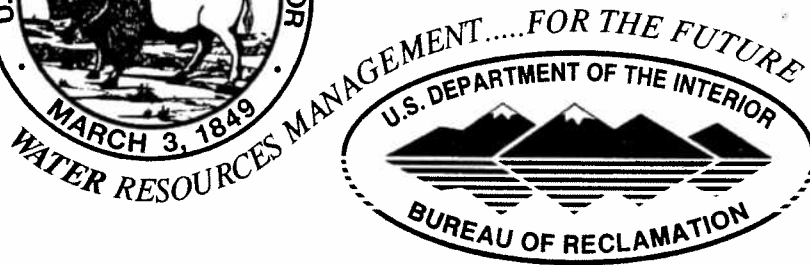


**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
NEIL W. PLATH**



**BUREAU OF RECLAMATION
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM**

**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
NEIL W. PLATH**



NEWLANDS PROJECT ORAL HISTORY PROJECT



August 25, 1994
Reno, Nevada



**STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH**



Interview Conducted by:
Donald B. Seney
Bureau of Reclamation



Oral History Program
Bureau of Reclamation

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OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF
NEIL W. PLATH

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Neil W. Plath
NEIL W. PLATH

INTERVIEWER: DR. DONALD B. SENEY

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INTRODUCTION

In 1988 Reclamation hired a historian to create a history program and work in the cultural resources management program of the agency. Though headquartered in Denver, the history program was developed as a bureau-wide program. Since 1994 the senior historian has been on the staff of the Commissioner, Bureau of Reclamation, in the Program Analysis Office in Denver.

Over the years, the history program has developed and enlarged, and 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); and making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation. It is also hoped that the oral history activity may result in at least one publication sometime after 2000.

Most of Reclamation's oral history interviews have focussed on current and former Reclamation employees. However, one part of the oral history program has been implementation of a research design to obtain an all-around look at one Reclamation Project - the Newlands Project. Focus on the Newlands Project, one of Reclamation's oldest projects, was suggested to the senior historian in consultations with Roger Patterson, the Regional Director in the Mid-Pacific Region, in which the Newlands Project is located. The Newlands Project was selected for several reasons: its relatively small size makes it manageable for this project; and the issues on the Project are complex and varied thereby providing a good mix of current issues faced by Reclamation in the arid West. It is part of a research design to develop a comprehensive look at the entire constellation of interests and participants affected by the Newlands Project in western Nevada.

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

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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW: NEIL W. PLATH

FAMILY AND EARLY LIFE

Seney: This is August 24, 1994, my name is Donald Seney, I'm with Neil W. Plath at his home in Reno, Nevada. Good afternoon, Mr. Plath.

Plath: Good afternoon.

Seney: Why don't you begin by telling me a little about your mother and father; where they came from. Were they native Nevadans?

Plath: My mother, I think, was born in California, probably up in Northern California, not far from here, like maybe a hundred miles from here. My father I know very little about, because there was a union there that resulted in me being born, and my mother's brothers were very upset about this situation, and I can only conjecture that they forced my mother and my father to divorce. So my birthright name is Kearns, K-E-A-R-N-S, instead of Plath. Subsequently, a few years later, my mother married a Harry Plath, who I think, came from Michigan, I'm not sure. That marriage resulted in two other births; my brother, and my sister. I can only say that my stepfather, if that was even where he is, was a very, very good father to me. This was preceding the days of the 30s of course.

Seney: What year were you born?

Plath: March 22, 1910, and my grandfather had built and given a cottage to my mother on what was then the home ranch. The Waltz [phonetic spelling] family were

always ranchers and dairymen, et cetera.

Seney: Waltz was your mother's family name?

Plath: Uh-huh, Waltz was my mother's family name, and my grandfather was a Civil War veteran, Third Michigan Cavalry, of which I have his Certificate of Discharge and all that.

Well anyway, I grew up in a urban area, not far from where I'm sitting.

Seney: Here in Reno?

Plath: Here in Reno, and it was a completely rural atmosphere and environment at that time. As I said, my uncles and my mother lived on a corner of the property, and my uncles had the dairy. Subsequently, they tried to get into the sheep business, which they really didn't have any business in, in my opinion, and they eventually went broke.

Seney: Why didn't you think they had any business in the sheep business?

Plath: The only people I think that do any good in the sheep business are the Basque people, and there's a lot of them around here and have done very well in the sheep business. But they made one basic mistake I think, that they went into the sheep business with black face [a breed of sheep] -- I'm not sure what that particular line of sheep is. Well anyway, the sheep that they ran were not adaptable, they were like an English meadow sheep instead of a sheep that would do well on this kind of an environment. They tried running them in the Sierra Mountains and various sections of it, and lost an awful lot of their sheep through -- this kind of a sheep

is not one to stay with one another and a lot of them wander away during the night or whatever, and the predators -- coyotes, mountain lions, and what have you -- took their toll. I can't give you any particulars -- I was a child when this was going on.

Seney: You've given me plenty of particulars. That's very interesting. I mean, they obviously chose the wrong breed of sheep, didn't they?

Plath: Well, whose to say that they really (chuckles) chose the wrong kind of sheep? I'm sure they didn't do it intentionally.

Seney: Well, you've given me lots of details. What are your boyhood memories of Reno?

Plath: Well, as I say, my mother was given this cottage on the corner of the home ranch which was just out here in the Truckee Meadows, and I can't remember anything very startling about my boyhood. It was a very close family. My uncles that were in the ranching business and all, were very close neighbors to me and so I was influenced a great deal by their proximity and their doings, so I don't know. My boyhood, I think, was different than today's boyhood days, because I was in a ranching environment, isolated from the town. I was three miles from my schools and I never became a Boy Scout, (laughs) I never participated in any way in those kind of youth activities. I just grew up. (laughter) That's right, in spite of everything.

EDUCATION

Seney: Do you remember much about your school? I mean was it the one-room school

house you went to out here on the edge of town?

Plath: No, no, my mother knew a schoolteacher of long standing, another farming type of family by the name of Fray. So Francis Fray [phonetic spelling] was the principal of the Southside School, so my mother insisted that I go to the Southside School although I was not in the district. (laughs). So, that caused me some problems, but nothing to remark about.

Seney: How would you get to school?

Plath: Walked most of the time -- a mile-and-a-half, maybe. As far as that's concerned, I walked three miles to the university.

Seney: To UNR? [University of Nevada, Reno]

Plath: Yeah.

Seney: When did you graduate from high school?

Plath: In 1928 or '29, I'm not really sure about that. In my senior year, I had an appendix problem, and it burst and I'm lucky to be here today because the modern medicines of today would have coped with it readily. But I was in the hospital a long time and had to have tubes in me, and one thing or another, so I missed my second half of my senior year in high school. Subsequently, I graduated, in fact, mid-term the following year. There wasn't anything remarkable about my high schooling I don't think. I think it was okay, I enjoyed it.

Seney: Anything stick out in your memory?

Plath: Oh, not particularly.

Seney: None of the teachers?

Plath: No, I wouldn't want to remark on anybody's names like that because I would say that essentially they all did me a favor by teaching me something or another.
(laughter)

Seney: Well, I didn't mean necessarily for you to criticize. Sometimes teachers have a positive effect and encourage, and I had that more in mind.

Plath: Well, I think that by and large, my teachers were effective in my life and were positive, and they did me well. I don't have any particular one of them that I remember that much. Anyway, I got through high school.

Seney: When did you start at UNR, right away?

GOING TO WORK FOR THE PACIFIC TELEPHONE AND TELEGRAPH COMPANY

Plath: No, I didn't think I needed any more schooling, so I decided to go to work and was successful in getting employment with the then Pacific Telephone and Telegraph Company who owned the Nevada Bell in those days, and I became an apprentice lineman -- outdoor work with that outfit -- and this was in the 1930 era when things were pretty bad and pretty tough monetarily for a lot of people.

Seney: You were awful lucky to get that job, weren't you?

Plath: Yes, I was lucky to get the job. And one of the things they taught me to do -- whether it was good or bad -- was to climb a pole. (laughter) I became a telephone lineman, and I can't give you good dates, but in 1930, I think, the American Telephone and Telegraph Company were in the process of building the

first transcontinental telephone line -- a lead sheath cable proposition -- which they shut down. I was working not directly for AT&T, but with what is now Nevada Bell, and I was in Battle Mountain, Nevada, when the crew I was on were all notified that with our next paycheck, we would be terminated. I don't remember whether they said why, but I think it was obvious why, because the whole the system was in bad shape you know, in the 1929 era. So, I came back to Reno and came home and started looking for another job.

Seney: Let me ask you, do you remember the newspaper stories, and I suppose it'd be on the radio too, about the Stock Market Crash in 1929?

WORKING FOR THE CROWN-ZELLERBACH PAPER COMPANY

Plath: I don't remember that. That was not of interest to me, because my folks were not investors, and I didn't know anything about that type of thing, so I don't have any recollection of what the press said about the Crash. All I knew was that there was one, and the Roosevelt era started about that time, so my mother was very influential in my life and wanted me to go on schooling. First job I got after the telephone job was with the Crown-Zellerbach Paper Company at a paper mill up the river here [a town] called Floriston. I took employment there in the shipping department handling, manually and physically, rolls of paper of all sorts of descriptions. That paper mill processed the wood from which paper is made into mainly fruit papers for the Sunkist label. They made Sunkist put labels of green paper for pears, and orange paper for oranges, et cetera.

