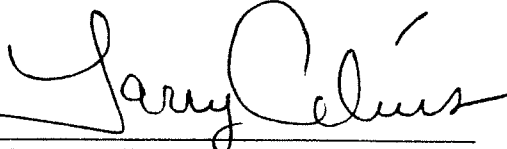


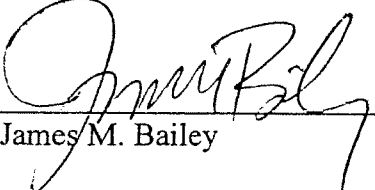
**STATEMENT OF DONATION
OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF
Larry Celius**

1. In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth in this instrument, I, Larry Celius, referred to as "the Donor"), of Yakima WA, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the Bureau of Reclamation and the National Archives and Records Administration (hereinafter referred to as "the National Archives"), acting for and on behalf of the United States of America, all of my rights and title to, and interest in the information and responses (hereinafter referred to as "the Donated Materials") provided during the interview conducted on 8/28/03, at Yakima, WA, and prepared for deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration in the following format: cassette tapes and transcripts. This donation includes, but is not limited to, all copyright interests I now possess in the Donated Materials.
2.
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Date: August 28, 2003

Signed: 
Larry Celius

INTERVIEWER:


James M. Bailey

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Archivist of the United States

Oral History Interview of
Larry Celius

Bailey: This is an oral interview on August 28, 2003 with, is it Larry Celius?

Celius: That's correct.

Bailey: Of Yakima, Washington. Larry, thanks for being here. Could you tell me about where you were born, and raised, and educated?

Celius: Okay. I was born in Seattle. I spent a couple of years there, and then we moved to Outlook, Washington, near Sunnyside. And, after my father tried farming for a year or so he got a job at the Yakima Carnation plant, or the Sunnyside Carnation plant and we moved to Sunnyside, and that's where I grew up.

Bailey: Okay.

Celius: Oh, and my educational background? I've got a high school diploma from Berkeley Adult High School, Berkeley, California. Originally I didn't finish high school in Sunnyside. I did that ten years later. I've got a couple years of college courses, but no more certificated programs. Done a year and a half of graphic arts training at Columbia Basin College in Tri-Cities, Washington. That would be Pasco, Washington. And, I'm a reader. So I read generally, so I've read a lot of things just from gardening to politics.

Bailey: Approximately when did you move out to Sunnyside? How long ago was that trip? Forties, fifties, or . . . ?

Celius: From Outlook?

Bailey: Yeah.

Celius: I'm going to say it was late '40s.

Bailey: Late '40s? So, it was after World War II?

Celius: Yeah. I'm a pre-baby boomer.

Bailey: How did you get on with the Sunnyside Irrigation District?

Celius: I was a ditchrider. Official title was Ditch Patrolman. There's not a lot of employment opportunities, to this day, in the lower valley. Most of it's agriculturally oriented. In the Sunnyside area, to make a living wage, it was limited. And, I liked working outdoors. And, I really don't recall where I heard about it, but the Sunnyside Valley Irrigation District is completely a part of the Lower Valley, and it's just always considered a source of employment for people who wanted to stay there. So, when I found out I went down to the offices in Sunnyside and I asked about -- I wasn't, I don't think I was really looking for employment but I was thinking of it as an option, so I asked about the job and it sort of appealed to me. Well, the outside part appealed to me, and being on my own appealed to me, because at that time they were pretty much, pretty much on your own once you, once you became acquainted with the ditch, and the farmers, and the various water allotments, and how things worked. So, and it looked like a challenge, because I'm not much of a people person. And I thought, I thought that this would be a good way for me to learn how to deal with people. So . . .

Bailey: Do you remember when you started on doing the ditchrider work?

Celius: Well, the photographs that I have, which are very limited, are dated '74. So, I'm guessing that I started in '72.

Bailey: I can just put early '71.

Celius: Yeah. '72, '73, or '74.

Bailey: And, this was back when they were still using -- I've been learning a lot about open and pressurized systems, as far as water delivery goes. So, this was back when they still had the open systems going?

Celius: My water came from a siphon on the north side of the Yakima River, and it delivered to a pond, a large pond, on the north side of the river and up on the side of a hillside, right behind the ditchrider house. So, that was pressurized, in a way. I mean, you know, from the siphon effect, but that may not be what you're talking about. All the rest of the ditch was open. It was all open. We had problems with evaporation when the temperature went up high and the air dried out. (Bailey: Right.) I mean that actually took away from our water allotment.

