can start telling me about Stan here in a little bit. (Laughter.) That you were a bit of a collector, I guess you might say, of whatever other folks were no longer in need of.

Bowser: Things just seem to migrate toward me, and I just–and then as they got older, "Oh, give it to Curt Bowser. He likes those things." Then the first thing I know, I have rooms and warehouses full of stuff that people have given me, and I buy actively on various things of general interest to me, some good, some poor. Lots of junk, lots of kernels of gold among the junk.

Simonds: I think he mentioned that you had somehow gotten some demolition timers that had then

converted into irrigation timers or water timers or something like that. Is that right?

Bowser: Oh, yes. I used to deal in surplus. In fact, I had a business on the side all the time. A. B. West kind of indicated once I ought to make a decision as to which interest I really had, and I didn't say anything, I just cut down on my sleep and kept on going. (Laughter.)

An engineer by the name of Bob Bellis [phonetic] looked at the number of people turning on lawn sprinkler systems here and said, "Hell, I can do that mechanically," and way before Rainbird and Toro brought out automatic systems, we had systems operating here. I was his supplier. I had the Sangamo time clocks that I had bought from a state agency in Kansas. They had them on hot water heaters, the house hot water heaters, so at a given time they could turn off the electricity and that would save load for other more valuable customers or more higher paying customers. So I bought thousands of those. They all didn't go into timers, don't misunderstand me. And then we had to have a valve, so I found a valve, a differential pressure valve, out of military aircraft, and Bob Bellis would convert those and we would sell them as units. Bellis sold them as units. My profit was in the system itself.

I still have one in operation right here. Now, there's the timer and that's the Sangamo timer, and it's been operating–not the same clock, because it's probably been there for thirty, thirty-five years, and I've had to replace the clock every ten years or so. But the valves, of course, they were aluminum, and they would deteriorate in this water, and then plastic valves came out. That timer is still being used. As far as I know, it's probably the only one in existence. That was just my–and then, of course, I rebuilt this house in my free time. I don't sleep much. (Laughter.)

Simonds: Stan mentioned that at least for the first few years you were in the area, there was no shortage of excess materials along the road between Boulder City and Railroad Pass.

Bowser: Well, there was the old Camp Williston here, and nobody was gathering a lot of that stuff up. It was just laying in the desert. I was prone to buying it, and then, of course, the Boulder Canyon Project would be selling surplus parts. We had a large garage here. They sold all the car parts, car and truck parts, up to, say, '43 once, and then they sold them again in '47, and I put a bid in, and I'd get them. I would wholesale them out.

Then I bought quite a little bit of stuff at the *test* site. I bought tons and tons of stuff at the test site, and lots of times I only acted as a *middle* man. I'd take a day off and drive up there and supervise the loading. I kept–well, if there wasn't enough of it to warrant shipping, I would keep it myself, and that would be part of my profit, my compensation. I tried to make ends meet that way. I didn't make any money, but it kept me busy.

I bought sixty-, seventy tents up there after their atomic blasts, where the troops had stayed, and I cooperated, or coordinated, my work with one of Reclamation's employees who had charge of the lawns up here. We went up and loaded them on vehicles I had. He was a very good man to work with, because I shared the profit with him. The tents sold rapidly. I don't know why we didn't get radioactive burns or something out of them, but we never seemed to. But he always said, "Curt, I really appreciate this, because I don't have enough money to do it, and you share the profit with me after expenses are taken out, and I appreciate it." He was the only man that realized that the capital–had to have the capital to do the work.

One time he got real mad at me. We were loading a tent. They're just like a sack of

flour. We were lifting and lifting and lifting, and he was standing on one of the ropes to the pin. I laughed, and he got mad for a second. Then he laughed, too. (Laughter.) It was a hot day.

Simonds: Who were some of the people here in Boulder City that you remember? Were there notable characters?

Bowser: Really, there wasn't hardly anybody outside of the business community, which is very limited. They were generally a kind of a grasping group, but not much different than any small town in the West. So it was all government employees, plus the Department of Water and Power, City of Los Angeles group that were well paid. But they were in operation of the dam and didn't associate much with Reclamation. There weren't too many really– oh, there were many outstanding people, but they were mostly associated with the government.

Transfer of Boulder City out of Federal Ownership and Control

Simonds: Were there any issues or controversies surrounding Reclamation's transfer of Boulder City out of Federal ownership?

Bowser: Oh, yes. There was a group of people who lived in the government houses that were concerned what would happen to them. There were the usual people who thought that the town was doing all right the way it is. And in many ways the town was very good. There were other people who saw business opportunities. So there was some controversy, but the die was cast. It had to get rid of Grand Coulee, Boulder City, Davis Dam, and all of those, and probably many more. So it was disposed of in timely, orderly fashion.

Simonds: Boulder City is notable among Nevada cities in that there's no gambling in Boulder City. Is that by law?

Bowser: That's by an ordinance, yes.

Simonds: I know out on the road to the dam, there's–

Bowser: That's the Gold Strike.

Simonds: –the Gold Strike, which is now closed after the fire.

Bowser: But it will be rebuilt, and that has a license.

Simonds: That's, I assume, out of the city limits?

Bowser: That's out of the city limits.

Simonds: And therefore not subject to–

Gold Strike Inn Was an Inholding on Mining Claims

Bowser: That's kind of a little enclave. I worked a great deal on that. When superintendent Lake Mead National Recreation Area Ritchie was setting up the area, he met with West, and then West assigned me to study the validity of the mining claims on which the Gold Strike Inn was situate. I ran through it, and there was no doubt they were valid, proven-up claims. This man Williams had acquired the necessary amount of land for the lake itself. So Ritchie was pressing A. B. West for Reclamation to buy out the Gold Strike claims. There wasn't much there. It wouldn't have been too much. And West bluntly told me, "Hell, no." No, he didn't. He never swore. I never heard him say a word like that. "No, Reclamation would not buy that. If Park Service wanted to buy it, *they* should buy it." And the case was closed.

Whether Park Service negotiated, I do not know. It went on then and was developed by several local townspeople and one man from Las Vegas. Turned out to be, in retrospect, it was probably good that it didn't go into the Federal Government, although it is an enclave within the Lake Mead National

Recreation Area *outside* of the protection and security zone for Hoover Dam. So, from a business standpoint and from a use standpoint, it's as good as–probably a little better situate. It's on the road, as is Railroad Pass. So it's a done deal. It's there.

Simonds: About when did the Gold Strike go in there? When was that built?

Bowser: I'd have to check back. The mining claims were there well before the–probably before or during the period of dam construction. I would just offhand say *before*. When the actual building started, I do not know. It was a very modest thing to start with, and it's just grown and grown.

Simonds: So the building that's there now is not the original?

Bowser: I would think the original is in there someplace, but added to.

Simonds: But it's been there for quite a while?

Bowser: Oh, I would say the fifties.

Simonds: Oh, that long?

Bowser: Yes, because my involvement started about 1958, '59, or so, because the Lake Mead National Recreation Area establishment was '61,[4] I believe, so it had to be several years before that. I had some association and I knew the principals and the background.

Simonds: And it's their intention to rebuild?

Bowser: Yes, I understand they are going to rebuild it.[5]

Simonds: It doesn't look like they've done much there since I was by there six months ago. (Laughter.)

Bowser: No, I don't think it's active yet, but what I read was that it's going to be rebuilt. They'll probably wait until they see what the–this would be *prudent*, if you were an investor, where is the *bypass* road across Hoover Dam going to go, and how best to fit into that configuration. I would *think* that would be what I would do if I was working on the project.