Seney: The kind of paper fruit used to be wrapped in.

ATTENDING THE UNIVERSITY OF NEVADA AT RENO

Plath: That's right. [It] always came wrapped -- all came in a little flimsy paper wrapper. Well anyway, I worked there until sometime in 1930 and the paper mill was in the throes of being shut down and done away with, which subsequently happened. And the young fellow from Verdi that I kind of palled up with, up into the same kind of work I was doing, by the name of Leno DelGrande, we got to be good friends, and so he had a target of trying to go to school. He wanted to go to the university and he was working to get the money to do so. So we had a lot of conversations about school and one thing and another. When I left, the paper mill, I heard about a job down in Sacramento for the -- I may get these names wrong. Yeah, but I don't remember. I went to work for a can company, inspecting tin cans for acceptability for the products that were going to be put in them, and that type of thing. I didn't like the job. I wasn't making enough money to even hardly pay my sustenance, so I decided to give that up and I came back up here and went home. My mother said, "Well, why don't you go back to school?" And Leno was influencing me too. He wanted me to go to school too, so I decided to give college a try. And all the time, I virtually had to work in order to sustain myself, because my mother and stepfather were not well off at all, and two other children had come along in the meantime -- my sister and brother -- so I had to look out for myself. So I did that, and because I had learned to climb a

pole and work on wires and things, I'm not sure how I fell into this job, but anyway, I secured summer and part-time employment with a fellow by the name of McQuery, who was the supervisor for the old Postal Telegraph System here. The old Postal Telegraph System was long since gone out of existence. I worked summers with him, and time being available, why, he would have me available for weekends some of the time. I picked up money that way. I worked in a Chevron Standard Oil service station some of the time -- whatever. But anyway, I was always doing something to make a little money and going to school. At the University, I think the only reason I decided to take electrical engineering was because I'd had the exposure to the telephone work. And actually, I'd also had some exposure through the Sierra Pacific Power Company. I had been able to get part-time employment with them some days -- well, in fact, some quite a bit of time. That time, they were beginning to push the use of electricity, and I worked in that area where I went out and tried to tell customers that the more they used, the cheaper it would be, which is a fallacy in itself, but the theory behind that was the block rates. You started at "A" rate and if you used up to "X" kilowatt hours, you maybe got over into the next rate structure, and so forth down. So, I did a lot of work in that particular area when I was going to school. I took advanced ROTC [Reserve Officer Training Corps] at the University which was an infantry unit at that time. That paid a little bit of money, just enough to buy a uniform and boots, et cetera. (laughter) I also joined the Nevada National Guard, and I was

an enlisted person in the guard for most of those school years at the University and my ROTC. So when I graduated in 1936, I was a second lieutenant in the infantry -- that was the only branch that the University of Nevada had at that time. The National Guard unit that I belonged to was the 115th Engineers, and so I took courses that were offered by the military in engineering and subsequently, changed my officership from a Second Lieutenant in the infantry to a Second Lieutenant in engineering. The war clouds were on the horizon, and Virginia and I, my wife, got married in 1936. She was in college with me and we had been going together for quite a long time. Again, the job situation was always tough, hard to get work, and her mother, and a fellow by the name of Guy Johnson, started a bakery here in Reno called Johnson Dandy Bakery. They were sympathetic to me and Virginia, and also, they employed me. I drove a bakery truck at the time that I graduated from the University in 1936.

WORK AFTER GRADUATION FROM THE UNIVERSITY

I'm a little bit ahead of myself, but anyway. After I graduated, ultimately, in the spring of '35, I got a job in a mining company out in Mina, Nevada, and I went down there and took employment, and I worked for the greater part of the year for the Nevada-Massachusetts Mining Company. It was coming around spring again and

Seney: What kind of mining were they doing?

Plath: Tungsten. I think it's calcium tungstite was the product that they were mining.

This particular mine had been pretty well mined-out by English interests in World War I, an old mine. It had a lot of underground workings. The main adit into the hill was, I remember, something on the order of 2,100 feet, and the ore body was both above and below that level, so that some of the ore was stoked out above and brought down to holding areas, and was then shipped out by electric mule trains outside. They had a water system that was interesting, which I took care of. That was the first time I ever got mixed up with water. The Feldt people, before I had taken employment, had built a dam on a series of springs on a mountain across the valley and built a four-inch or maybe six-inch lock joint pipe pipeline down across the valley, up into the range of mountains in which the mine was, and they built three lift stations. The gravity water from the mine to the first station poured into a redwood tank, and then in turn, the water was taken from that tank and the electric pump operated raised to the next level, and then to the next level, and then to the mill. So one of my primary duties was to -- because when I was working, they were only operating the pumps during daylight hours. Part of that was because of wintertime and they didn't want to freeze up. So, I tended those pumps and I worked in the mine doing survey. I had qualified myself for civil engineering surveying and I could do that so I would keep the vats and the underground workings up wherever the tunnel or another scoped out or whatever [was], I would record that as we went along. So I got a lot of experience of an engineering nature that way.

Seney: Sounds like an interesting job. Was it?

Plath: Yes, it was, it kept you busy. Reflectively, I really loved the job, I liked it, it was challenging. A good job.

GETTING MARRIED AND GOING TO WORK FOR SIERRA PACIFIC POWER

Seney: Were you married at this time?

Plath: No. My wife and me, we wanted to get married, and during that year of '35, after I graduated in May, up to about February or so of '36, we decided we wanted to get married.

END OF SIDE 1.

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2

Seney: We were talking about getting married.

Plath: So Glen Amateur who is the superintendent of this particular mining operation, Nevada-Massachusetts, I talked to him about him providing me quarters at the mine for a wife, and he said no, that that was not possible with this mining operation, it was marginal at best, I guess. So, I said, "Well, I'm going to leave you and going to go get married and get another job though." He pled with me not to go, and I bought my tickets on the Greyhound Bus and he even hauled me down to the bus station and talked to me all the way down, trying to keep me on. (laughter) So I came into Reno and Virginia and I set a date, we were going to get married, which we did. I reapplied to the power company for employment and it was spring of the year, February, and they had vacation spots to be filled during

the year, so they hired me more or less on a temporary basis. I worked for them in many, many capacities. During that year, I operated all of the power plants on the Truckee River on a vacation basis -- there would only be two weeks at each station, I had that kind of exposure. When that ended, why, they kept me on and put me on a construction gang which consisted mostly of setting transformers and regulators and brick-a-brack like that, and I was looking for a better job because the pay was fifty cents an hour. So I got back to Mike McQuery, the fellow at the Post Telegraph, and he told me that there was a job opening in Northern California. If I wanted to apply for it, he would recommend me. So I made an application for this job at the Postal Telegraph and got it. I was offered the job. So I let my foreman know, who I was working under at the power company and he, I guess, got in touch with, or called the general superintendent, a fellow by the name of Fletcher, Charlie Fletcher, told him that I was going to quit, so this Charlie Fletcher came down and talked to me. He said, "What do you want to do this for, young man?" I said, "Well, hell, it's more money than you're paying me." (laughter) So, Virginia wanted me to take this job because it was up in Northern California, and her mother and her family had come from this general region up in Siskiyou County. So Charlie Fletcher says, "I don't think that Postal Telegraph Company is a very good bet for you to get into." He was a businessman and he knew what was going on so I didn't know that the Postal Telegraph was about to be washed out, which it ultimately was. So he talked to

me, he said, "Why don't you decide to stay around? We can keep you busy."

Seney: Did he offer you a little more money?

Plath: I can't remember about the money. But anyway, I came home and told Virginia that I thought I'd stay here, and she was upset with me because she wanted to go up to her home stomping ground. So anyway, I stayed here, went to work for the power company and [with] my ability to climb poles, I was always a physically able and active guy, so they put me in one of their line construction gangs and got me back in the hooks, so I was climbing poles again. Well, I can't give you good numbers on time, but subsequently while I was in that job, the company at that time had what they called two servicemen who served the ordinary routine daily service jobs of setting meters for new customers, and change-outs for people changing out whatever, and running light services from a transformer to the houses and that sort of thing. Well, anyway, these two servicemen were involved in an outage one night when something, I'm not sure what, even today, happened -- but anyway, one of the mainline feeds to the Sparks sub-station was in trouble, and these two servicemen were called out on the job -- which was normal. In investigating the outage and what the trouble was, one of them -- [I'll] never know why -- insensibly stuck a screwdriver in a 23 kv spoil switch. He thought the trouble was in the switch, and he also thought that it was dead, but it was a mix-up between, whether it was line ten or eleven, in effect. Well anyway, this spoil switch exploded and the oil and everything else, and both of these guys were

burned badly. So, like that, the power company the next morning didn't have any servicemen. So another lineman in the line crew that I was on, and myself were tagged and we were the new servicemen.

Seney: And that was a good job?

Plath: Well, it was a better job. I was probably making, six, seven, or eight dollars a day, I don't know.

Seney: And even though you were a college graduate with an engineering degree, this was all they had for you at the time?

Plath: That's right. You were lucky to have a job period. (laughs)

Seney: That's right.