Bailey: And what exactly were your duties there when you did your ditch riding? I noticed in some of my interviews, some had little bit different duties than others, and I'm just curious, what exactly did you do when you got up every morning and went to work? Can you describe that for me?

Celius: Uhm-hmm. The first thing I did before breakfast was -- Did I call the watermaster first? Okay. I got my, I took my farmer calls. And, I think it was 7 a.m. and everybody who wanted a water change that day called on the company-furnished telephone. So, once I got my orders -- and they were supposed to limit their calling to, it must have been an hour or so. So once I knew how much water I needed, I called the watermaster and I would tell him whether I wanted a cut or whether I wanted an increase. Oh, and before that, before I took the farmer calls, I went up and read the ditch to see how

much I had in fact. Okay. So, I've called the watermaster and I 've got my -- I don't remember the paperwork part of it, but I'm sure I had my changes written down, because there was usually too much to keep in my head, unless it was a middle of the summer. In the middle of the summer there's very few changes, and sometimes -- in fact, that was one of the reasons why I took the job was because you were rewarded for your, for how well you did the job by -- see, in the springtime, in the springtime it was very, very tough, and very hectic, and very stressful because everybody wanted their water immediately, and there's no way to do that with the way, with their water delivery. So, the springtime, the first, when water first came on it was a different sort of life because it was just pretty much dawn-to-dusk work. Because I was always out there, and sometimes I would even go out -- and then in the springtime we had our windstorms, and I could wake up in the middle of the night and hear the wind blowing, and know if I had to get up or not. Nobody, after the first couple of times, nobody had to call me and tell me that the ditch was plugged up because I knew it was going to be plugged up, from tumbleweed. The ditch was, this particular ditch was right on the edge of the open range land. Sagebrush, rattlesnakes, coyotes.

Bailey: I've been down there. Yeah.

Celius: And, so when the wind blew the ditch was going to be plugged up. And so I just get up, and no matter what time it was, and get in the truck, and grab my reed hook, and go out. And sometimes I was gone for four hours, until it stopped blowing.

Bailey: Oh. Okay.

Celius: But the typical day, after the water was sort of evened out and everybody had their service started, I just rode the ditch, from beginning to end, delivering, making the changes, opening gates, shutting gates. And sometimes farmers would meet me out on the -- there were. I had farmers who were uncomfortable talking on the phone. And, after I figured out that that was their problem, I would look for them. And, after I learned the job I was able to anticipate who, and who would be calling or, you know, who would need water, and who would be wanting to get rid of it. So, some of them would actually meet me at their property line and give me their changes. It kind of irritated me to begin with because I didn't know if I'd have enough water for them. But later on I was able to intuitively know, which was one of the neat things about the, like I mentioned before, you were rewarded by how well you did the, how well you did the job, by less work later on, and also the farmers were more satisfied with you. The ditch rider is always where the rubber meets the road. The ditch rider is the guy who got yelled at. The watermaster very seldom ever heard what was going on in the ditch, unless the ditch rider was totally out of line.

Bailey: Then it gets back from the farmer back to the watermaster, then, right?

Celius: They'd rather deal with the ditch rider than the watermaster, because the watermaster always had his ... organization to fall back on, you know. And, they covered for the ditch riders to a degree, to a degree. Sort of, you know, stuck up for them, because they knew -- most of the watermasters at that time had ridden ditch before, so they knew what the job was and they knew that nobody was perfect, and they knew that you

screwed up, and they knew the farmers screwed up all the time. Either, you know, -- because farmers in the early '70s were much less professional than they are today. Much less. They wasted water. They lost control of their water.

Bailey: How were your relationships with the farmers, generally speaking?

Celius: Well, I only did it for two years, because they drove me nuts. But, that's my personality. I wasn't really suited for that, although, although I, I did a great job. I mean, the only reason I know that is because the farmers said, "Why are you leaving?" I mean, you know, to, they just didn't understand why I was leaving, because I was doing the job so well. They didn't want me to leave. The watermaster, on the other hand, I think he was kind of relieved because I was just about as individualistic as the farmers were. And farmers are some of the, or were, some of the most individual people I've ever met in my life. I mean, you had, you had to develop a personal relationship with every one of them. And, I think I had -- and this is something I don't really recall, but I think I had almost 200 people that I dealt with throughout the year, farmers. And, I think there was almost 2000 acres too. Or maybe I got it -- it's like I never really -- that always kind of scared me, you know, how much acreage I was responsible for. Because it really frightened me, you know, how much water there was, and how much damage it could do. The ditches were dirt, mostly dirt berms, and there were lots of gophers, and burrowing animals. And, it broke almost every year and it always did, always did big-time damage. It always took somebody's, you know, a piece of somebody's crop out and ruined it, or, depending on the time of year. And, it