Railroad Pass and Klinger's Garage

4. See footnote on page 49.

5. The Gold Strike Inn had both a hotel and casino, but it burned and the Hacienda Hotel and Casino was built in its place.

Simonds: Then, of course, on the other side [of Boulder City] there's Railroad Pass.

Bowser: Railroad Pass was established–of course, it was here when I came here and had been here many years before. My understanding is that in the mid-thirties you could not–first we had a government town with government housing, to a degree, and there was a gate out at Railroad Pass, and you could not cross that gate unless you had a permit indicating that you had a business, a reason, a visitor or a job.

So, two little things were established there. One was Railroad Pass, and the other was called Klinger's [phonetic] Garage. Mr. Klinger was a very enterprising gentleman, and he would bring food in from Las Vegas and sell it to these people who were waiting outside of the gate to get in, either to get employment or get clearance, and was making reasonably good money. He was on a *mining* claim there, too. It was a questionable mining claim, but it proved out that they had had title, so there was no problem later in life.

Simonds: He was just doing mining of a different sort? (Laughter.)

Bowser: Yeah. But it was cleared up politically. Railroad Pass then was just a little hangout.

And there was one on the top of the hill then further up the road toward Vegas, on the left-hand side. It was called–I've forgotten the name. I think it was Sunset Club or something like that. It was operated by a Las Vegas family. But I don't know why it–probably about 1950, it just folded and never–the land has not been occupied since. I do not *know* the ownership of that land.

Simonds: A lot of those clubs along there had fairly notorious reputations going back to the period of construction.

Bowser: Oh, yes, yes, and many people stayed on that side. There were wine and women. It was a construction zone. It was even *fairly* active when I came here, quite discreet. There was no openness about it, but people went there looking for entertainment and it was available. There was nothing on the other side of the dam, virtually nothing to Kingman.

Simonds: And, of course, the laws in Arizona–

Bowser: Yes, prohibited it.

Simonds: –didn't allow for certain forms of entertainment which are in Nevada. (Laughter.)

Bowser: Sure.

Simonds: By ordinance, they don't allow gambling in Boulder City. And, it's my understanding that alcohol was prohibited–

Alcohol in Boulder City

Bowser: Yes.

Simonds: –for quite awhile. When was that prohibition, do you recall about when?

Bowser: I don't know. I don't recall.

Simonds: Was there resistance to that?

Bowser: No. It was just being bootlegged in anyway. So it was just more or less tolerated and adopted, just kind of migrated in. When I came here, I think about the only place you could buy beer would be at the pool hall, and then a couple of more little taverns crept in. It's kind of restricted here, though, so it's not wide open, and it's not wide open gambling in town. I imagine they will try to, as years go by, there are forces at times that try to think, well, we should overturn the ban against these things and have it more like Las Vegas, but I think the general populace of the town says, "We like it. If you want to go to gamble and

big-time entertainment, it's just over the hill," and it's virtually a *freeway* now. I would think that Boulder City would take a more conservative course.

Simonds: There does appear to be quite a bit of growth in recent years. I notice when you go over the hill, along the road down to the dam there's a lot of newer construction and housing and stuff going in.

Boulder City Has a Growth Ordinance

Bowser: Oh, yes. The town– the valley is coming this way. We've had a growth ordinance. Only so many lots can be developed each year, and that, to some degree, has suppressed the *boom* of the town.

Environmental Issues

Of course, the town, in land area, is the largest town in Nevada by land area, and there are certain restrictions on the use of the land, the Tortoise Preserve and this and that. But they do their darnedest to *weaken* those restrictions. I imagine the old Federal Government will always be looking over the shoulder, and the environmental groups will say, "Look. I don't think a big airport down here is really compatible with these poor little tortoises

walking around," so there's going to be tugs and pulls further down the road. Economics will play a big role in it.

Remember we had a group of people that I bucked up against not too discreetly, because I'm not discreet, but the environmental groups were coming in, in force, when I was about in the latter part of my career. They would brazenly say, "Oh, Curt's a good old guy, but you don't want to listen to anybody over forty." Well, those same people now are a little older, so the Abbie Hoffman theory, they can't listen to anybody less than 104 now. (Laughter.) And the environmental groups were pushed. They pushed pretty hard. I'm pretty well trained in sciences, and they weren't always on firm foundation. Some things did more harm than good. All in all, it was for the good, though. But many people *rode* that environmental movement by using the word "ecology" and "environment," and it did make people more aware.

But by the same token, they also *took* rights. See, everybody has, particularly in land, there's a bundle of rights. You can regard them as straws in a jar. And, each one of those is a right. You have a right for this property, and sometimes the environmental groups or the protectionist groups will say,

"Well, we will not let you cross this land of yours to get to the water unless you do something for this game preserve." It was kind of a blackmail. And some of those are now going to the Supreme Court, and that *cannot* be done. If you take a right, you have to *compensate* for that right. It's new theory.

Eminent Domain

I was coached very, very strongly in the rights of eminent domain, a very powerful weapon. For the good of the people, you can take your glasses. Good. Take your car. Take your house. We exercised it a great deal. It was used here in Vegas, where the city would exercise its right of eminent domain and then turn the land over to non-city organizations for operations like on the Fremont Street experience and out at the airport. The Supreme Court now is overruling some of those, and the city has found great liability. I don't know how they got so far off by just stretching the eminent domain technique to a breaking point.

Arrived in Boulder City as the Region Was being Established

Simonds: You mentioned that when you arrived here in 1945, just about the time that the regional system–

Bowser: I think there were only about ten or fifteen people here in the region at that time.

Simonds: You indicated that there was some animosity between the project people and the regional.

Bowser: They could feel crowded. They could see the end coming, and the project was built. It was downhill, except the operation part. And they, I think, resented the *intrusion* of a new group, generally younger, new ideas, taking over the offices and this and that. Personally, they were good friends, but there was always that–can't call it competition–just career fear.

Simonds: But it didn't seem to really interfere with–

Bowser: Those older folks passed on. (Laughter.) And the project was more or less absorbed into its operational phase, and the town changed and accepted it.

Simonds: We're rolling down towards the end of this tape, and I think you mentioned you had [unclear].

Bowser: I'm not that critical on time.

Simonds: I *do* have a plane I have to catch. I want to thank you for your time.

Bowser: Well, I thank you for even considering me, because I don't know why anybody would want to talk to somebody who just rambled.

Simonds: One last little formality. Do you have any objection to, or do you desire to place any restrictions on the transcript?

Bowser: None whatsoever.

Simonds: We would be allowed to open this up to researchers–

Bowser: Throw it away.

Simonds: –if they so desire?

Bowser: Throw it away. (Laughter.)

Simonds: Okay, thank you very much for your time.

Bowser: Well, I thank you, sir.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. MARCH 12, 1999.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 1, 1999.

Simonds: This is Joe Simonds with the Bureau of Reclamation history program. I'm in Boulder City, Nevada, at the home of Mr. Curt Bowser. And it's October 1, of 1999. This is the start of tape one.

Phreatophyte Control on the Salt River Project

To start with, I'd like to pick up a little bit talking about your work down on the Salt River with phreatophyte control. An interesting time trying to spell the word. I had to go track it down, and it wasn't what I had thought it was. I always thought it was–

Bowser: P-H-R-E-A-T-O-P-H-Y-T-E.