THE START OF WORLD WAR II AND MILITARY SERVICE

Plath: Well, John Zaborra [phonetic spelling] and I took on the service job, and I worked with the company that way, and let's see, this would be, timeframe wise, coming up on Pearl Harbor. That was December of '41, and I had been told by the National Guard, which I still belonged to as a Second Lieutenant, that I didn't think I wanted to stay in and was given the opportunity to resign my commission since I was below the grade of Captain. If I had been a Captain, I probably wouldn't have been able to get out. So I got out of the Army in October of 1940, and December 7, '41, we were in the soup again, there was a war. So, Uncle Sam had his finger on me and I got greetings and all that sort of jazz, and I was back in the Army.

Seney: Did you go back in as a Second Lieutenant?

Plath: No. I went back in as a First Lieutenant. I don't know how that promotion came. I think I made First Lieutenant while I was still in the National Guard, so I shipped out of here and went to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, which was, at that time, an engineering station that was mainly for blacks. The segregation of Negroes and whites was still in force at that time. So I spent a few months at Fort Leonard Wood and then I was tagged to be a new officer for a new unit. The Army created an engineering unit called the 376th Engineer Battalion Separate, and that word "Separate" on the end of it meant something in the way of black segregation whether you know it or not.

Seney: I didn't know, so would you say "separate" behind it, and that would mean a segregated unit -- a black unit. So you were a white officer in a black unit.

Plath: Yeah. Well, I subsequently made Captain and then our target to be shipped overseas was to be in the spring of '42 and they then sent me up to Fort Leonard Wood to our Field Officers School, which I completed, and then I went back to Louisiana and we got our orders that we shipped out.

Seney: Were you made a Major by then (Plath: No, no.) by going to Field Officers School?

Plath: I was still Captain, and I was a Captain a long time.

Seney: Let me ask you, what was it like to be a white officer in a black unit?

Plath: Very satisfactory. Actually, the policy of the Army was do as best they could in

respect to getting recruits that, hopefully had at least some education. A lot of them had not had a high school education. But, on the other hand, they weren't completely misfits either. I don't deem it an injustice that I was put in a black outfit. By the time we were fully manned in 1943, we had about twelve hundred enlisted personnel, nineteen black officers, and twelve white officers, of which I was one.

Seney: And the NCOs [noncommissioned officers] would have been black?

Plath: All the NCOs, yeah. The whole structure was black with the exception of those few officers. There was a dental officer and a doctor who were not line officers or anything, so there was only about ten or eleven of us that ran the outfit. And time went on and we got orders to be shipped out, and we went to some place in Massachusetts, where we were staged and outfitted and made ready for overseas. And this was, as I say, in the spring of '43, so the African Campaign was still going on in pretty good fashion. We were shipped to Mers-el-Kebir in North Africa which is near [Oran]. Well, the name has escaped me, but anyway, in the course of getting over there, our TE [technical equipment?], our equipment, was sunk by a German submarine, so we ended up in North Africa without any of our table of organization equipment, which in an engineer outfit, is a hell of a lot of nuts and bolts! (laughter) So we were stymied there and held Oran is the name of the town I was trying to think of. We were just outside of Oran, and we were kept there for a period of time until they could ship new organizational

equipment to us, which they finally did, and then we went up, part of the outfit went over land, part went by water. I took command of the outfit, to transship them up to Algiers, and we rode a little British ship that had been in the ferry service between France and England; it was called the *Princess Beatrix*. We got up to Algiers and then our TE equipment had caught up with us and had enough trucks to haul the guys and most of our equipment also. By that time, the Germans had been run out of Bizerte. So, we ended up in Bizerte just a week or so after the Germans had evacuated. And a great part of the city was mined, and that's one of the jobs that your engineers do is de-mine, or that's one of the things they're trained for. So, we did an awful lot of de-mining in the city of Bizerte. The Germans, of course, had done a good job of destroying anything that was useful. They dumped the gantry cranes off into the harbor. (laughter) Well, this is war! But I never saw a house, and the city of Bizerte is not a very big town, but I never saw a building in that town that didn't have shell hole in it. It was the most torn-up place that you can imagine. But anyway, we bivouacked up on the hills just outside the port area, and we were used for stevedoring, road maintenance; the only thing the engineer outfit does, which is a lot of things. We were under air attack there constantly at night, generally. We had seven or eight Purple Hearts in the outfit, probably our own AA [anti-aircraft] fell back on them. (laughter) It doesn't make any difference how you get hurt. So we were there for quite a long time, and in order to restore the place to some kind of semblance and

normal, why, they were able to rehabilitate a power plant or two. And one of the jobs, I remember, is I ran a three-phase, about 30 kv underwater cable across the bay at Bizerte to the other side so they could get power over to where they wanted it. Our outfit did a lot of things like that. Stevedoring again, we unloaded so God damn many ships that I can't remember. The only thing good about that was I'd get acquainted with the ship's crew and captain and get myself invited to a good meal, (laughter) get off K-rations. But anyway, I was in North Africa I think a total of thirteen months, and the war was moving slowly but surely, and finally, the Sicilian invasion was consummated, followed by the invasion of Italy, and our outfit was shoved into the Naples area on D+7 [seven days after D day]. The Italian invasion in the boot outside of Salerno which was a fairly long fight, our forces got Italy almost overnight. That was closed down real fast. So we arrived next door to Naples in . . . I can't remember. We were housed in a steel mill facility that the Italians had once owned and run. We housed our unit in that and roofed a lot of buildings in which the tiles had been blown off by bombs, and then we went back to making gravel. We had Barber-Green equipment: crushers and all that goes into crushing rock and making road metal. And the route from Naples to Rome, which was the old Roman Appian Way, as soon as we started running our thirty-ton tanks up and down that, why, that road became something other than a road. (laughter) So those were the main things we did there, was make road metal. However, we did have one company that was doing

rehabilitation of sanitary facilities; the sewer system in Naples and stuff like that.

Seneby: When you say road metal, you mean gravel, aggregate to put on the roads?

Plath: Aggregate, yes. That's what we always called it, "road metal." So, anyway, I spent that time, and finally, when we broke through Monte Cassino and the invasion of France came about, why, they loaded us up again and we went to Italy. Both times that we were in the Mediterranean, we were transported together with our equipment because we had power shovels, rock crushers, you name it. A whole lot of heavy equipment, you know. So, we rode the LSTs along with our equipment, and from Italy, we went into San Tropez in Southern France. And from Southern France, we moved by various stages to Marseilles, or near Marseilles, and we had our outfit bivouacked at a little town in Southern France called Marian [phonetic spelling], and there's an inland sea there that's titled/called, Etang de Bare [phonetic spelling], and the French, before the war, had a big dirigible airport there, so we also occupied that, and there again, the Germans had mined everything so we had an awful lot of de-mining to do, which is a miserable god damn job. The only place that we really had any casualties, we had one truckload of men that got blown up by a load of German mines that had been taken up, and I'll never know what the hell set that off, but anyway, that happened. Luckily, I wasn't around.

Then I spent the rest of the war in Southern France and I was then detached from the Negro troops that I had. I was Major by that time and I ran the Delta

Base Engineering Depot. The war wasn't over in the Pacific yet, so we undertook to create and waterproof for ocean shipping, all kinds of equipment to be transhipped to the Japanese theater, and then eventually, that was terminated, that was the end of that. But I couldn't get out of the Army because I had that kind of a job, running that damned depot. So I was kept in Italy until, I guess it was October of '46. I got home here in November of '46. Isn't that enough?

GOING BACK TO WORK FOR THE POWER COMPANY AFTER THE WAR

Seney: That's enough about the war, now do you go back to work for the power company at this point?

Plath: Yes. I was offered a couple other jobs but the power company offered me the equivalent pay and I knew the game there, so I went back to work for them.

Seney: At what point do you get involved in the water side of Sierra Pacific's responsibilities?

Plath: Well, pretty early on. The superintendent, the operations man, was F.G. Barnett. When I came back to work for them, why, they created a new title that they never had had before of Superintendent of Construction, and I became that.

Seney: Was this kind of in recognition of the fact that you were a Major in the Army.

Plath: I don't know. Of course they had no choice, they had to take me back if I wanted a job, under the law. But, as I say, I felt more comfortable in taking that kind of a job than maybe launching out on something else. So I guess you could say that that was my first taste of the Water Department. The water supply basically then

was the Hunter Creek Reservoir, which was fed from what water came down from Hunter Creek, together with some water that was carried by the Steamboat Ditch, and brought down into Hunter Creek Reservoir. The flumes on the water system on the Highland Ditch at that time were in hellishly bad shape because they had not been able to get materials and supplies and even manpower, I guess, during the war to do a good job maintaining. So my boss recommended, together with management, I guess, that we change out the old wood flumes and replace them with metal, steel lanin flumes. So I built the first lanin flumes on the river. Let's see, how many did we build? I guess they replaced them all with the big long flume that runs around the Old Silver Ranch by Verdi. And, being Superintendent of Construction, I did -- you name it -- anything and everything that was thrown at me.

Seney: Was this Superintendent of Construction on the water side, or for the whole company?

Plath: No, it was for the whole company.

Seney: So you did electric lines?

Plath: Well, to a limited degree. It was really more water and gas. During that time, they had a gas system in town here that was oil gas. They cracked heavy oil and was it low Btu [British thermal unit], 940 Btu, gas created from cracking oil, and they decided that they would supplant that with propane air. So during the years that I was working in this capacity, why, we changed from the old oil gas system

to the propane air. I was superintending the installation of the, eventually four, 30,000-gallon high pressure containers for the propane air. One of the funny things that happened during that installation was that we hired local plumbers and fitters to do that and they were supposed to be able to read a blueprint and know what they were doing I suppose, and we had a man that they brought in from Kansas City who was knowledgeable in this area.