was always a very big thing to go out and shut the water off, to get it, to dump it. We had a valve in the bottom of the siphon, right over the river, about a couple miles away, and it took, it took the watermaster's authorization to dump the water, and we'd, in an emergency, we dumped it in the river. We had this huge valve that we took, I think it took two people to manually open that valve in sort of a donkey-ring-around thing. We'd go around in circles and dump the water. So, how I got along with the farmers? The way I saw it, and the way they saw it, evidentially, was once a little different. But, really, they, to this day I don't like answering the phone, and I don't like talking on the phone.

Bailey: I could tell when I called you up and talked to you. You seemed not to. (laugh) Yeah.

Celius: Yeah. I like to see people's body language, and be able to look them in the eye. And, the telephone is just such a poor means of communication, especially with something, you know, where you're really trying to understand somebody. And, when the stakes are, I always felt the stakes were high. You know, because if you didn't develop -- see those farmers were so individualistic that you, if you didn't develop an individual relationship with them, where you totally understood each other, you would have problems. So you were, once again, you were rewarded by how well, how conscientious you were about trying to give them what they were entitled to, which was their allotment of water. So, I guess I'm proud of the time that I spent doing that because, because I succeeded in what I set out to do, which was to, which was to learn how to do something else. You know, how to deal with people better.

Bailey: How long did you ditchride?

Celius: Two years.

Bailey: Two years? What did you do after that?

Celius: Actually, the reason I left, and what I did after that, let's see. What did I do? I'm asking my wife.

Marilee: Your dad was dying.

Celius: My father was sick with cancer, and I tried to figure out a way to spend more time with him. So, I thought, I still got a little bit of the GI Bill left, so what I did was I enrolled in a class of graphic arts at Columbia Basin College in Pasco. And, in that way I was able to move back to town. Because as a ditch rider you have to live in the ditch rider house. At that time. And, so I, so basically I wanted to be with my father as he was dying of cancer.

And, also, like I say, at that time I do believe I would have stayed. The thing that made me leave the ditch rider job was the fact that they were going to change the way ditch riders operated. The first thing that they were going to change was, they were going to furnish a truck. See, previously I was using my own truck. I made a few bucks driving my own truck, by the fact that it was an old truck and I worked on it myself. And so, I was able to -- and I also bought my own fuel from a farmer's cooperative. So, I was able to actually make a few bucks extra on my pickup truck. You know, just because it wasn't new. It wasn't, I wasn't making payments. Also, so they wanted to furnish trucks for us to drive. They also wanted to put a radio in those trucks, which

would do away with the farmers, the relationship I had with, that intimate relationship that I had with the farmers. In other words, I was talking to them. They were going to, subsequent to these changes, they were going to have to call the, I think there was actually an automated thing where they would have to leave a message. So, there's no longer any negotiation between the ditch rider and the farmer. And, after working so hard to develop a relationship with these people, I thought that that would seriously impact the desirability of the job. And then having to use someone else's equipment, and they were going to change it to an eight-hour day, which means that in the summer, after I got everybody happy and got their water going, there would be no more -- when I had things really humming -- and I talked to other ditch riders, and it was sort of something you could talk amongst yourselves, but you never told the watermaster how much time you spent in the middle of the summer out on the ditch. But I, actually, had my job done in two hours, a couple, enough times that it was actually desirable. I mean, you know, that was part of the perks of the jobs. So, the obverse of that coin was, it was difficult to have a summer vacation, because you really didn't want anybody else messing with your ditch. I mean that's, it was so hard to get it going, and you put so much labor into it, and spent so many long hours out there. Actually, you could call those two hours that I spent in, you know, you could call that comp time, to use a modern term. You know, because I did put the hours in, and I never did figure out how I came out on those hours. But, it was a salary job, so it didn't really matter how many hours that you spent out there.

Bailey: Any humorous stories from the field, you'd like to share? Anything you remember, off the top of your head, that really stands out?

Celius: Humor?

Bailey: Or unusual. Anything that's unusual, humor, or humorous in any way?