Simonds: I found one of the people in our environmental section who could spell it right off. But briefly, if you could, just give me a brief description of what the canals were like before you began the removal of vegetation.

Bowser: Are we on record now?

Simonds: We're on record.

Bowser: All right. Of course, I'll have to guess on some years here.

Simonds: That's fine.

Mormon Pioneers Planted Cottonwood and Mulberry Trees

Bowser: But the early Mormon pioneers–and most of them were Mormon–or the early settlers in the

Salt River Valley, dug the ditches probably by horse and just hand labor and put the larger canals, the carrying canals, on section lines or mid-section lines, and then went into the farms. And on the main canals and the secondary canals, they planted cottonwood trees, primarily, with a smattering of mulberry and probably other plants. And we're talking probably 1906 through 1920, and these cottonwoods are prolific growers, both in diameter near the trunk and in height and just general foliar umbrella-spreading. I would assume that lots of them came out through the years, just from getting in the way, but many of them remained, I would think maybe several hundred *miles* or more of them, and they just kept flourishing with their toes in the water, so to speak.

As Salt River Started Rehabilitation of its Canals it Was Determined the Trees Had to Go to Protect Canal Lining

Then at an early date, when Salt River started to think about rehabilitation of the whole project, the obvious answer at that time was to gunite them, which is a thin concrete layer in a ditch that is shaped. And my boss, Wes, just simply said, "We can't have these plants there." First, you could never get [to] the canal in if you don't take them out.

They're just going to crack the lining in a short period of time.

Now, in general appearance, they were probably 20 to maybe 60-, 70 feet in height, and in a smaller canal, say on a mid-section line in a farm canal, they would lots of times the upper story of the tree would touch the upper story of the tree over the farm lane or even on the, I'll say, country road or county road. It was gorgeous. It was utterly gorgeous. But it was necessary to take them out, and Salt River officials–well, there was no choice. There was no alternative.

Simonds: This went on for miles and miles?

Bowser: Miles and miles, in *every* direction out of Phoenix, because Phoenix was just a little *town* in there, with little Mesa and Tempe and Goodyear, just little spots. Now it's all filled in, with no trees, but no alfalfa or cotton fields, either. Just houses.

They just simply started with the equipment that was available then, more or less heavy-duty chain saw, axes, tractors, backhoe, and would just come along and pull and push. Their general labor force was the Yaqui Indian. Now, as I mentioned once before, there's a very graphic picture of this in this museum,

that you'll get the exact address and everything from Stan, because he took me there, and it's fantastic. Next time, spend ten or fifteen minutes there. Well, it'd be nice to spend a couple hours. But you could see it from day one right on through from the photographs available.

Simonds: This is in Tempe.

Bowser: In Tempe or Mesa. There is a man by the name of Ted Walker that works for Salt River Project. He's still alive. Of course, he has more intimate knowledge than I have because he *lived* there and worked right on the project, where I was kind of an outsider all the time. Although they tolerated us, they did as they pleased, because we had no direct responsibility, outside of this repayment, R&R, rehabilitation.

The trees, the cut trees and stumps, were just taken and put in ricks wherever they could find some vacant land, particularly up around Tolleson and Goodyear and up in that area. And then they were burned, and the ashes were distributed by the wind or hauled away. It was quite a task. I would not have any intimate knowledge as to how many trees there were or how many miles, but that would be easy to get to be exact.

Simonds: It was significant, though?

Bowser: Oh, yes, *more* than significant. It was a *monumental* task.

Simonds: Had there been any attempts at removing the vegetation prior to your–

Bowser: No, I think they actually cultivated it, *encouraged* it and everything. The opposition that you *heard* was scenic, minor wildlife, the birds and everything, and wind control, and you cannot deny that–well, it's hard to say that there's more wind today than there was yesterday, but there certainly wasn't anything to stop it, and I don't imagine there's much wind today because it's whistling between the houses. So the transition, well we've made a circle.

Simonds: What about the human uses of the canal area, other than, of course, the transport of water for irrigation and other purposes.

Kids Swam in the Canals

Bowser: Oh, I think it was used widely for everything but potable supply. In the summer, you would see kids frolicking, with tires hung in the trees, diving off. And I imagine there was a safety problem there, because it constricted to go

underneath the lanes and underneath the roads, and water would rush through there pretty rapidly. And I would assume they had grates on it here and there, and it would be hazardous swimming. But at 110 [degrees], and even with the tree shade, it would be tempting to any.

Then on some canals, particularly out in the Tempe area, I believe there was a tremendous amount of even organized recreation there with, I'll just say, picnics of groups and, "Oh, let's go down there and picnic." I do not recall of any off-canal bank areas, like a little–but you never would find them anyplace, probably, in the forties or the thirties. Of course, I never saw it in the thirties, but in the forties and fifties you didn't have much of that. You kind of went and found a tree and a blanket, and you had a picnic. You didn't have benches. It would be nice to go out there and see are there any picnic areas with benches and tables and barbecue units now. I don't know. Vandalism, of course, has always been a problem with those, so they have not been popular in the last, unless they have a custodian around, and then it's a fee and this and that. But the free type is not as popular. You don't see them along the roadsides hardly anymore, and many people

will not stop at a roadside rest area anymore, particularly after dark, unfortunately.

Simonds: Would you describe those areas along the canal as a focal point for socialization, social activities?

Bowser: I doubt if it would quite go that far. Maybe in what you might say the working-class community, it might have been. But within the immediate city area, I do not know.

Simonds: When you began the program of removing the trees and clearing the vegetation, was there– you mentioned that there was some resistance because of concerns, the wildlife and the shade and stuff like that. Were there any organized type of resistance?

Bowser: No. I think the people just realized that the time had come. We have to save the water, get the water through more efficiently, and in some cases, I imagine the trees were nuisances. Certainly they were nuisances to the developer who was thinking about, "Let's develop this forty acres," and he'd have to–something had to go.

Simonds: You mentioned in our earlier talk that you conducted some experiments as to how much

water these trees used, and you followed the roots to see how far they would extend.

Demonstrating the Extent of Tree Root Systems

Bowser: Yes, just as a very elementary sideline. A suggestion was made that you demonstrate that these tree roots go quite a ways into the field, and I believe every farmer knew that. The mulberry especially has a very distinct colored root. It's yellowish in color. And the cottonwood isn't hard to identify, either. And we simply came off from a medium-sized canal and dug out into a field that was not actively being plowed, that had been there for an X time, but there was seepage or something in that area. Oh, they would go out 200-, 300 yards into the field. In other words, the feeder roots, the tree with its brace roots in the canal or in the bank, but the feeder roots would just keep on going, even though it had probably a reasonable supply of water right here.

Simonds: Did you ever do any comparative studies as to was the loss of water from the vegetation–

Bowser: The transpiration.

Simonds: The transpiration, yeah. Did you do any study to see if, by removing the vegetation, was there

a more or less loss of water through evaporation?

". . . the ditch bank vegetation. The basic theory, of course, was that it's a canal for irrigation, and when they become *in*compatible, then one has to go. . . ."

Bowser: No, that was never considered with the ditch bank vegetation. The basic theory, of course, was that it's a canal for irrigation, and when they become *in*compatible, then one has to go.

Simonds: I guess what I'm saying is, the shading of the trees would have prevented a certain amount of evaporation.

Bowser: Obviously.

Simonds: Was the trade-off–

Bowser: Of course, that is always affected by the volume of *wind* and the ripple on the water, but it probably would be mitigated there because the level of the water was probably X inches/feet below the bank. So unless the wind was blowing parallel with the canal, it's doubtful if there would have been much roiling of the water of the water and tremendous evaporation. There would have been

considerable, but by the same token, the plant itself was transpiring into the atmosphere.