END OF SIDE 2.

BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2

Seney: This is August 24, 1994, my name is Donald Seney, I'm with Mr. Neil Plath at his home in Reno, Nevada. Go ahead, Mr. Plath.

Plath: So anyway, got up to D-Day and we were going to convert, and prior to the conversion, why, we had a substantial number of men that were going around and drilling out the orifices of all the gas stoves, water heaters, and everything like that, because propane air is a heavier gas than the old oil gas was. So we had to change everything. And it all comes up to D day and got the shipment of propane in the tanks and all loaded, and ready to start up, when they valved open to make propane air gas. Shortly after they started making it, why, they ran out of propane air gas because the excess flow check valves on the tanks were put in backwards.

Seney: So that just let it all out in other words?

Plath: No, that's a safety feature that the gas couldn't get out of the tank, we couldn't get it out, we couldn't make gas.

Seney: Oh no!

Plath: We had a hell of a time.

Seney: How long did it take you to figure out what was wrong?

Plath: A matter of an hour or so, I think -- I don't know.

Seney: How long did it take you to fix it?

Plath: Oh, two or three weeks I guess. Well, we didn't really fix it immediately. There's other ways to skin a dog, you know.

Seney: Were people in Reno here waiting for their gas and it didn't come?

Plath: No, we never lost the system. We had enough of the oil gas in the holder together that we'd not done away with the old gas system -- it would still work. So we were able to survive and keep the system active. But it took quite a long time, because in order to turn this valve around, you had to evacuate 30,000 gallons of propane first. And there's no place to put 30,000 gallons of propane.

Seney: What'd you do with it?

Plath: Well, what we did was -- this was in the early spring when it was still cold -- we could get some gas out of the tank through several bypass arrangements and so it was decided we'd limp along, if you will, on this bypass arrangement until we could empty that tank. As soon as we got that tank empty and turned that valve around and then refilled again, we'd get back in business. So that took, as I say, two or three weeks. Also had another mishap then where the compressors were pressurizing the holders for the gas. [We] had to have the inlet and exhaust valves interchanged, because, again, this heavier-than-air feature of the propane air. So

(chuckles) the guy that had always started up the compressor was instructed very thoroughly and effectively, we thought, that whenever you was going to start the compressor, that he first of all opened the inlet valves to the compressor and started the compressor up in a neutral position so it was not compressing. But he had always opened the valve when the start-up of a compressor that was used to be on the inlet side, but now was on the outlet side. So when he reversed the valves, he blew the head on the compressor. And we were in the soup again for serving the place. Boy, this was an experience I'll never forget!

Seney: I'm sure. Let me jump ahead a little bit. At what point do you begin to work pretty much exclusively in water? At what point do you begin to deal with Truckee River Water pretty much exclusively?

WORKING FOR STONE AND WEBSTER CONSULTING

Plath: Not until I guess until I came back from New York.

Seney: You went to New York for a while? What did you do back there?

Plath: I worked for Stone and Webster in a consulting ethic for companies like Sierra Pacific Power Company.

Seney: You left Sierra Pacific Power and went to work for Stone and Webster?

Plath: Yeah, in 1945.

Seney: And then at what point did you come back to Sierra Power, what year was that?

Plath: In '58.

Seney: At that point, that's when you get into the water side of things. (Plath: Uh-huh.)

What was your first position when you came back in '58? Did you come back as President of Westpac?

Plath: No, I came back as Vice-president of Operations, total operations of the company. Within two or three years, why, Mr. [First name?] Gracey had reached retirement age and they were replacing him, and they replaced him with a man by the name of Fred Fletcher who had been working for Central Illinois Electric and Gas. And at that time, the Stone and Webster input on the company was very heavy -- they did an awful lot of services. Sierra is a small company, they couldn't afford high-priced tax people or in some cases, engineering and various things like that, so they would hire those services from Stone and Webster Service Corporation, for which I had been working. And that's the kind of work that I did. I worked on maybe fifteen or twenty utilities, both in the United States and foreign. I did several overseas stints, the Island of Jamaica, Haiti (chuckles), Canada. I've been shipped around liberally. (Laughter)

RETURNING TO SIERRA PACIFIC POWER AS VICE PRESIDENT FOR OPERATIONS

Seney: When you come back in 1958 as Director of Operations, when is it that you begin to come in contact with the Newlands Project and the Truckee-Carson Irrigation District?

Plath: Well, it was always on the front burner one way or another. I would say exactly that it was animosity, but in short water years, why, the TCID [Truckee-Carson Irrigation District] always felt that we were taking all the water, and shortchanging

them, which I don't think it ever has done -- certainly not deliberately. So I was well-acquainted with it. I had read the Orr Ditch Decree case and at that time one of the engineering people of the company, George DeVore [phonetic spelling], was still advising Frank Tracy and Fred Fletcher about it. He'd always been the head water man of the company. Have you ever heard that name before?

Seney: I have heard that name, yeah.

THE FEDERAL GOVERNMENT AND THE TRUCKEE RIVER

Plath: So there was always something going on between allocations and water and so forth. One of the smartest things that Mr. Tracy ever did was buy the Independence Lake. I think he bought that in 1930 -- that could be incorrect, I can't remember. But that was the first storage lake that Sierra had any part of, and then subsequently they got into a storage compact with the TCID and the Donner Lake owners, and we were able to store some water in Donner Lake, and that water, I forget what the ratio was between the TCID and us, but we would use that water. I can't give you the dates, but they changed the character of Independence Lake by digging in outlets and building a controlling structure at the outlet so that they could control the flow out. And they also built a small berm at the lower end of the lake. It was restricted by the Forest Service because the Forest Service owned the land at the upper end of the lake, and they objected to us raising the level and making any storage in the lake. That's a bad thing. That should be still done, I think, because I think there's room for more.

Seney: More storage in Independence?

Plath: In that lake. But the world being the way it is, Reclamation's part of it, and the Forest Service, et al. You don't play games with those people.

Seney: You had problems with the Bureau of Reclamation, you mean?

Plath: Not directly. I think the Bureau of Reclamation, U.S. Army Engineers, they always have been sticking their nose in the Truckee River. At one time, the U.S. Army Engineers proposed to build a dam at Verdi. Have you heard of that? (Seney: Yes I have.) Which I think was the most stupid proposal that ever could be made.

Seney: Why did they not build it? What happened to it?

Plath: I think M-O-N-E-Y. It would have taken I don't know how much money to relocate the Southern Pacific Railroad tracks, it would have inundated a portion of the town of Verdi, and I never got deeply into it. I don't think the water available that could be stored by that would have had a meaningful part in the overall picture, because it was not a very big storage project, as I remember. And we in the company, we were always against it.

BECOMING PRESIDENT OF SIERRA PACIFIC POWER

Seney: When did you become President of Westpac?

Plath: I never did become the President of Westpac, per se. I became President of the Sierra Pacific Power Company.

Seney: Okay, I'm sorry, I misunderstood. You were President of the whole company.

(Plath: That's right.) Forgive me, Mr. Plath, I thought your part was Westpac.

Plath: No, no.

Seney: I wrote the wrong thing down, okay. Let me ask you, when did you become President of Sierra Pacific?

Plath: (long pause, followed by chuckle) Oh, let's see

Seney: When did you retire, what year?

Plath: Well, my retirement date is '75, and I was President eleven years.

Seney: So '64 you became President.

Plath: In '64, '65.

Seney: Somewhere in there, yeah. When you became President of Sierra Pacific Power, this is when the whole sort of situation for the Newlands Project begins to change, doesn't it? By '67 the Endangered Species Act is coming into the fore. Do you recall all that?

THE BUILDING OF THE WASHOE PROJECT

Plath: Well, to some degree, but not really intimately.

Seney: I mean more from your position as President of Sierra Pacific Power, (Plath: Oh, absolutely.) how it seemed to you from your vantage point as President of Sierra Pacific Power.

Plath: I thought it was absolutely crazy! The company had been working with and for, in order to get Stampede built, and it was our understanding all the time I was President, that that particular project was a three-part project: that it was flood

control, recreation, and water supply. It had absolutely nothing to do with a God damned fish -- pardon my expression.

Seney: That's alright.

Plath: And I've always said that the day's going to come here in this valley when they're going to have to make up their mind whether they're going to have more people or fish -- and I feel that way about it. This *cui-ui* sucker thing is the most ridiculous thing in my mind, that ever came down the pike.

Seney: When Stampede was built, when you listed it as recreation, flood control, and M&I [municipal and industrial] water, did you mean to put it in that order, or did you think of it as M&I water first, flood control second, and maybe recreation third?

Plath: I think we thought of it as M&I water.

Seney: And these other two, flood control and recreation were incidental.

Plath: They were incidental. Well, not exactly. I think M&I water and flood control were both probably equal.

Seney: Did you play a part in your position at Sierra Pacific Power in pushing for the construction of the Washoe Project, specifically the Stampede Reservoir?