Marilee: I can remember one.

Celius: I can remember more ludicrous than humorous.

Bailey: Ludicrous is fine.

Celius: (laugh) It's more of tragic-comic to have a farmer fly in his helicopter from northern Washington all the way down to Mabton, Washington, and land across, in his field across the road from me, and walk up the road just to chew me out. That was, that was Taggerus [spelling?]. Very rich, very powerful, politically, and economically, a farmer that's still in Washington state, to this day. I don't know about him personally, but it's a family. And, he flew in his helicopter, all the way. I don't know. It's hundreds of miles. All the way to chew me out for not giving him exactly what he wanted when he asked for it. And what he asked for was a favor of extra water, which all the other farmers knew that when I had it I gave it freely, when I didn't have it, and we were on an allotment, you know, like in the middle of the summer, I just flat wouldn't dicker about that at all. They just couldn't have it. Otherwise someone, they were taking away from someone else. And this fellow, this fellow thought all he had to do was intimidate me and he could have his way. Well, that was probably one of the few complaints that the watermaster actually heard about, because I told him to get off

my property. He said, "It's not your property." I said, "Yes it is my property, as a tenant. Legally it's my property." So, I told him to "Get off my property or I'd call the Sheriff." Nobody had ever done that to him before.

Bailey: Now who is this? What was the name of this guy again?

Celius: Taggerus.

Bailey: Okay.

Celius: T-A-G-G, and the rest of it I don't know.

Bailey: Yeah. It's not important. I'm just curious about it.

Celius: A-R-A-S. I think. He's a vintner? Or a, his family's a vintner, and they have all sorts of property all over Washington state, and but that's not really a humorous story. Looking back on it -- because, I was scared to death. This guy, you know, this guy could have -- but on the spot I decided my job didn't matter. That I had to live with myself. So, I just said, "Well, call him if you want. You can have my job."

Bailey: Were any crops down in your district more water-intensive than others?

Celius: Oh absolutely. Fortunately I didn't have too many potatoes. Potatoes are very water intensive. Mint is, and, also, and hops. Yeah. Well, I had a lot of hops. So. Hops were, it was very important that the hops got all the water they could get, and I gave them all I could give them. Once I understood, once I understood about the more water-intensive crops, then those are the ones that I tried to bend over backwards to give them as much as I could. So there was, hops was a big one, but I only had one small patch of potatoes. Twenty acres. It was only twenty acres of potatoes.

Bailey: Okay.

Celius: Yeah.

Bailey: Did you have to live in the ditch rider houses when you were doing the work?

Celius: Yeah. I did. Actually it was really cool.

Bailey: Talk about it a little bit.

Celius: The ditch rider houses were, weren't real well insulated but the employees of the ditch company done all the maintenance, and they were just absolutely excellent. I mean, you know, any problems at all and they'd, like, be right out there to fix it. So, I never had to do anything to the house at all, except that I think I painted it, painted some. The house was, the house came with five acres. You could do anything you wanted with it. It was yours to use. I really, I'm not really a farmer guy. I'm not a farmer mentality. I just let the neighbor guy, who was the next ditch rider, I let him put his steers on there, and so he used it. But the house, the house was, like I say, it wasn't insulated. So. So, actually that's pretty humorous. My daughter ... she got her tongue stuck up to the window one time because she was touching the frost and, on the window. And the snow would, when there was a north wind, and it was snowing, the snow would come under the door. And, so, we'd, it was pretty cold except around the heater in times. But the house was really neat, and actually maintenance free. I had a huge barn. I had a wood stove in the barn, and that's where I worked on the truck. And I just, kind of just, fixed it up as cozy place where you could sit around the stove and have a cup of coffee, and had this huge, huge area, which I didn't really use except for my truck

maintenance. And, there was a chicken coop out in back. I never had any chickens. I probably would have if we'd, if we'd have stayed longer than we did. Behind the, behind the house there was a huge garden plot. All the water you wanted. There was no measuring of the water. We could have absolutely all the water you wanted. And, the neat thing about the garden was that you had all these volunteer plants that would, that were left over from previous ditch riders and their wives. So, you, every spring you never knew what was going to come up and it was always exciting to see these different things that came up. And, rose bushes, and just all kinds of flowers, and it was a great garden. And, around the ditch, like I said before the, it was right across the ditch from some very just open range, and the sagebrush, and wild country. So, we had all kinds of wildlife. Never saw a rattlesnake, although they were around there. I never saw one. I saw a huge huge king snake, the biggest one I've ever seen, on the ditch. And, also, there was some kind of a snake that hung out in a hole in a dead tree that we had in the backyard, and it was always entertaining to see the wildlife. And, one time we came home from town and this snake had a robin in its coils, and it was hanging outside of its hole. The snake was hanging outside and it had this robin in its coils and it was slowly squeezing it and killing it, and it was just, well it was like a zoo around there. We had a dog. We had a border collie, that grew up there, that actually belonged to the people across the siphon. But I had daughter and she paid so much attention to this dog that it, that it just moved in with us. And, it howled at, and with . . .