Wanted to Understand Water Use and Transpiration by Phreatophytes

But in that vein, where we ran into another problem, was how much water is transpired by phreatophytes–i.e., salt cedar.

Cooperated with USGS on a Study of Salt Cedar Water Use

And that is where, I think I mentioned in a previous discussion, that, in cooperation with the Geological Survey, we established a number of hydroponic-like tanks out in the Buckeye area and then seeded them with salt cedar, measured the water in, and that way we were able to determine the amount of evapotranspiration. And that was significant. That would range all the way from 5 to 11 acre-feet per year.

Dr. T. E. A. van Hylckama and Tommy Robinson Published the Results of the Salt Cedar Study

Now, that's a study that's available through Geological Survey's papers. I did not write the technical aspect of it. A doctor did that, Dr. T. E. A. van Hylckama, and then a

man by the name of Tommy Robinson, and he is deceased. But van Hylckama could still be in the Tempe area. He was a very dynamic man who graduated in engineering, engineering science in Europe, took his first job in some place in Africa, and then went to the Far East and was captured by the Japanese and spent four years in a prisoner of war camp, and then came to the United States and was hired by Geological Survey. He was in charge of the evapotranspiration phreatophyte study. It was pretty well studied, and pretty well proven that the trees took up an awful lot of that water. Riverbed, yes. Canal bank, negligible study on it. I would doubt if there is *any*.

Simonds: So most of these studies were conducted along natural streams or–

Bowser Was Interested in the Academic Side of Salt Cedar While in Region 5 (Amarillo) They concentrated their efforts on Control

Bowser: Flood plains. That's where we were concentrating, in flood plains. I do not believe that New Mexico, Region 5, did–they worked more on control. They'd already decided salt cedar'd have to go. Whereas, I don't know, I got off more on the academic side of it, how much water *do* these plants use? If you were

interested, I still have copies of all that stuff, so I can abstract that for you without any difficulty.

Simonds: That might be interesting. So only, except for when conditions were just so, the evaporation wasn't as big a factor in terms of water loss as the trees and the vegetation–

Bowser: Nuisance value of the tree. The nuisance of the tree outweighed that other consideration.

Simonds: It did.

". . . the time had come just to go the next step to a line[d] canal. . . ."

Bowser: Well, you just couldn't have them there with a line canal. And the space. Space also became a factor here, because you moved the same quantity of water down a much less formed, shaped, line[d] canal than this nice little thing that was, not meandering, but with dirt banks and eroded and less maintenance, and the time had come just to go the next step to a line[d] canal.

Simonds: So, was that the primary drive behind the removal of the vegetation was to line the canals?

Bowser: Yes.

Simonds: It wasn't as much a water loss issue as it was to–

Maintenance Played a Part in the Decision to Remove Vegetation along the Canals

Bowser: It was a factor, but not the *major* factor. *Maintenance* would be probably the big thing, because they must have spent a lot of money on maintenance because some places you couldn't even get *in* to a canal. You'll see that if you look at those pictures in the museum.

Using 2,4-D to Control Vegetation

Simonds: Previously we talked a little bit about environmental concerns. You had stated that you were some of the earlier users of, I believe, the 2,4-D type of chemicals.

Bowser: No one knew. The Dow Chemical Company, the other large chemical companies, American Chemical groups, had developed this product that would translocate, through a foliar spray would translocate, disrupt the metabolism of the plant, the roots would rot away, and the whole plant would die, and that was given the name 2,4-D. The 2,4,5T came in a little later

and was primarily used, was the Agent Orange in Vietnam.

2,4-D Wasn't Studied Much Before Marketing

No real consideration was given, outside of the, by today's standards, would be a rather skimpy study by whoever the regulatory federal agency was at the time. And oh, yes, it's going to be a benefit. Yes. Does it hurt anybody? No, our studies indicate that it does not. Okay, market it. And there was an instant market. It was very, very successful. And the big chemical companies pushed it with vigor because it was available, the farmers wanted it. But since that time, the whole thing has mushroomed into a *tremendous* big business based on this same general philosophy, but have modified the ingredients to fit the particular soybean, corn, wheat, and everything, and brought out other products, of course. It would almost take a chemist to keep up with what comes out every year or two years.

Issues with 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T as Herbicides

There probably were hazards that we didn't even know about, although it would appear that there were no, or few, hazards from the 2,4-D. But the 2,4,5-T, then we get into a

little different ball game, apparently, and I'm not sure they ever proved or disproved what the problem was in Vietnam. ~~Was it a chemical product?~~ Was it a reaction to the chemical by the troops that allegedly were sprayed? And how about the individuals who were Vietnamese that must have been in there with probably less protection than our military forces? I never even hear about it anymore.

Simonds: Essentially Agent Orange was being used along the canals and stuff?

Bowser: Not so much, but quite a little bit of 2,4,5-T was used in the flood plains to spray. Of course now, there shouldn't have been very many people *in* the flood plains. As far as I know, it was totally uninhabited, and they sprayed it on judiciously, probably much better than the military did, because by that time we had helicopters and airplanes, and we had some restrictions. You don't fly this when the wind is beyond this and that. And then we watched the drift, because we were cognizant that drifting of 2,4-D over a cotton field was a *taboo*. Now, apparently a little bit of it would stimulate the growth, but it didn't take much to go beyond stimulus, and then you would have actual. . . And I shouldn't wonder but in some areas we probably damaged the cotton unknowingly, and the farmer didn't recognize

it, the university didn't recognize yet. But it didn't take long. It was only a matter of a few years and the hazards of it become well known and well publicized.

Concern about the Environmental Consequences of Herbicide Use

Simonds: You had mentioned in our previous talk that you had some concern about the environmental consequences of using those chemicals, but–

Bowser: Oh, there always has to be. Always has to be. Like when you take a pill–and you see more and more of it–what is going to be *my* response to that? I know of no studies where they studied field mice that could have been exposed to it. I never have heard that. They probably ingested it, and probably in a laboratory they took white mice and fed them 2,4-D. In fact, one man dramatically drank a portion of 2,4-D-laced water at a conference in the east someplace, and that's harmless. That kind of belayed the fears to that group, at least, and I've never heard anything since that said that–although 2,4-D, I don't believe, is used–it's used widely, but by licensed applicators. You can still buy it, though, at WalMart and places like that in concentration for garden use, so it's not something that is absolutely

dangerous. It has to be used judiciously. That's about all you can say.

Simonds: Back to the social aspects. Did you feel or get any indication that the removal of the vegetation and the trees and so forth had any type of a social impact on the area?

Bowser: No, outside of the wind, increased wind, and the visual. Just the general, "Well, isn't that tree pretty? Isn't it nice to have shade?" That type. But I don't believe there was really any organized social use outside the kids swimming in the canals, and it was certainly more *picturesque* for the kid to be swimming in a canal with trees on than in a sterile concrete bathtub.

Simonds: Was there ever any problem with wildlife or fish in the canals?

Fishing in the Canals

Bowser: No. In fact, fishing was rather–that might have been the largest social function of those early canals. There obviously were fish in there. I've seen them fish. I do not know what they were catching. Probably sunfish, carp. Certainly not a trout or anything like that. A warm-water, bottom-feeding carp, possibly.

Simonds: So there was no effort to keep fish out of the canals?