Plath: Oh, absolutely! Our attorneys, Harold Chamber and Dick Campbell [phonetic spellings] at that time, they drew up the agreements as we understood they were going to be finalized, and I signed numerous papers related to this whole situation, and it was late along, after the Project was being built, when we found out that

they were going to use a material amount of the water out of Stampede for fish. And I still feel very strongly that that is a bad decision. This fish is a nothing fish, really, in my estimation -- "endangered" is (laughs) Don't get me started on this!

Seney: No, no, part of what we want to get in these interviews is how strongly people feel about these matters, so don't apologize for expressing your feelings in a strong fashion.

Plath: I've really felt strongly about the Stampede Project -- still do! Of course I admire the company's forthrightness in trying to work out a plan in which they get some water out of the Stampede, which, as you can see, is definitely needed. Look at our status right now, we're in a hell of a drought year, and yet at the beginning of this year, how many thousand acre-feet did we pour into Pyramid for the fish? I've forgotten what the number was, but 150,000 or 75,000 acre-feet of water, that as far as I'm concerned, they just wasted it.

Seney: Let me go back to the authorization of the Washoe Project and the beginning of the Stampede Reservoir. As President of Sierra Pacific Power, did you get ahold of the senators? And there would have been one congressman.

Plath: Oh, absolutely.

Seney: Tell me a little bit about the kind of maybe, for want of a better word, the sort of political activity that you might have undertaken on behalf of the Project.

Plath: Oh, I don't know that I want to try to rehearse some of that.

Seney: No, I don't mean to get into all the details, but just tell me, what does a President of Sierra Pacific Power do when there's a big Project like this coming up that the company is obviously interested in, and is counting on some benefits from. I know you don't just sit back and wait for things to happen -- am I right?

Plath: That's right.

Seney: Well, without breaching any confidences, if you could just kind of in general tell me how it was you saw your responsibilities and what you did to live up to those responsibilities.

Plath: Well, we pushed with every ounce of effort that we could to control the ultimate outcome of Stampede, which we still, and everyone in the power company yet feels, that we were really glibbed down when they decided to change the rules midstream from what it was originally supposed to be, what we understood it was supposed to be.

Seney: You felt you had an understanding (Plath: That's right.) with the members of Congress and the Department of Interior maybe?

Plath: And this thing about controlling the Stampede thing for fish, early on, was never heard of, never mentioned. It just was the outfall of all this conservation bullshit that has come along, in my estimation, since. Just like the snail darter fish in Tennessee: For Christ's sake, what the hell is wrong with people?! Isn't this world made for us to use?

Seney: Well, the Endangered Species Act was a big change in the rules, wasn't it, by

which the game was played.

Plath: It sure was. Well, I can only say that it was very hurtful to this company and to this environment. Ultimately, we haven't seen the end of this, really.

Seney: I don't want to get too far ahead of your own responsibilities, because I want to talk about the time when you were President, and what you did as President. The company currently has, do you think, done a fairly good job in terms of guaranteeing water, even keeping in mind the *cui-ui* in Pyramid Lake?

Plath: Well, he has no alternative.

Seney: It's political reality, I suppose.

Plath: That's right, political reality.

ACTIVITIES AS PRESIDENT OF SIERRA PACIFIC POWER

Seney: Let me go back. I want to try in a whole bunch of ways to get you to talk about this. As President of Sierra Pacific Power you see the Washoe Project, and particularly Stampede Reservoir, I guess it would come to my mind that there would be a number of things that you would want to do. One I suppose, is to make sure that there's newspaper support in the local area for it. (Plath: Right.) You must have known the editor and publisher of the Reno Gazette well.

Plath: Yes and no. During my presidency, why, there was another syndrome going on in the utility business -- it always has been, because it's a regulated business. So there's always the political implication of regulation. The Public Service Commission is appointed by the Governor of the state. And the political party in

power, of course, is given the choice jobs at the given time, et cetera. The utility business is not free enterprise (chuckles) in my estimation. So everything you do in the utility business is always scrutinized, second-guessed and opposed, almost, for what you do. The Public Service Commission always would infer that they could do it better, or that we made a mistake or something like that.

Seney: Did you feel like you had a kind of adversarial relationship with the Public Service Commission?

Plath: Oh, we always have.

Seney: And where did the *Reno Gazette* stand here? Did they tend to put you guys' feet to the fire, did you feel?

Plath: I'd say by and large the *Reno Evening Gazette* -- actually preceding the *Gazette* there was a morning paper called the *Journal*, and I think we had a better relationship at that time with the *Journal* than we did with the *Reno Evening Gazette*, but they never really "chose up sides," if you will, between us and the Public Service Commission, or made a big deal out of it. There wasn't that kind of animosity. I never had that kind of trouble. Once in a while I had trouble with the public newspapers sticking their nose into things, which I didn't think they had any right to stick their nose in. And I had a policy at that time that no employee, whatever his status, would converse or give any information to the newspapers, without it passing over my desk, because I learned early-on that I'd get myself in trouble unknowingly by somebody else.

Seney: Yeah, there'd be trouble if you didn't do that.

Plath: That's right. So I don't know what current management out there does about this, but at least I shut off a hell of a lot of bullshit. (Seney chuckles)

Seney: Who were the United States Senators when you were President?

Plath: Howard Cannon and Paul Laxalt, Allen Bible before him.

Seney: Mr. Laxalt succeeded Mr. Bible, didn't he? (Plath: Right.) What was your relationship with Senator Cannon, who was a very influential senator, was he not?

Plath: Not in my estimation. I thought he was a jerk.

Seney: (laughs) I guess I'm thinking more of in the Senate. Was he influential in the Senate, do you think?

Plath: No, I don't think he was ever influential (Seney: You certainly have a better idea of that than I would.) in a meaningful way for the citizens of Nevada. Do you know what Howard Cannon was for? Howard Cannon. You know what all people that get into senator for? For themselves.

Seney: You couldn't depend on him.

Plath: We never had much dealings with him. You see, he came from the south, he didn't understand the northern part of the state that well. I always felt I couldn't trust him, because he would pull the rug out from under you.

Seney: What about Senator Bible?

Plath: Well, Allen [phonetic spelling] was a senator, in respect to my presidency, a short time, really. Allen and I were really great friends, I got along fine with Allen

Bible. I always felt that Allen was kind of a wishy-washy guy and that he played to the crowd -- well, all politicians do this sort of thing anyway.

Seney: Was he helpful to you in, say, any of the Stampede business, or Senator Cannon?

Plath: Neither one of them. They just laid back and let the powers that be, whoever they were in the Bureau of Reclamation [do what they want]. They didn't even give us a chance to argue about, or question the decision making this water available to fish. That kind of a decision was just written-into the public record, it becomes law.

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2.

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2.

Seney: My understanding of the decision to allocate water in Stampede to the *cui-ui* recovery was that that was a decision made by the Secretary of the Interior, under a court decision. He said, "Well, you can do it if you want," and he went ahead and did it. I'm trying to think of the year, and maybe you can remember better than I can what year that was. Was that 1973 that happened?

Plath: It was about then. You know, that's one thing about me, I can't remember detail-wise, the dates anymore. Dates kind of get away from me.

Seney: Well, I can't either, and I've got less excuse than you do, Mr. Plath, I'm not nearly as old. Let me ask you, who was the one member of the House of Representatives during this period when you were President? because there was only one congressman from Nevada before 1980 -- I think I'm right about that. My question is, [was that person] helpful? If you can't remember them, they

probably weren't very helpful to you.

Plath: No, the House people were never very helpful to us, I don't think. I would say that our current House Member, Barbara Vucanovich, she's always been on the power company's side, I think. She's been helpful where she could, but she's a voice in the wilderness in comparison to the overall story.

Seney: What kind of dealings did you have with the Bureau of Reclamation itself?

Plath: Directly, myself, not much. Generally my attorneys were on the front line with respect to this. We were led right up to the end, thinking that Stampede was going to be the kind of project that it was intended to be, and I still think that was the case. It came as a real surprise to us. We had submitted proposed contracts, which I signed -- I've got papers in Washington someplace, I guess in the Archives (laughter) -- that set forth what we thought would be an equal "allocation," if you will, of the water, and number one was M&I water, as far as we were concerned, because that was our number one interest.

Seney: And the contracts called for you all to get some of the water, I take it, to pay for that water, obviously.

Plath: We were going to pay for the water.

Seney: Were you going to pay for just the operating and maintenance on the dam, or were you also going to pay for some of the construction costs, do you remember whether that was part of it?

Plath: I don't remember that we were going to pay any construction costs. I think the

pay thing was the payment for the water itself.

Seney: The storage and the operating and maintenance on the [dam] as part of that probably.

Plath: There was talk -- and ultimately it came to pass, I guess -- they put a small generating station on the outlet of the thing, which of course doesn't pay for itself, because the water only runs out of the reservoir part of the time. The waste that has gone by in my lifetime!

Seney: Let me ask, if you didn't yourself deal directly much with the Bureau of Reclamation, what was your general view that you acquired as President of Sierra Pacific Power toward the Bureau of Reclamation?

Plath: Well, I don't think that we ever arrived at, never felt any animosity here towards the Bureau. I understood what it is and what it's for. It wasn't until this fish thing jumped up on the horizon that I really got negative about the Bureau, which I still am.

Seney: Was it your feeling that Bureau of Reclamation supported the Endangered Species Act, or were they -- I don't know if this is the right way to put it -- or were they victims of it too, like you felt you were?

Plath: I think it was partly both, a sign of the times, the way it's gone.