END OF SIDE 1, TAPE 1. AUGUST 28, 2003.

BEGINNING OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1. AUGUST 28, 2003.

Bailey: Continue with the story about the dogs.

Celius: Since the dog grew up there we had, there were a lot of coyotes. Almost every night we could hear them howling. A lot of times they came very close to the other side of the ditch, and they would howl and our dog would be right outside the back porch, and he would howl back, and they would just sort of howl at each other. So, it didn't matter if we told him to shut up or not he just kept howling, because I guess he was keeping them at bay. There were neighbors who, who lost all kinds of animals to these coyotes, so they did come across the ditch occasionally. The only way they could have got across was on these, on these -- oh, I forget what they were called. Check dams, across the ditch. And, they would walk across those, walk across those and steal a chicken or two, or even try to lure a dog across the ditch. And, I heard stories that it was female coyotes who did this. And so, the dogs found it quite irresistible. (laugh) But, when they crossed the ditch the pack usually killed the dog. So this dog was a really good companion to my daughter. And, that went with the house. The dog went with the house, pretty much, because when we left the dog -- we had to leave the dog. We had to give the dog up because it just barked all night long, in town, which was . . .

Bailey: Not good?

Celius: Nope.

Bailey: No. You don't make good neighbors that way. (laugh)

Celius: No. It just, well it was so protective at the ditch rider house. You know, it was, it

actually, well it kept the coyotes away from our side of the ditch. And, I was never afraid of the coyotes but there were rumors of mountain lions, although I never saw any evidence. But, you still felt better, since we were so isolated there. At that time we were, it was an isolated house, and so you felt better having a dog to announce someone's presence, or something's.

Bailey: So it sounds like the ditch rider house was actually a pleasant experience to live in? Did you raise a family in there?

Celius: Well, I had a daughter before I got that job, and she was there. And, she really really enjoyed the dog and the house, because the house was -- and the neighbors. Oh gosh. We had great neighbors, and there were kids for her to play with. So, it was a great family situation. And my wife got pregnant during that time, and also gave birth to my son. And, so yeah. I have very pleasant memories about the house and the, and the better aspects of the job, and just that I was so plugged into the community. I mean it was, it was really an intimate, intimate experience. It really was. And, that was true for all the ditch riders at that time. They all, you know, we all talked about that aspect of it. And, we compared our farmers and, you know, we talked a lot about that. And, the watermaster wasn't particularly included in those either because, you know, we had our, we had our little ways of doing things. And, of course, the older ditch riders shared their experiences with me, and their advice. They helped, they helped more than the ditch, or they helped a lot more than the watermaster did. So. So, there were a lot of things I enjoyed about it.

Bailey: That's what I was going to ask you to talk about, the things that you enjoyed the most about the job.

Celius: There were a lot of farmers that I really admired that, after I, after I learned about their operations, where I could just, you know, you could just see that what it was that made a successful farmer. And, you could see how much these fellas, you know, put into their livelihood. And, it was admirable. And there were other people who were just, you know, who were pathetic, who just, you know, should have been doing anything else but farming. They just, you know, did everything wrong. And, there was nothing you could do to help them either. I mean, they pretty much, you know it's, I guess they sort of, you know because they had been doing that all their lives that's exactly what they did, whether they did it bad or not. But, there were a lot of good farmers, and they were, they were really something to watch, and had a lot to teach people.

Bailey: So, what you liked about the job most is that you were plugged into the community, all the community involvement thing, and you liked being in the outdoors?

Celius: That's right.

Bailey: What did you dislike about the job?

Celius: Hmm.

Bailey: You think if you want, go ahead.