Bowser: No, I don't believe. But there wasn't really a habitat, either, because the poor fish would go down, and he'd be out in the field pretty quick. And the lining, of course, was the bank. I doubt if there was much of a place that they could hide, so to speak. But in the larger canals, I wouldn't doubt.

"I don't recall *ever* seeing anybody fishing in a smaller canal. They were always along the main canals . . ."

I don't recall *ever* seeing anybody fishing in a smaller canal. They were always along the main canals, and whether they were catching anything. . . You fish lots of times just to get away, and sometimes you don't bait the hook, even. (Laughter.)

Simonds: Just an excuse to be out in the country somewhere.

Shifting gears here a little bit. When we spoke last, during one of our breaks you showed me a letter. This is to do with the trespass along the lower Colorado River.

Bowser: We had a trespasser on the east side of the Colorado River in the vicinity of Blythe, and it was my job to go down and tell that man that he was occupying the land illegally and that he would have to vacate. He was rather belligerent, but I was able to not convince him necessarily, but to tell him the position of the government, and he, in strong terms, expressed his position, too, but that was contrary.

". . . regional director received a letter from the assistant United States attorney . . . said that, 'I talked to Mr. So-and-So, and he was non-cooperative and made certain veiled threats-like, and I would suggest that if Curtis Bowser goes into that area to talk to him on this subject, that he forewarn or ask the U.S. marshal to go along. . . .'"

I thought it was settled, and then suddenly the regional director received a letter from the assistant United States attorney in, I think, Los Angeles–well, yes, it would have to be Los Angeles, because this was California–and said that, "I talked to Mr. So-and-So, and he was non-cooperative and made certain veiled threats-like, and I would suggest that if Curtis Bowser goes into that area to talk to him on this subject, that he forewarn or ask the U.S. marshal to go along." I'll give you a copy of that. I still have that.

Simonds: Oh, I don't need the copy. But I was curious. The person who was writing the letter seemed to, perhaps in a humorous vein, express some concern for his safety or the safety of others involved in that. Was this case an exception or you found this in a lot of cases?

Bowser: No. It would be typical of the more volatile type trespasser. But this one more or less bubbled over the top, and I thought it was–I never gave it a first thought, because many of them were more, more what?–louder. (Laughter.)

Simonds: So this type of threat wasn't really uncommon with regards to that work.

Bowser: Nah. I imagine many people in government get that, "Damn dumb government people. They all have to go someplace."

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 1, 1999.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 1, 1999.

Simonds: I thought that was rather interesting. I could imagine that a lot of people had a lot of their lives spent in those areas and that they would have been very upset.

Bowser: Yes. You can visualize that we had some people down along the river below Yuma that,

in court, I believe, he said, "I do not like what this attorney has said, that that was not my home. I was born there. I went there every night after school. It was known as my home. I was mid-life before I realized that we didn't own the land. So it was *my home*."

Simonds: Were there any efforts or cases where the land was able to be purchased by the residents or anything?

There Was No Provision for Trespassers to Buy the Land Involved

Bowser: No. No, there was no provisions by the United States, either through the Bureau of Land Management or the Bureau of Reclamation regulations to offer that for sale.

Trespass Removal on the Colorado River below Parker Dam Was Moved from Reclamation over to Bureau of Land Management Where it Was Directly Supervised by the Secretary of the Interior

However, in later years, when it came apparent that the program was going to take a tremendous effort, it was removed from Reclamation and went to the Bureau of Land Management, primarily the Bureau of Land Management, but directly directed out of the

secretary's office. But they worked more with the Bureau of Land Management than with us, which was proper, because I was the only lands man and the rest were engineers, and they could give a tinker's darn about it. So it was logical. And the Secretary of the Interior appointed a man by the name of Hollister, and they set up a Yuma office.

River Meandering, Evulsion and Accretion

And then we ran into this very, very *technical* problem of river meandering and what happens to a ownership. Now, hold in mind that many of these trespassers had a bona fide, full fee-simple title to a parcel of land. Not all of them. Probably two-thirds of them always had. That's of the agricultural groups. The squatter in a summer house had nothing, of course.

And then the river shifted–boom. Okay. You have the theories, recognized by law, of evulsion and accretion, where you lose and you gain and so and so. So the Land Use Office, then, said, "God, we can fight about this forever. Let us just take this and you give us that and we'll give you that, and we square your field up. We get what we want, and everybody is happy." And that was well received, and they settled many, many cases in

those veins. Because what would you do? You could litigate and litigate and litigate. And I have never heard of one that didn't pan out successfully. I imagine we lost on some and gained on others, but the Land Use Office was happy, the owner was happy, the river channel was happy, and I've never heard a– maybe Bob Brose. I'll ask old Bob if he ever heard anything more about any of them. But the channel was in, the river was stable, so there was no more opportunity for them to claim additional lands or have an objection. It was settled, signed, sealed, title given in court.

Simonds: So once the levy work and channelization work was completed, the problem of accretion and evulsion really kind of disappeared.

Bowser: But those folks still may have been bothered by it, pre-channelization and had a right, and that's where we brought in to play a man by the name of John McCuen [phonetic], Stan Freeland [phonetic], and a counterpart in the Bureau of Land Management. Our man testified, along with the Bureau of Land Management man, and worked closely in court with the Land Use Office in Yuma and the Reclamation engineer–engineers, in this case– and the Bureau of Land Management engineer. They were all engineers, so they got along wonderful. They would argue among

themselves, "Well, what way is it?" It seems like you could go any way you wanted, pretty near, within some–oh, well, what the heck. We're coming out all right, so here we go.

Simonds: So there were really kind of two classes of trespass cases? There were the ones that dealt with–

The Two Classes of Trespass below Parker Dam

Bowser: Yes, two classes–recreation, and then agricultural based.

Simonds: I was kind of seeing it as you had your squatters, and then you had–

Bowser: They could be the same.

Simonds: They could be the same?

Bowser: Yeah, agriculture and recreation.

Simonds: You talked about those who had legitimate title, fee title. Was that trespass in regard to, as the river meandered and you got evulsion and accretion, and then trespassing on to new lands.

Bowser: Oh, yes. There was obviously lands that we had no claim whatsoever to in part of their

field, maybe up to a fence line. But then, "Well, when we're level here, why don't we just go on out a little ways?"

Simonds: They were just more extending their reach out a little beyond their actual–

Bowser: What they legitimately had a legal claim to. Now, the residential land, he only had a little area, maybe 100 by 200, but he was in there by the droves. Now, the typical residential trespass was from Parker Dam, south to Parker. Building the dam, the man said, "I've got a job. Where do I live?"

I got a feeling that the project engineer, "Oh, go find a place and live."

Where? There wasn't anything in Parker. Not anything in Needles. "Well, I guess I'll just take and put a tent down." So he put a tent down someplace along the nice river, four miles or two miles downstream, of course, from the dam.

Pretty soon, "I've got a job someplace else." Here's a new man. "I'll sell it to you for 'X' dollars, fifty-, ten." There wasn't much there, I would assume.

"But how do I know I'm getting anything?"

"I'll give you a quit claim deed. Whatever right, title, and interest I have in this, I hereby transfer to Mr. Joe Simonds." Signed by Dave.

Well, some of those were recorded. And maybe that went through two or three of those, and a guy who didn't understand what the quit claim deed said, "Well, I'll put a little better house here." Now, those houses were–don't misunderstand me–the were habitable, but they weren't majestic. (Laughter.)