Seney: Let me ask you this: As President of Sierra Pacific Power, what percentage of your time do you suppose you spent on these water questions, as President of the whole company?

Plath: Oh, that's awful hard to say. We would have staff meetings once a week and they would generally run from ten o'clock in the morning through the lunch hour. Each department had its input/output they wanted to address, and this water question was, I might say I guess, front burner all the time, to some degree. It was always there. As I say, it really came as a surprise when they decided that they were going to control Stampede more for fish than what they were for [its intended purpose] as we understood. And you know I think we even brought suit against the government to try to get this turned around. It was like fighting a bag of air, though.

Seney: Obviously it wasn't successful.

Plath: No.

Seney: Let me try to put the question this way: In terms of the headaches and troubles you faced as President -- although I'm sure you enjoyed the job -- but in terms of the headaches and the troubles you would face as President, how would these water questions stack up against "Oh, no, not water again!" Or was it not so bad? Or how would you describe it, do you think?

Plath: Of course I'm an electrical man, and that's my strongest suit, and I guess I'd say my best interest in the business, and that's where the money is. We never could make any money out of the water business. The electric business always subsidized it. This goes back to the Public Service Commission's playing politics with the money, you see.

Seney: With the rates you could set?

Plath: That's right. You get the most opposition from the public -- noise -- from rates that you raise in respect to the water. And it's still alive today. Yesterday's paper, I think, had another blurb in it about people being antagonistic about [water] meters in this town. I personally always wanted meters. There was one time, when at a staff meeting of the power company, and my chief engineer opposed me. I suggested we sell the damned water company to the City and let them have the problems. And I still think that's where it ought to be.

Seney: I was going to ask you about that. Did you really feel -- or were you just jabbing your chief engineer? Did you really feel like you wanted to get rid of the water company?

Plath: I felt like we ought to get rid of it, I really did.

Seney: Why didn't you do that?

Plath: Well, I guess I wasn't strong enough.

Seney: Let me suggest something to you and get you to comment on it: If I were in charge of the power company in a place like this where water is short, I think I'd want to control the water too, because the availability of water would be key to my power business, which I'm really most interested in. And so if I go out and fight and make sure I've got enough water, that means there's going to be residential construction and commercial construction and I'm going to be able to sell those new people more power, and the water too. Was that ever the way you might

think about it?

Plath: Well, yes and no. (chuckles)

Seney: (chuckles) What are you chuckling about when I say that? I thought that was a pretty good question!

Plath: Yeah. (pause) I've kind of always had it in my mind and my philosophy of the business that the water business and the sanitation sewer business should be together, and to be managed by one entity, and ideally, if you could have a nonpolitical board of trustees or whatever, that would manage the water and sewer business for the best of the good of the people, that's my idea of what an ideal way would be to do it.

Seney: Do you really think it's possible to have a nonpolitical board manage a function like that?

Plath: Well, I think there comes times, the world doesn't stand still. Sometimes there's factors arise and one thing and another. At one time there was some feeling about the company getting rid of the water business and the cities running it. But every time you get into this kind of a thing you've got three entities -- you've got the County and the cities -- and Sparks and Reno are always knocking heads with the County, so you're just rolling uphill whenever you try to put anything together.

Seney: And you appreciated that, right? I mean, that this was the reality of the situation.

Plath: Sure, the reality of the situation. It's just as true today as it's ever been. (coughs)
I'm running out of mouth here.

Seney: Well, we'll just go on for a couple more minutes if you don't mind, and then I'll be finished, because there was a couple of other things that I wanted to ask you about. Now I've lost my train of thought -- I've run out of brain! (laughter)

Plath: I don't blame you!

GROWTH IN THE RENO-SPARKS AREA

Seney: Well, I talked to Miss Oldham this morning too. (brief break)

When you were President, what was your view of the growth of the Reno-Sparks area? Did you see it being as populous as it is today? (Plath: Oh, sure.)
No surprise here?

Plath: No surprise. I'm a realistic person in respect to that sort of thing. The population of the world is growing outlandishly, I think. There's a lot of problems that are down the road on account of population. And this is a nice place to live, it's a good environment, has good weather by and large, and it attracts people. And the whole state is one of the fastest-growing states in the nation. I've never been against growth -- I think it's a realistic thing, because people have to have jobs and construction generates jobs. People feed off from each other. So I think it's fine and dandy, where we're going. I'm not sure that they are really telling the truth that they've got enough water to expand as far as they think they do -- Mother Nature may call a halt to that.

Seney: Are you still paying attention to these matters?

Plath: Sure.

THE FUTURE OF THE NEWLANDS PROJECT

Seney: Let me ask you this as a final question, unless after you answer this you want to add something else that I haven't thought to ask. What do you think the future of the Newlands Project is, given the population growth in the area?

Plath: (chuckles) I don't know whether I want to be quoted on this. Number one, I think the original Newlands Project was a mistake, but coming into being at that time of the world, and for the reasons that it did, the people that did it didn't do it dishonestly, they did it for a reason. And they had no foresight of what the effect would be, that the Pyramid Lake Indians, and the effect on the lake and the fish and all that would come about. So the clock's going to turn around, in my estimation. Eventually, somebody -- the power company or whoever is running the water business -- is going to buy the water that is available in whatever amounts it is, to the Newlands Project. And that water will be devoted to the very thing that's happening here, the growth syndrome, because you can't keep adding people and having houses here in this valley without something having to give. So one of the logical places, in my estimation, is to shut the damned TCID thing down and devote the water where it ought to be. You know the Newlands Project has never paid out. The generation of wealth, in my estimation, has been negligible, because as the breadbasket of this country is in the agricultural area in the big way in the Midwest and the West -- not in spot places like small acreage in the Newlands Project. So this water that they now think they're entitled to will

probably have to be bought from them, one way or another. And our government has always got enough money to buy most anything -- if they haven't at the time, they just print it. (chuckle) You know that you're living on printed money?

Seney: Yes, I know that. As long as somebody else will still accept it, I guess, it's sort of okay.

Is there anything else you want to add, any other comments?

Plath: No, I don't think so.. I guess you don't want any more of my life history.
(laughs)

Seney: Well, it's an interesting one.

WORKING FOR STONE AND WEBSTER

Plath: Outside of where I left off in the gas business. Then I spent ten years, almost eleven, with Stone and Webster.

Seney: Did you like that? Was that good?

Plath: I found it a very interesting, challenging, educational thing for me.

Seney: It must have been great preparation for becoming President of Sierra Pacific Power, I would think.

Plath: I would never have made President if I hadn't had that exposure -- no way. And I became acquainted with a lot of other people's problems.

Seney: You know, as someone who gets as high as you do in a big company like Sierra Pacific Power, as President of a company as big as that, it seems to me not only do you have to know how to manage the company itself -- that's a big part of your

responsibility, although you've got subordinates who'll see to that -- it seems to me the biggest part of your responsibility is kind of a general political responsibility to look out for the welfare of the company.

Plath: That's true, sure.

Seney: Would you agree with that?

Plath: Sure, yeah. Looking back, I have no regrets of my history of the company. I think I did a reasonably good job and I didn't live quite long enough to get paid well! (laughter)

Seney: You mean, you missed the big salaries. (Plath: That's right.) You retired too early. Like the ball players, I guess, from yesteryear. Well, aren't there other compensations, though, to a job like yours? I mean, the money would be nice, but you didn't aspire to the job simply for the money, did you? Didn't you enjoy the authority and the ability to make decisions?

Plath: I think my basic likes was that I like engineering and the electric business and I learned a lot of tricks and new ways of doing things with Stone and Webster. As you say, I could never have made President if I hadn't had that New York exposure, I don't think.

Seney: But didn't that pay well? I would think working for a company like that, the pay would be pretty good back in New York.

Plath: You know, the pay scales have changed so dramatically in the last fifteen, twenty years. When I went to New York, I thought I was getting a big salary. I went to

work for them for \$12,000 a year.

Seney: In 1945?

Plath: Yeah. You know, I can show you a payroll sheet in here that I got a raise from \$4.50 a day to \$5.00 a day when I worked for the mine. (laughter)

Seney: And that must have seemed like a lot of money too, huh?

Plath: Well

Seney: Not that much?

Plath: Not that much.

Seney: Well, listen, I really appreciate, on behalf of the Bureau, your willingness to tell us these things and give us your perspective. All of these pieces of the jigsaw puzzle fit together and help us understand the whole area.

Plath: Yeah, the water business has certainly been something. I didn't have any part of it intimately about it, but I know that the ditch tender, a good many outlets off the Highland Ditch were agricultural -- in fact, the Highland Ditch originally was built for irrigation purposes, and it ran all the way out into Spanish Valley. So in the 30s when we had the other drought -- I don't know whether it was more severe, or as severe as now -- but anyway, the ditch tender used to carry a shotgun, because the water users, the agricultural pursuits, they'd break the gates, or shoot the padlocks off the gate and take water more than they were used to, and there were pretty strenuous feelings about such, you know. This fellow that hired me to the power company the first instance, Charlie Fletcher, he came in for a lot of

static with the water.

Seney: Emotions run high over water.

Plath: Oh boy, do they! And they still do. And I've got a lot of friends in Fallon -- in fact two or three years ago I had an uncle that lived down there, and he kind of thought I was a bad guy! (laughs)

Seney: Is this the Frey family?