Celius: Well, I had my doubts whether or not I was, I was the proper person for the job. And, it, I didn't get any feedback. It was pretty much, the first year, the first year was pretty much the school of hard knocks, and I, you know, people, in a stress situation, people

look out for their own interests so it's hard to judge. You know, as you get to know people, and farmers in particular, you -- I mentioned how intimate it was. Because you had to get to know them to know whether or not you could trust what they were telling you. And, everybody served their own interest, and that's perfectly understandable, but from the ditch rider's point of view you had to -- it was a job that required you to be very, very flexible and very, so that you had to figure out who is, who is telling you the truth and you had to bend the rules, but you had to bend them in a very fair and a very equitable way. And, I think in the first year, the fellow that taught me the job, the fella that had it before me, we didn't really care for each other. So, he gave me the very, very bare minimum that I needed to do the job. Then he said, "That's it. You've got it. You're on your own." That's what he said. And it wasn't enough. So, so, and I think that was a result of our personality conflict. So, I, what -- I, it required a person that was very flexible, and maybe easy going. Well, I've never been easy-going in my life, so I found it difficult. And I, I take things very seriously, and especially something like that. I saw it as a serious job, and so, I think the lack of support.

Bailey: Expand on that a little bit. Lack of support, and from . . . ?

Celius: From the watermaster. When you complained about your farmers to the watermaster he pretty much said, "Work it out."

Bailey: Passing it to you to (Celius: Yeah.) say, "You need to work it out."

Celius: He said, "Those are your farmers. You solve the problem." There were a lot of -- I mean you really had to -- I think I, you know when I, you know I'm a pretty engaged

person. And I was then. So, maybe I thought about things too much. Maybe I made things too complicated, because some of the other people that nowadays would be considered dumb as a rail seemed to do perfectly well. (laugh) (Bailey: Hmm.) I mean they seem to, you know, they seem to do perfectly well. It seemed like it was harder for me than it was for them. But then again, I guess what, the bad parts of the job, I'm remembering that first year. The second year, the second year was, I keep thinking back on it, it was a piece of cake because, which is why I was so disappointed when they changed, when they changed the job, because I put so much into it, learning how to do it right, and making it work. And, eventually getting the approval of the, of the farmers, you know, their stamp of approval. Yeah. What Marilee?

Marilee: And didn't they make us, charge us for the housing too, the rent?

Celius: Well, if they did it wasn't much, because I don't remember it.

Marilee: No, they were going to start.

Celius: Oh. Yeah. That's another way they were going to change the job. They were going to charge you for the housing.

Bailey: Yeah.

Celius: How am I doing?

Bailey: You're doing great.

Celius: Oh. Okay.

Bailey: And, why did you leave the job?

Celius: I left the job because they changed it, and they made it much less desirable by

furnishing the truck, and also the radio, the radio that they put in it, the two-way radio. And, also the eight-hour day. And the lack of ... the close contact with the farmers, since they would be calling the irrigation office instead of me. So I wouldn't be able to dicker with them over -- and I just saw it as a source of problems. And, you know, where it would just make them more dissatisfied with the irrigation district.

Bailey: Right.

Celius: And, I understand, after I left that they did, they had quite an adjustment, and that the farmers didn't -- well, the farmers never want to change. (laugh) They don't want to change any more than anybody else wants to change. So, they were dead-set against the whole deal. And, of course their voice was not heard. I would, irrigation district had board meetings but they were, they were pretty much a joke. I mean, you could have input but, and you could get it in the record but -- I never did, you know, I never did get into the politics of the irrigation district, but it was pretty political, at the upper, at the upper echelons. Maybe, I used to work for, I've worked for the U.S. Postal Service too, so the upper echelons of that are highly politicized, so I assume that most government politics is pretty much the same kind of deal.

Bailey: How was your relationship with Bureau of Reclamation? Did you have one with them?

Celius: No. I couldn't -- that always puzzled me. I always -- I've asked the watermaster. I'd say, "What about the Bureau of Reclamation? This is part of the Bureau of Reclamation." And he'd say, "Nothing. They let us run it the way we want to run it." But there was just no Bureau of Reclamation. I don't think I ever met a person that

worked for the Bureau of Reclamation, as opposed to the irrigation district. It was -- I just puzzled about that. And, but not enough to learn the history or anything though. I had other interests. I always thought it was kind of cool, the idea that it was -- I always just thought that someday that I would get interested in the politics of water. But, I don't know if I've ever got onto it.

Bailey: It takes a lot work.