"My job at one time was to select *five* typical cases, one residential, four agricultural, because *all* of the residentials did not total probably one of the big farms . . ."

And then we came along. My job at one time was to select *five* typical cases, one residential, four agricultural, because *all* of the residentials did not total probably one of the big farms, because we're talking about several hundred acres in the big farms. I picked one at Yuma, one at Blythe, and one at Needles, and one in the Cibola Valley, and a residential man between Parker Dam and Parker, Arizona, on

the California side. Pathetic. Wish I'd known human nature better.

So we took them to court. The man on the California side, the residential one, first the woman captured me one day and said, "What will ever happen to my quail and my birds that I have to feed here?" Quite concerned. So here we entered into court, and they had a mediocre lawyer, and walked in with a son. First, the man was in Levi pants or coveralls. The woman was in a calico dress, a son in a military Marine uniform, and I've forgotten what the other son looked like.

And we heard it and heard it and presentation, and pretty soon the judge called them up to the bench and he said, "I have sympathy for you. I would stretch the law to the utmost. But you have no title to that land. Case dismissed." There was nothing there that indicated they had any vestige of a legal right to occupy the land.

I think I mentioned to you, I was up and talked to a man in *Nevada*, one of the older families in *Nevada*, a little piece of land, quite insignificant piece of land, not much bigger than a residential area. I said, "You have no title. You have no right in here." But I got a lecture that, I think he was the third generation

that had occupied that land. I speak lots of times before I think, and I said, "You know, in reality, sir, a colored boy in New York City, in Harlem (I think I used the word Harlem), has the same right to this land as you have," and I left right then. (Laughter.)

Simonds: He mentioned he was a third generation.

Bowser: That had used the land.

Simonds: On that particular parcel of land.

Sponsored a Cadastral Survey Because the Trespass Cases Were Complicated by Unsurveyed Areas

Bowser: He may, in all fairness, never have known that it wasn't–remember, some of this land was unsurveyed. That was also a problem. So one of the earliest things that we did was have a cadastral surveyor come in and re-establish the corners and bring them out, establish a survey, period. The previous surveys were clear back, oh, gosh, in the eighties, nineties, maybe up to 1920. And they were, "We're not going down there in the river. We're out here in the hills." And if they did establish–and undoubtedly they did in some cases–the river said, "What's this little stake doing here? I'm going to take you to Yuma."

Simonds: The reason he said three generations–

Bowser: Oh, it probably was.

Simonds: How long had some of these trespasses been–

Bowser: I imagine that had gone on for maybe when Las Vegas was a nothing, probably not anything there. Some of those families came here. My understanding is that the Salt Lake people moved south, establishing St. George, Cedar City, moved into the Las Vegas area, and I would assume that it became just part of this man's what he occupied, and he probably was an early homesteader there, or at least he got title to it someplace along the line since the first one sat down there, and probably a homestead. I never did check that, don't really know.

Simonds: Do the same laws that apply to other lands with regards to adverse possession–

"No adverse possession against the United States Government. . . ."

Bowser: No adverse possession against the United States Government.

Simonds: On the federal land. So they could not claim right by time of occupation as they could on other lands?

Bowser: If I could move on your back porch, in your garage there, and you said, "Oh, that's all right, Curt." Then down the road your son comes back from college or he's now married, forty-five years and I'm still there, I say, "Well, hell, your dad let me have this, and I've been here X years, whatever the state law is. I think I'll just stay."

Simonds: And indeed he can.

Bowser: Yeah. Within some margins, he has a claim. I would not want to profess what *extent* that claim is, but I got a little toehold.

Simonds: Those type laws, they don't apply on federal. No claim of right by time of occupation. And I suppose that a lot of the folks believed that they had a right based on that.

Mining Claims and Reclamation

Bowser: Oh, yes, because that's a common verbiage among lands people, adverse possession. And then there's the mining claim phases of it, that you go out and stake a mining claim and you think through the years that you should have a

right. But we squeezed out many of those because they did not follow that fine print by saying, "Each X period of time you are to put a hundred dollars' worth of assessment work by digging a hole or prove up that you have a marketable mineral or whatever the product is," and they didn't do that. So those were squeezed out in coarse terms, or terminated would be the proper term, in *ab initio*–in other words, failure to perform. And, we squeezed out many of those.

Researching and Resolving Mining Claims on Reclamation Land

I think I perhaps told you before that West was over in Las Vegas at one time at a Rotary meeting, and jokingly or otherwise, Cashman, which is the Cadillac dealer over there, told him, "I'm going to develop my claim in Lake Mead, my dad's mining claim." I don't know whether A. B. West was home yet or not, but some guy by the name of Curt Bowser was getting laced about, "What do you know about mining claims in Lake Mead?"

I said, "Nothing."

"Well, you better get on it and find out about this claim."

So I went down to the dam and went through their archives, and I came to a file. It was dated about 1942 or maybe even '41. I've forgotten the man's name now. And there were about eleven of them, a small stack of manilla file folders, with their little tabs and names up on the corners. "These files not closed. Going to war." Signed his name. They were there. Cashman was one of those, and we squeezed him out under this *ab initio*.

Simonds: Based on it had never been worked.

Bowser: Right. I've often wondered what claim they would have had if they would have said, "Hell, man, we can't get to it. It's under the water." I don't know. I never researched that to know what their–

Simonds: Now, where there any cases involving–and I need to make sure I'm clear on the term–inholdings? And if I understand that, that's privately held land within an area of federal ownership.

Bowser: Yes. But not as pronounced as it is today. That was the responsibility of the acquisition men to squeeze those out in the case of Reclamation–i.e., underneath or adjacent to the

reservoir within 200 feet back from the high water line or whatever they established.

Defining High Water Line

There is some question of where is the high water line when you come to a bluff. Well, I took the position–and I don't know whether it was my position or an engineer's position. Probably somebody told me what it *should* be, and I adopted it and I said, "Okay, you come to the water line. You set a staff, and then you go up here, on top of the hill, you go back 200 feet," or whatever the figure was.

"But the water will never get here, but I'm closer than 200 feet."

"No, you don't have any claim to that." Nothing was ever challenged, because it was within reason.

But to answer your question more directly, we never had that problem, because there were supposedly no–but you interviewed a man whose father had one–that had no inholdings that should *not* have been extinguished.

But one time a man, funny little man, looked like Hobo Joe, but terrific man, asked

me to look into a claim that his relative had asked him about, and I'm assuming he had an interest in it, in the Cibola National Wildlife Refuge. I looked into it and told him what it was, and we've never heard a thing since. It's quite possible that you have interviewed that gentleman, Mr. Clifford Pugh.

Simonds: I believe that he's been interviewed, yeah.

Bowser: Yes. Maybe you did not.

Simonds: I didn't, no, but I know who he is.

Bowser: I'd be interested to see his transcript to see if he did mention that. I would assume he had not, because he didn't give a tinker's darn, and I don't imagine his heir–or not his heir, but his relative, and I do not remember even–distant even then, that's all I can remember–pressed it anyway. It's entirely possible it has slipped through the cracks and there would be there, but it would be virtually *impossible* to find at this date.

But I had one. In fact, I had several, but only *one* that really sticks out, and then I would like to go back to this other one. A man passed away who had *a claim* of some type, but not very good, possibly a mining claim, in the area above Parker Dam, on the Arizona side, near a

gravel pit that we have that was used in the construction of Parker Dam. He passed away, and his wife brought an attorney, and I met her in Parker one time with her brother-in-law or a son, and we went up there. They didn't know where it was, so we just drove through the area. And then later, when I was in Los Angeles, I met with her in her attorney's office, and he had left some papers in his personal effects that he had a claim to land up there. They were no more than prudent. They were looking to see what it was.