Plath: No, I don't know if you'd know the name. Maybe I'd better not mention it. If that's on the tape, let it go.

Seney: (laughs) Okay. Well, I'm sure they wouldn't take it personally.

Well, thank you again, Mr. Plath, we really appreciate your time.

Plath: Well, okay.

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2.

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM GUIDELINES: BUREAU OF RECLAMATION

Effective Date: October 13, 1994

COOPERATIVE PROGRAM WITH THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION (NARA)

The Bureau of Reclamation conducts its oral history program cooperatively with NARA because Reclamation wishes to permanently protect the data obtained through implementation of its oral history program, facilitate research in Reclamation's history, and assure permanent access of Reclamation and researchers to the data resulting from implementation of its oral history program. This cooperative program permits Reclamation to: use and distribute unrestricted oral history materials; use and distribute restricted oral history materials after the restrictions end; and, close interviews to public access and researcher access through restrictions contained in a donor's deed of gift accepted by the Archivist of the United States. The program is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding between the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Archives and Records Administration. These Oral History Program Guidelines of the Bureau of Reclamation fulfill one condition of that agreement and are required to be followed.

OBJECTIVES OF THE ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The ideal sought in Bureau of Reclamation oral history transcripts is to retain information understood today which may not be clearly understood, or will be lost entirely, in the future; yet, still retain facts and opinions, speech patterns, inflections, characteristics, and flavor of speech. This shall be done through preservation of oral history interviews: on cassette tapes and in printed transcriptions.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEWS DONE OUTSIDE THE DENVER OFFICE

Oral history interviews done outside the Denver Office should conform to the guidance in this document to assure that the resulting tapes and transcripts will be accepted by the National Archives and Records Administration for permanent storage and retention. Even if that is not done, copies of tapes and transcripts should be provided to the Oral History program in the Denver Office.

CONDUCT OF INTERVIEWS

Preparation for Interviews

Effective interviews are dependent upon proper preparation in advance. A brief telephone conversation with the prospective interviewee should provide basic background about where the interviewee worked at Reclamation and types of responsibility. Using that information, basic research into the offices involved and relevant projects may be conducted.

It is always a good idea to have a list of questions ready in advance of the interview. These should contain both general and specific questions about Reclamation and the interviewee's special areas of expertise and responsibility.

Obtaining Deed of Gift

Signature of the interviewee on the approved deed of gift should be obtained before the interview--with the understanding that clauses limiting access to all or part of the interview may be added after the interview if the interviewee deems it necessary.

The interviewer will also sign the deed of gift as a simple acknowledgement of conduct of the interview.

Objective of the Interview

ALWAYS REMEMBER THAT, WHILE WE ALSO WANT GENERAL BACKGROUND ABOUT THE PERSON BEING INTERVIEWED, THE OBJECTIVE(S) OF THE INTERVIEW IS:

TO PRESERVE INFORMATION ABOUT THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION, ITS PROJECTS, THE COMMUNITIES ON ITS PROJECTS, AND PERCEPTIONS OF BOTH INSIDERS AND OUTSIDERS ABOUT THE BUREAU OF RECLAMATION.

Conduct of the Interview (Including Opening and Closing Statements on Tape)

Introducing the Interview Before Taping Begins

Before beginning the interview discuss:

the general nature of what is going to happen,

the deed of gift and request signature of it,

point out that the interviewee may at any time state that they don't wish to discuss the topic proposed,

state that in addition to information strictly about the Bureau of Reclamation you want general family, education, biographical outline and other information about the interviewee,

Explain that the interview will be transcribed and then transmitted to the interviewee for review for accuracy and correct spellings. The interviewee will then be asked to initial each page of the interview.

Beginning the Interview on Tape

Open the interview with a statement which includes the following information:

Names of interviewer and interviewee.

Any pertinent information such as: farmer on _____ Project, or, electrician at Hoover Dam, or, operator at Minidoka Dam, or, watermaster of the Northern Colorado Water Conservancy District, etc..

Location

Date

Time

Point out to the interviewee that the conversation is being recorded and ask permission to record the conversation.

Conduct of the Interview on Tape

Try to avoid questions which can be answered with yes and no. Instead ask for descriptions, explanations of events or working conditions or relationships with the community, etc.

Responses that include hand motions need supplemental work by the interviewer. When a person says "Oh, it was about this high" [and holds a hand about 2½ feet above the floor] -- we have no record of the meaning of what was said. The interviewer must integrate words into the tape to provide the necessary meaning, e.g., "Oh, about 2½ feet high, then?"

Just Before Ending the Interview

Before closing an interview, ask the interviewee whether (s)he wishes to add anything, recount an interesting story, or express any perspectives on Reclamation that were not already covered.

Ending the Interview

In spite of the signed deed of gift, each interview should end with a question such as this:

May we quote from and otherwise use the information in this interview for purposes of research and quotation? And may we also provide it to researchers interested in Reclamation and its history for purposes of research and quotation?

The end of the interview should be a brief restatement, ON TAPE, as to the identity of interviewer and interviewee, time, date, and location.

PREPARATION OF TRANSCRIPTS¹

Use of Computers

For editorial and other reasons it is necessary to use an IBM compatible computer using WordPerfect 5.1 or a later version for transcription of Bureau of Reclamation oral history interviews.

Objectives

Transcription and editing of oral history interviews by the Bureau of Reclamation shall be carried out in accordance with this guidance.

Transcription shall be done only with very limited editing. The basic objective is a verbatim transcript of the interview.

The Parts of the Final Transcript

The following will normally be the outline of a completed transcript, and when

1. Much of this material is developed from Shirley E. Stephenson, *Editing and Indexing: Guidelines for Oral History* (Fullerton: California State University, 1978 (Second Printing with revisions - 1983).

transmitted to the interviewee for review the transcript will be as nearly complete as possible:

- ◆ Title Page with suggested bibliographic citation form on the back of the page near the bottom. The title page should include the information and be laid out as shown in Appendix 1.
- ◆ Table of Contents -- use the table of contents function of WordPerfect to do this.
- ◆ An "Introduction" to the transcript with background material on the interviewee and interview, and including:
 - Discussion of the time, location, date, and circumstances of the interview.
 - Listing of each Bureau of Reclamation employee or contractor involved in the interviewing, transcribing, editing, and indexing of the interview.
- ◆ Copy of the signed and dated "Statement of Donation" for the interview.
- ◆ The transcript of the interview.
- ◆ Appendices, including:
 - A copy of the Bureau of Reclamation's "oral history program guidelines".
 - A list of donated photographs (including copies made at Reclamation expense which were only loaned) and/or documents -- if any provided by the interviewee/donor.
 - Copies of any photographs and/or documents.
- ◆ Index to the transcript -- use the indexing function of WordPerfect to do this.

Page Layout of Transcripts

Begin the first page of the transcript with the heading "Oral History Interview of _____."

Single space the heading on the first page. Double space the transcript itself.

Insert a centered footer which will include the page number to begin after the first page of the transcript in this format (8 pt. Times Roman font):

Name of Interviewee

The transcript, if it falls naturally into distinct segments may have headings for each segment inserted in the transcript.

To indicate the speaker use the last name of the person followed by a colon on the left margin of the page, e.g.:

Wilson:

Would you tell me about your educational experience?

Smythesville:

I was educated, first, at a one- room school house in Wittsendburg, . . .

After the name of the speaker indent as needed to line up the left edge of the text for all speakers. For instance do not do the following:

Babb:

Would you tell me about your educational experience?

Smythesville:

I was educated, first, at a one- room school house in Wittsendburg, . . .

Instead, indent twice after Babb and once after Smythesville for this effect:

Babb:

Would you tell me about your educational experience?

Smythesville:

I was educated, first, at a one- room school house in Wittsendburg, . . .

Indicating paragraphs in transcripts should follow the following rules:

Immediately after the name of the speaker do not tab at the beginning of the paragraph. For all subsequent paragraphs tab the beginning of the paragraph and do not insert extra spaces. For instance:

Watson:

Would you tell me about your education?

Witt:

Well, I went to grade school at South Wittburg, junior high school at West Wittburg, and High School at South Inglewood.

On the other hand, my older sister went to grade school at South Wittburg, and then attended West Wittburg Junior High School before going off to finishing school in Basel, Switzerland.

Then I went to college at . . .

Indicating the Beginning and end of Tapes

Indicate the beginning and end of each side of tapes in the transcript. Place this notation on the left margin lined up with names. Do not indicate the beginning of the first tape -- simply begin the transcript. For instance (note single spacing):

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1.

Smith:

There was no indication that we . . .

If interviews/sessions on more than one date occurred then use the following format:

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 2. SEPTEMBER 15, 1993.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1. OCTOBER 22, 1993.

Smith:

There was no indication that we . . .

In such cases, place that date at the end of all indications of tape changes in order to help quickly orient readers/researchers:

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1. SEPTEMBER 15, 1993.
BEGINNING OF SIDE 1, TAPE 2. SEPTEMBER 15, 1993.

Smith:

There was no indication that we . . .

Editorial Conventions

Transcription shall be done only with very limited editing -- punctuation designed to clarify meaning must be provided; only false starts and redundant oral sounds shall be edited out of the transcript with no indication they have been removed; interruptions to the interview or situations when the conversation wanders from the topic may be indicated in brackets and not included; to the extent possible full identification of individuals and geographic place names shall be provided.