Celius: Yeah. And in this area, it's very complicated, and it's hard to get straight answers because everybody's biased, and everybody has a side. The Yakamas, for instance, in the last twenty years they've sent all, a goodly number of their young people off to college and they came back lawyers. And they put that to work. They took back part of Mount Adams, and they are totally involved in the irrigation, in the Bureau. I assume the Bureau of Reclamation, since that's the government agency in charge. And, they're really, they really want their salmon to survive, even though it's, as I understand it, it's a religious issue with them. It doesn't really have anything to do with, I mean it's not a giant source of revenue, but it has worked favorably in that it has forced the farmers to clean up their wastewater. They, when I was a kid I remember going swimming in the Yakima River, and I was out in the middle of the river and there was feces in the water. And, that's the last time I swam in that river. And that was when I was, oh I don't know, that must have been, that was in the '50s. So, in the '50s people were routinely emptying their toilets into the river. It killed all the fish. The bacteria in the water killed all the fish. So, that's what the Indians were talking about. They said that

they used to fish at the Sunnyside Dam, where they take out the irrigation water for the district that I worked for, and they wanted their fish back. And, I don't blame them a bit for that. And, it's forced, slowly over the years that, there's fish coming up the river now and I think that's, I think that's great.

Bailey: Did you leave the irrigation district and your job before Mt. St. Helens blew its top?

Celius: Yes.

Bailey: Okay. So you really don't have anything about your district and Mt. St. Helens to talk about?

Celius: No.

Bailey: I ask that for everyone, because there's all kinds of interest about laterals getting filled with ash, and all this other stuff that was going on.

Celius: Well my ditch probably wouldn't have been affected because Sunnyside was on the edge of the ash cloud. Because at the time St. Helens blew, I was living in Sunnyside and I remember distinctly that we were on the edge of the cloud. And the area where the ditch that I previously worked on was to the south of that cloud, so I doubt if my ditch got any ash at all. So. Or was impacted. Other than the canal where the water came from was impacted. You know, the headwaters.

Bailey: Yakima-Tieton, they really were impacted very heavily by it.

Celius: I bet they were.

Bailey: Yeah.

Celius: Yeah. Oh, we was, you know, I definitely, always remember that eruption.

Bailey: I do too. I remember seeing pictures of Yakima, and my interview this morning, Warren Dickman, he told me, he said, "From about ten o'clock to about four o'clock in the afternoon," (Celius: Uhm-hmm.) of the day after the eruption, the day of the eruption, that "it was just dark." He said it was "as dark as night. And nobody could see anything." So. I was just curious if you were on the job when it happened?

Celius: Hmm uhm.

Bailey: So, what are you doing now, Larry?

Celius: I'm semi-retired.

Bailey: Okay.

Celius: And, what I did after, you asked a little while ago. What I did after the ditch -- did I say, Marilee [spelling?]? What did I do? Oh yeah. I went to college. I went to that graphic arts school, and after that, what did I do?

Marilee: American Can.

Celius: Right. And after that I worked in a -- another day-late-and-dollar-short thing (laugh) during the '80s, I guess it was, that, or roughly that area, American Can Company, who sold to James River Company who went, who got into trouble financially during the roaring '80s, and borrowed too much money. And so, they shut that plant down in Sunnyside, that I worked at. And, so only, only I quit that job. And what did I do after that? :Oh yeah. But that's another history. What did I do after . . . ?

Marilee: That's your last real job.

Celius: That was my last real job. (laugh) Okay. So I've dealt in antiques and collectibles, off

and on. Just sort of as a hobby, but my wife sort of took over the -- so I'm kind of a dinosaur. (laugh)

Bailey: Any final thoughts on your career as a ditch rider, your short career as a ditch rider?

Celius: Yeah. It was a worthwhile chapter of my life. I'm glad I did it. I learned a lot from it. I learned a lot about people. I learned a lot about myself. I learned a lot about water. And, so I'm glad I did it. On the whole, looking back on it, it was a pleasurable experience. And, I'm happy to share this with whoever would like to hear about it.

Bailey: Great. [pause in recording] This is a last-minute addendum to the interview. Okay, Larry, you had a couple of other topics you wanted to discuss about your job here? Kind of a late add-on, if you would like to go ahead and discuss those?