She was a wonderful woman, like my mother, and she was old enough at that time to have been my mother. I remember she wore a nice dress, and had a nice car in Parker, too. I admired that big car. And the attorney was the same age, and family friend, probably, and he listened and called her by name, and "I don't think we have anything. We thank you for participating." That was the end of it.

And the same way. I had another man that came in one day, "I worked here on Hoover Dam. I had a lot of free time, and I was interested in mining and I prowled the area up above Gold Strike." And he was pretty clever. He wouldn't tell me exactly. He wouldn't show me on a map where it was. I've often wondered how I flubbed that. "But in

this area." Well, that only took in above five square miles. And "I'd like to go in there and get some of that, because it had color in it."

Now, that was not uncommon, because Gold Strike, evidently, had had some rumors or somebody had salted an area or something. But I don't believe it was salted. I think there actually was a color of *gold* in there. Where it came from? And it was not in place. It had been transported-type gold. And so it has to be up someplace above, and the only things that indicate that it should come from above is about the area that he was circling.

He was crestfallen when he left, but I understand he–his health was broken even at that time, but it was the last straw, and I guess I helped–I didn't improve his health outlook, I don't imagine, but I had no choice. It was Reclamation withdrawn at the time, not open to mining, and it was still Reclamation withdrawn.

Protection and Security Zone at the Dams

In fact, part of what he was looking at was a protection and security zone around the dam.

Now, you might ask, what's protection and security? When the Lake Mead National

Recreation Area Act was passed,[6] West was jumping up and down, "What are we going to keep?" Off record now. Obviously, you did not want another agency taking half of the dam, very concisely put. So just for protection and for security. And engineering staff helped. I'm not sure that I even drew a line. I didn't. I just watched over somebody's shoulder, and probably a second down from Shanklin [phonetic] or from Bob, Bob Brose's firsthand man.

We said, "Well, that's kind of hilly in there. Let's come in a little closer." And we'd draw the line down the section line.

"This is pretty flat out in here. Let's come out. Let's jig out here about a half a mile and then down, down. Let's go on down here through Parker or down here through Lake Mohave, down to Davis Dam. We ought to have a little bit below the dam. Up, up, up, up, up, up, up, back around." And that is *excluded* from the Lake Mead National Recreation Area.

So they do not have any–it's a little hard to define now. They do not have any right to go onto that land and build something or do any activity up there. But when you get on the

6. See footnote on page 33.

water, now you've got a little different thing that was never considered in the protection and security, because they manage it and you wouldn't want to say, "You can't come below this line." So it's a fuzzy area there, and I don't know, in a national security area, obviously we would have to keep something above the dam. You'd have to put a barrier or something. But that was never a consideration. It was just the outline, the border, the extremities of the land that was not a recreation area–it's a protection and security zone.

Park Service Wanted a Smaller Protection and Security Zone than Reclamation Developed

Outside of Mr. Ritchie [phonetic], who tried to get me to bring that line smaller, naturally, and West told me to hold firm, and I guess he probably called West and West held firm. I like the Park Service. I always got along with them well. But that was it. He called me even a day before the bill was signed in whenever it was, '65 I think,[7] and "No, I'm sorry. A. B. West says hold tight."

Simonds: And it was really a matter of just Reclamation wanting to maintain some control over elements.

7. See footnote on page 33.

Bowser: Well, not so much control. We really don't care if they take tours out there or not, and I don't think we would even object if they would come and work out an agreement to use it. I don't think there'd be any problem, with the understanding that if some future date which we cannot foresee, I'm sorry, this is going to be a fence around here or armed guards. See, we had that during that World War II. You did not cross the dam without a convoy. You had to be in a convoy, with your windows rolled up, and a soldier in the lead car and probably a vehicle behind, and you scooted across. And then we had pill boxes. I never did have anything to do with that, except the pill boxes are still visible. At that time, it was conceivable that it could be used, *would* be used or *could* be used, so it was a logical protection and security zone, just a fence, an invisible fence.

Issues Regarding Inholdings

But going back to this other. There were no inholdings as we're speaking today, where a group of farsighted people, sharpies, have picked land within the wildlife refuge on top of a hill that had a–

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BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 1, 1999.

Bowser: I think, if you talk to Stan [Seigal] sometime, you'll find that a man by [the name of] Chapman is now wrestling with them, and he's going to build a house.

"You have no objection to me flying over with a helicopter with an I-beam on it, do you sir?"

"Well, there's no way I can stop you."

And there are wealthy people in the United States who would love to have a, going back ninety years now, or fifty years, a place called Eagle Nest. That was very hard to get to, where a man by the name of Hitler allegedly committed suicide in some far-off country. And there are people who would relish having a house that you couldn't get to except by helicopter, and it's not too far-fetched.

Simonds: You mentioned Chapman, and I believe he's pretty known in the Colorado region for getting title to some of these in-holding areas and then threatening to bulldoze roads through wilderness areas to gain access to it. And his whole thing is that he finally was able to force the Park Service or Forest Service or somebody to purchase the land from him for some inflated price in order to protect the–

Bowser: In fact, I met a woman once, an executive. . . One of my *best* friends in the land business, working for the Bureau of Land Management, was a man by the name of Roy Helmendollar [phonetic]. We're approximately the same age, retired about the same time, and he asked me, "Would you be interested in a job with the Arizona/New Mexico or the New Mexico/Arizona Land Company." Somebody told me the other day that that's part of the old Page [phonetic] Land Company, but that doesn't mean anything.

I had lunch with her one day, and he went to work for them, and that was what they were doing. They were primarily protecting their own *interests* in these wildlife refuges and everything that was being established at that time, but I understood that they did expand into getting other lands, inholdings, and buying them. And you could buy them quite reasonably at one time and just hold on.

Property Rights

We are entering into a new phase of, any piece of property has a bundle of rights, a bunch of pencils in a bowl, and that total bowl is called full fee simple title. Reclamation, through a man by the name of Jay S [phonetic]–I guess you know him–he comes by

and he buys one bundle. But he is not supposed to take parts of the other bundles. It goes way back in state laws that the big rancher no longer can go in and take the spring, fence it, and keep the people out. He has to own that, and then it gets pretty hairy here. So many times he didn't even own it. He managed the water, and no one else could get in.

It's ironic now that people like that, but the new generation is thinking, "Well, you damaged some of my rights." Now, this is going to go to the Supreme Court, and Texas has already moved into it other rights. I believe the problem has been that the environmentalist has moved too rapidly by saying–the test case is California, on a lumber yard, where the environmentalist wanted a road down through this man's property to get to a stream. The road was for public use. The man said, "I have no problem with that, but I ought to be compensated."

They said, "No compensation," and they worked with the local government, and they wouldn't give him a permit to expand his business until he gave this road up. So that was blackmail. That is not the one that will go to the Supreme Court, but one of these others will, quite similar to that. And I believe the

landowner is going to win, just on this constitutional equality of the straws in the bundle of rights.

Trespass Cases

Simonds: The trespass cases, the residential ones, the lands, the areas where these people were trespassing or squatting, were they good lands, were they marginal lands?

Bowser: The agriculture or the residential?

Simonds: The residential.

Bowser: No. Rocky, nice, twenty feet above the water, near the water's edge, ~~upstream from the road,~~ or uphill from the road. Every place.