Punctuation Conventions

Punctuation is the best tool for the transcriber and editor to provide clarity, understandability, and readability. Do not rearrange sentences or words to do this. Punctuation must simply reflect the original meaning and the original arrangement of thoughts.

Quotation marks.

Do not use quotes around the words of the interviewee as spoken to the interviewer. Use quotes around words which are presented by the interviewee as quotes of another person, e.g., -- then he said to me "Well, if you want it that way you can go ahead and do it."

Place commas and periods inside quotation marks -- regardless of whether the punctuation belongs to the quotation or the sentence as a whole.

Place colons and semicolons outside quotation marks.

Question marks and exclamation marks are placed inside or outside the quotation marks dependent upon whether or not they belong to the quotation or to the sentence as a whole.

PARENTHESES ARE USED TO INDICATE THINGS WHICH ARE ON THE TAPE.

When laughter or other expressive sounds occur indicate them in parentheses =(). Indicate only what is on the tape with parentheses =().

ALSO USE PARENTHESES to include brief interjections in a discussion. For instance:

Smith:

At that time we were assigned to special duty as concrete inspectors for the construction of the dam. We found that the quantity of ice mixed with

the concrete was insufficient to reduce the temperature properly, (Jones: Yes.) and we had to work that issue out with the contractor. That only took a day, but it was rather tense because the contractor had to shut down the [concrete] batch plant while we worked it out. (Jones: Um-hmm.). The contractor was particularly concerned that she wouldn't fall behind schedule, and . . .

BRACKETS ARE USED TO INDICATE SUPPLEMENTAL EDITORIAL INFORMATION SUCH AS INTERPOLATIONS, EXPLANATIONS, AND CORRECTIONS PROVIDED BY THE EDITOR WHICH WAS NOT ON THE ORIGINAL TAPE -- place it in brackets =[]

FOOTNOTES:

May be used to provide supplemental editorial information. This would generally be done for researched information added to clarify and supplement the interview while brackets would provide brief information intended to clarify what was said.

Footnotes must be attributed to indicate who added the material. If the editor made the addition, the footnote should be followed by: (Ed.) If the addition was made by the interviewee, the footnote should be followed by the initials of the interviewee in parentheses.

Footnotes should be printed at the bottom of the page on which they appear in the final transcript rather than at the end of the entire transcript or of a section of it. The following conventions should be used (using WordPerfect set these conventions in the options to footnotes at the beginning of the transcript):

The footnote number in the text shall be superscript.

The footnote(s) shall be separated from the text on the page with a line from margin to margin of the page.

The footnote number in the footnote shall be on the left margin with the beginning of text one tab in from the note.

The footnote number in the note shall be full-size and shall sit on the same line as the text, i.e., it will not be superscript.

Ellipses are used to indicate pauses in the conversation.

For pauses in the middle of sentences always type them as three dots separated by spaces from one another and the preceding word -- thus . . .

For pauses which become the end of sentences or even incomplete thoughts, always type them as four dots separated by spaces from one another and the preceding word -- thus

Use of dashes.

Double dashes (--)² are used to show an abrupt change of thought in a sentence. For purposes of Reclamation's transcripts each double dash will be preceded and followed by a space. For example:

Our house at the dam had a living room, dining room, kitchen, and three bedrooms -- now it's been moved over on "N" Street here in town.

Single dashes (-) are used in inclusive or continuing series of numbers or dates (e.g., 23-26 or 1945-1948; to indicate words spelled out by the interviewee (e.g., L-A-N-I-D-O); for compound words (e.g., twenty-one).

Use of italics:

Use the italics font on the computer to indicate italics.³

Italics are used:

For titles: books, plays, newspapers⁴, periodicals, journals, long poems, musical productions, paintings, films; the names of ships, trains, and aircraft.

For foreign words not yet anglicized.⁵

Abbreviations:

Under normal circumstances abbreviations should not be used since one does not

2. Technically double dashes (--) are known as "em" dashes and single dashes (-) are known as "en" dashes.

3. If a typewriter is being used for some reason, a single underline of the word indicates it is italicized.

4. The official title of the newspaper that appears on the masthead is what should be italicized. Consult *Ayer's Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* for the official title.

5. Dictionaries are useful here. A useful reference is Marjorie E. Skillin, Robert M. Gay, et. al., *Words Into Type* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1974).

speaking in abbreviations and the objective is a verbatim transcript. The following abbreviations are generally acceptable: Mr., Messrs., Mrs., Ms., Dr., Jr., Sr., Ph.D., M.A., B.C., A.D., a.m., and p.m..

Do not use U. S. Postal Service abbreviations for names of states. Spell them out.

Acronyms:

Acronyms are capitalized without periods inserted after each letter, e.g., BR, NASA, NPS.

Normally the first use of an acronym should be followed by the words for which that acronym stands in brackets, e.g., BR [Bureau of Reclamation]; SOP [standard operating procedure].

If an interviewee uses the acronym B-O-R for Reclamation, type it BoR [BOR is the acronym for the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation, a now defunct Federal agency].

Hyphens:

Do not use hyphens except in compound words. Turn the hyphenation default in the computer program off.

Margins:

Set the margins in the computer at one inch -- top, bottom, and sides.

Justification:

Set the justification at left justify only. Do not use the "full" justification setting.

Grammatical Conventions

Use contractions in the transcript when they appear on the tape, e.g., they's, it's, etc..

Do not correct the interviewee's grammar.

For consistent colloquial pronunciations of words use the proper spelling instead of a phonetic spelling, e.g., them and not "em." But, equally, do not change the words, e.g., "yeah" is a word and should not be changed to "yes."

Numbers:

Generally exact numbers of two or fewer digits should be spelled out and numbers with more than two digits should be expressed in numerals.

Dates and parts of a book are expressed in numerals.

Do abbreviate dates when the century was not included in the taped discussion (e.g., '41 and not 1941)

When referring to dates you may use numerals and an "s" -- type 1940s instead of Nineteen Forties, or type '40s for the term forties. Do not use an apostrophe unless the term is possessive [as in -- The 50's autos often had huge tail fins]..

Spelling Conventions

Use the first (preferred) spelling in a standard dictionary when transcribing. American English conventions are preferred over British English conventions in most instances (e.g, interviewing a Briton might result in use of British English spellings).

Table of Contents

Interviews on different dates and major sections of the manuscript shall be marked with the table of contents function of the WordPerfect 5.1 program. Interviews of different dates shall be labelled at Level 1. Major sections within each interview shall be labelled at Level 2.

Indexing

All proper names, project names, feature names, locations, and major topics of discussion shall be indexed using the WordPerfect 5.1 indexing function. Items in the text will be cross-indexed as necessary to assure ease of finding them.

Review of Transcript by Interviewee

After transcription and initial editing, the transcript will be forwarded to the interviewee for review, comment if necessary, correction of names and place names, etc. The interviewee will be asked to initial each page of the interview if it is acceptable as is.

If the interviewee requests changes, additions, or deletions to the transcript, each request will be considered on its merits. The transcript will then be corrected as necessary and returned for final review and initialing by the interviewee.

Changes to Transcripts at the Request of Interviewees

Additions to transcripts requested by interviewees will be made in footnotes at the appropriate location in the text with the initials of the interviewee in parentheses at the end of the addition.

Deletions to transcripts at the request of interviewees should be made with care and only after consultation with and approval by the Senior Historian of the Bureau of Reclamation.

Editorial changes to transcripts for the purposes of making the text more formal and grammatical, e.g., more like a formal written style rather than spoken style, shall be discussed with and approved by the Senior Historian of the Bureau of Reclamation. It is the policy of Reclamation, where possible and appropriate, to retain the flavor and style of the spoken interview.

Preparation of Record Copy of Transcript and Other Materials for Transmittal to NARA

The record copy of the transcript prepared for transmittal to the National Archives and Records Administration will be on quality, non-acid paper with a high cotton content, preferably 100 percent cotton. The record copy will be unbound, but Reclamation's copies will generally be bound in a standardized hard cover format.

Transcripts of 100 pages, or fewer, will be printed on one side of the paper. Transcripts of more than 100 pages will be printed on both sides of the paper.

The record copy of the transcript and other copies shall normally be printed in Times Roman font at the 12 point size.

SUGGESTED INTERVIEW CITATION FORM FOR RESEARCHERS

A suggested bibliographic citation should be placed near the bottom of the page on the back of the title page of each oral history interview. The following is the format

and punctuation for the citation:

Suggested Bibliographic Citation:

Last name, First and middle name or initial (of interviewee). ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW. Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interview conducted by ___(name of interviewer)___, ___(relationship of interviewer to Reclamation)___, ___(date of interview - be precise)___, at ___(location of interview)__. Transcription by ___(name of transcriber or transcription service)___ . Edited by ___(name of editor[s])___ . Repository for the record copy of the interview transcript is the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland.

THIS SET OF GUIDELINES SHALL BE PLACED AT THE END OR BEGINNING OF EACH INTERVIEW TO PROVIDE INFORMATION ON THE PRINCIPLES USED IN DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRANSCRIPT.

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
Name of Interviewee
Name of Reclamation Project
(if limited to only one - otherwise blank)

Date of Interview
Location of Interview

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

Interview Conducted by:
Name
Title
Organizational Unit

◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆ ◆

Oral History Program
Bureau of Reclamation