Celius: Well, I can tell you about the guy who drove his pickup truck into the ditch and drowned. He was a barber that I knew slightly, from Sunnyside, who liked to drink and drive his pickup around the countryside. Well, this one road out there that leads up to the ditch, up by a turkey farm, it sort of dead-ends at the canal. Well, it's just this long straight road that goes kind of up the hill, and I don't believe that it -- oh, I think there was a sign that said "Dead End," but it wasn't really, wasn't really that noticeable. And this fella was out there driving, drunk as well, and built up some speed I guess and he just went off the road, sort of like a ski jump, and went nose right into the canal. And, I guess he hit his head on the dash or something, and he drowned before, before he came to his senses. And, I remember that morning, I was driving. I was approaching the turkey farm and one of the employees of the turkey farm came running out and flagged

me down, and started -- he was very excited, and he was telling me about the guy that went in the ditch. And I said, "Well, is he still in the ditch?" And, he said, "Yeah." And I said, "Well, well, well how come you didn't help him or something?" And he said, "Well, he's dead." And I said, "Well, then I guess there's no hurry." (laugh) And so, so when I get there I'll, I'll see if he's obstructing the ditch or something. And, so, as I approached I seen that the Sheriff was already there, and there was a firetruck there, and sure enough this pickup was in the ditch. And, it wasn't really obstructing the ditch. But, so they flagged me down, and it seemed that they didn't have any way to get to him. And, I don't know, they were waiting for, I guess they must have been waiting for life jackets or something. But, they didn't want to get into the water because, for whatever reason. So, anyway they asked me if I had anything to get him out of there. See, he was floating in the, you could see him floating in the cab. And, so we used my weed hook. We used my weed hook to catch him, to catch him, and it was really quite a feat to, you know, he was floating face down in the water. And, we caught him with the weed hook and pulled him out to shore. But, I did know him slightly, but I guess the water and everything he wasn't really that recognizable. (laugh) He had been there all night, so he was pretty swollen. So there was, there was that.

And the other thing I could tell you about was a wooden siphon, because those seem to be disappearing from irrigation districts everywhere.

Bailey: They are.

Celius: And it was, always a big deal in the wintertime was we would go inside these wooden siphons, that you couldn't quite stand up in. At least my siphon, you couldn't quite stand up, so you were bent at the neck to walk through these siphons. And, it was always very, very spooky because of the smells and, the smells of creosoted soaked wood, and you never knew if you'd find drowned animals in there.

Oh yeah, and that's something else that happened in the springtime, was fishing the dead animals out of the rear boxes and various siphons. And, so that was pretty gory work. That's another use for the weed hook. And, so that was pretty gory work.

But, the siphons, we used kerosine lanterns to go in. It was before the battery lanterns really caught on. We used kerosine lanterns, so, and everybody was uncomfortable with that, going into those siphons, because you would like, you'd go in far enough that you couldn't see the entrance anymore, even if it was straight. It would like, you could see the opening shrink smaller and smaller until it absolutely disappeared, or you went around the bend or something. And, it was just, it was like being in a tunnel. So, there were people that just couldn't do it at all. And, like I said, it was very spooky and we, there was always somebody on the outside, walking along, and so as we walked through the siphons we'd tap on the wood, and the people on the outside would keep track of where we were inside the siphon. Like there's no radios or anything, like there is nowadays. So these guys would keep track of us on the outside. The guys who couldn't go on the inside would go on the outside, and they'd keep track of where we were in case something happened. It was always unstated. (laugh) In case

they had to get us out of there really fast. So. So, that was always exciting. It was sort of an exercise in self-control. (laugh) The kerosine lanterns and everything. And, they would find -- the guy who is really the expert. There were usually two guys who really knew what they were doing, who were real experienced at it, and they would sort of chip, and tap, and dig away at the boards, and I guess they could see it manually, visually, which boards were bad, and then they had a record which ones had been leaking throughout the year too. So, they'd cut them out and replace them with new boards. Some of the smaller pipes -- all I could handle was the big pipe. There were pipes where you had to go in horizontally on a trolley. You were laying down. And, those pipes must have been eighteen inches. Maybe a little bigger. But, you had to go in on a trolley, with a rope. People would let you down, and they were usually sloped, so they'd -- I couldn't handle that at all. And, those guys would get going, rolling down on this trolley, and sometimes they'd get going so fast that they'd run into water and they'd start -- you could hear them yelling. (laugh)

Bailey: Okay. Well, I think that'll do it for today. Thanks for your time. And you'll be in the National Archives with this tape, for anybody who wants to listen to your experiences down the road. So, I thank you very much for your time, Larry.

Celius: Okay. Thank you.

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1. AUGUST 28, 2003.
END RECORDING.