Simonds: Aside from the fact they were trespassing on federal lands, what would have been the objection to allowing them to potentially purchase those lands?

Bowser: I don't know. Probably no, except you would have had to give them priority. And then someone would have said, "Why did they get a priority to buy?" You always run into that.

The decision was made at the secretarial level they ought to go, and that was

the general consensus of just about everybody–except the occupants. Even the county governments, at least behind the scenes, were very supportive of it, because there was no tax base. The turnover, they were no longer associated with the Reclamation program in the Parker area, and they were, shall we say, possibly deteriorating in the type of individual that was occupying. Some were very, very, almost wealthy people, and others were just, "I'm occupying this house." It probably was abandoned when they moved in, and they got a job and they were not paying any rent and they were becoming prosperous. Not prosperous, but they were living. Remember, this would be in the fifties.

BLM's Land Use Office Handled the Trespass Cases

There's a *whole* record of this phase of it, this Land Use Office part. That's a *whole* big chapter of Bureau of Land Management's function out of the, generally you might say out of the Phoenix office, but not reporting to the Phoenix office, reporting to the Secretary of the Interior. It was neither drummed up–it was proposed to the Secretary. It was adopted by the Secretary. It was enforced by the Secretary.

Simonds: How many cases were there of this trespass, the residential?

Bowser: Oh, you'd have to get the exact number. I can kind of probably–or leave a blank there. But just in talking, I would say between 200 and 300.

Simonds: That many?

Bowser: Yes.

Simonds: And those were the residential?

Bowser: Those were the residential.

Simonds: And how many of the agricultural type?

Bowser: Probably between forty and sixty.

Simonds: So the residential, although the tracts being significantly smaller–

Bowser: Some, they didn't even claim more than just enough to get their carport up and maybe a chicken coop back behind.

Simonds: But there were quite a few of them?

The Majority of the Residential Trespass Cases Were on the Colorado River Between Parker and

Head Gate Rock Dams–Primarily on the California Side of the River

Bowser: There were quite a few of them, primarily centered. . . Ninety percent of them were in that ten-mile strip or fourteen-mile strip from Parker Dam to Head Gate Rock Dam above Parker, Arizona, both on the Arizona and California side, primarily on the California side because the Arizona road didn't go in at an early date.

The Many Trespass Cases below Parker Dam Apparently Stemmed from a Need for Housing During Construction of the Dam

Simonds: Why do you think that area attracted so many?

Bowser: I have to go back to this construction engineer, "Oh, go find a house someplace. Don't bog me. I don't care where you live." And even to the extent that, "You know, other people are living down there in tents. We'll be nice to you. We're not going to say anything to you." I never participated in those discussions, and I never tried to learn what he did say, because it was immaterial. Those same people were not– I would assume there wasn't 1 percent of the people who ever worked on the dam were

there at the time of the vacation notices,[8] and it could be zero.

Simonds: It was something that grew out of the construction of the dam and the works on the river.

Bowser: Where were these people to live? It was, I wouldn't want to quite say a failure, but it certainly wasn't an employee/employer relationship that provided houses. It just said, "If you get here to the gate, you'll get in and you'll get a paycheck, and where you live is kind of up to you."

Simonds: They didn't construct camps or anything else? Like here in Hoover, there's–

Bowser: Yes, there were for some workers.

Simonds: There were?

Bowser: There were, is my understanding. And there certainly was at Davis, but we never had that. I don't know. You got beyond me. I do not know.

Simonds: You go around, and going back as far as I can recall to even the very early projects, Newlands

8. Notice to vacate a property.

Project or Truckee-Carson Project at the time, they built camps and small towns for the–

Bowser: There obviously *was* a camp at Parker, because when I got here there was a commissary there. I do not recall, but I can just barely visualize one-room, two-room houses below the dam on the California side, but they wouldn't probably take in the people that were [working] on the dam.

Simonds: It wasn't sufficient in size?

Bowser: I would think not.

Simonds: And so most of it was holdover from the construction period, then?

Bowser: Yeah. And they probably had all left by that time, so it was just the–

Simonds: It turned over, in some cases, two or three or four times.

Reclamation and Los Angeles's Department of Water and Power Participated in Construction of Parker Dam

Bowser: Probably so. And I don't even recall exactly. Now, the dam was–Reclamation played a part in–I'll look that up. Reclamation played a part

in the construction of Parker Dam, but we also had the city of Los Angeles's Department of Water and Power[9] that were the lead. But we were in on design and all of that, and what personnel we provided, I do not know.

Simonds: And all of these cases were eventually resolved? The people were removed from the lands?

Bowser: Yes.

Simonds: How many of them actually did you have to litigate?

Bowser: Not very many. Now, see, you had the Land Use Office now. I'd been relieved of my responsibility. I had other responsibilities. This was a staff of maybe three, four GS-equivalent 13s now, maybe a 14, and probably a 15 with Hollister, which would be Schedule C appointees. And then down from that, there was probably a staff of ten, fifteen people. So it was a big operation, and I do not recall that I ever knew how many were litigated. But this one case that Reclamation litigated, it virtually broke the back of the other folks.

9. Parker Dam was constructed by Reclamation with monies advanced by the Metropolitan Water District of Southern California, of which the City of Los Angeles is a member agency.

Simonds: Pretty much set the precedent, and there was no . . .

Bowser: Set the precedent. So the residential ones were no longer a major factor in the litigation.

Simonds: How was the removal handled? I mean, were the people given a certain amount of time to vacate the premises?

Bowser: Oh, yes. They leaned over backwards to them and, "Well, how about Christmas?"

"Oh, we were going anyway."

And then what was left, things have a habit of disappearing if they're not occupied, and I would assume then some crew went by and, "There's a pile of rubble. Let's load that on the truck," and it was loaded on the truck.

I would say that less than half of 1 percent had a foundation. They might have been placed on cinder block or stones or something like that.

Simonds: But it wasn't a case of the sheriff shows up at the door one morning and says, "You've got ten minutes to get off the land"?

Bowser: No. It never reached that point, to my knowledge.

Simonds: Maybe some individual cases were a little tougher.

Bowser: I imagine there were a few who were a little reluctant and were threatened. Or if you couldn't cajole them into going, maybe they said, "You've *got* to or we're going to have to . . ." I do not know. I didn't–well, I had no responsibility there. We cooperated very well with Mr. Romeo and Mr. Hollister, but I never was–I noticed I was never called in to assist, because there's nothing I could have done. And my advice, I didn't have any advice. I didn't know.

Simonds: Actually, I'm getting pressed for time at this point, unless there's anything that you'd like to add or anything that you can think of right now.

Bowser: No.

Simonds: This was very good.

Bowser: Did you get most of what you were seeking?

Simonds: I think so. Certainly, as I'm driving off to the airport, I will think of it. "Oh, why didn't I ask?"

Bowser: Now, where am I on the other? I have taken it with me to Alaska. I took it with me to Colorado, Nebraska, and Wyoming. I looked at it for a few pages. I'm up at page 42. I'll put this transcript with it, and I'll get there sooner or later.

Simonds: Okay, great. And I'll just ask you the standard question, do you have any objection to folks using the copies for–

Bowser: No, none whatsoever. Do whatever you want. I understand that if I don't want it to be used, it'll be discarded. The only thing I'm concerned about is, when I read it I say, "My God, nobody's going to read that windy rascal." It's not too coherent. It's not as smooth as it should be.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. OCTOBER 1, 1999.
END OF INTERVIEWS