

Voices from the Past

Building the Grassy Lake Dam

Interviewee: Lowell R. Barrick

August 17, 1972

Tape #21

Oral Interview Conducted by Harold Forbush

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Harold Forbush: Through the sponsorship of the Upper Snake River Valley Historical Society, Inc., this interview, first recorded on reel to reel, is now transferred onto C-60 Cassette this 4th day of February, 1984.

This morning...invite to the office Mr. Barrick, who has been a resident of this area for a number of years. The date on which we have met for this oral interview is the 17th of August 1972. Now, Mr. Barrick, for the record will you state your full name?

Lowell R. Barrick: Lowell R. Barrick.

HF: And how do you spell that last name?

LB: B-A-R-R-I-C-K.

HF: Now, Sir, will you state the date and the place where you were born?

LB: The date of my birth was July 15, 1902; Litchfield, Minnesota, Meeker County.

HF: Now I am assuming that your folks, your parents and family came out West for some particular reason and thence on up into this area. Why don't you give me just a little background, relate as best you can, why your family came out into the Upper Snake River Valley of Idaho.

LB: Well, from 1927 to 1935 I was a member of the Lobnitz Brothers Construction Company of Willmar, Minnesota. There were so many contractors in the state of Minnesota that it reached the place where contractors were underbidding each other to such a state that it was hard to make a living. So we decided to come out into Montana and bid some state highway work, which we did. We first came to Thompson, Montana, and did a highway project there. Then we went to Libby, Montana, and did another highway project; then over to Wolf Point, Montana. In the spring of '37 we had completed that work and we come to Idaho for the purpose of building Grassy Lake Dam on the south side of Yellowstone Park.

HF: So actually that was your first contact then with this area of Idaho?

LB: Yes. Very first.

HF: That's interesting to me. Tell me just a little about this Lobnitz Brothers.

LB: The Lobnitz Brothers were a contracting firm of five brothers back in the state of Minnesota. And at the time we came to Montana, two brothers and myself come to Montana and we formed a co-partnership. The other brothers stayed in Minnesota and operated there.

HF: I see. How do you spell the name Lobnitz?

LB: L-O-B-N-I-T-Z.

HF: Is that a Russian—

LB: No, it is a Dane name; but the father to these boys lived in I believe England if I remember right, and his name was Anderson. He was always getting his mail mixed up with some other Anderson, there were so many Andersons; so he said he would fix it and he'd change his name to Lobnitz. That's how the company got the Lobnitz name.

HF: Now were they in background experience, more or less capable of doing highway construction?

LB: To start with, they were farmers. Back in Minnesota the counties are divided into townships. Each township did its own road work. They got interested in doing township work with a small amount of equipment. From that they went to highway work and to railroad work and to canal work, and all kinds of earth and rockwork.

HF: In other words, at that time their equipment was all motorized?

LB: Very little motorized to start with. It was all horse drawn to start with and then it became motorized.

HF: By the time you had completed with these fellows, these partnership, and these projects in Montana, this road work and so on, you'd had a quite a lot of experience in earthmoving?

LB: Yes, my earthmoving experience at that time was 15 years of earthwork. At the time we completed the work in Montana.

HF: Well now, coming to the Grassy Lake Project, were you fellows given the—did you fellows bid on this project?

LB: No, the prime contractor was S.J. Groves & Sons of Minneapolis, Minnesota. They are a large construction company back there. They are still in existence.

HF: Had they had experience in building these reclamation projects?

LB: Very much so.

HF: I see. They would be comparable to, maybe, Peter Kiewit's and MK today?

LB: I would imagine. I would imagine they would be, because I notice every once in a while on large dam jobs, government jobs, I notice their names are mentioned amongst the bidders.

HF: Well then, this firm that you referred to got the bid and they contracted out to the Lobnitz Brothers and yourself. Would your firm referred to as the Lobnitz Brothers as the partnership?

LB: Yes, yes.

HF: In other words, your name wasn't in the partnership?

LB: My name was in the partnership, but not the name of the company. There was Lobnitz Brothers consisting of Henry Lobnitz, Otto Lobnitz, and L.R. Barrick.

HF: I see. So you fellows undertook to perform what particular contractual services in conjunction with the Grassy Lake?

LB: We did the earth and rockwork. There was another subcontractor that did the concrete work. He was from Wyoming, I can't remember his name. I asked about that yesterday.

HF: Now was this Grassy Lake project a government sponsored—

LB: Yes, it was sponsored by the Bureau of Reclamation.

HF: By the Bureau. Can you tell me specifically the purpose of this, the background, what they wanted to accomplish by this project?

LB: They had formed an Irrigation District here in Eastern Idaho and in this district, it covered a wide area; and to get the water that they needed for it they built a dam at Island Park known as the Island Park Reservoir. And that took care of the greater part of them, but there was some of the farmers in the Ashton area and the Newdale area that had too high an elevation to get water from the Island Park Reservoir. So in order to take care of that part of the district, they built this Grassy Lake Dam up on right off of Fall River and brought the water down Fall River and then took it out of Fall River into the canals.

HF: It might be helpful, Lowell, to those who read and who will perhaps transcribe this into raw historical data, source material, if you would just kindly comment on our river system, what we are talking about in this area, with the principal stream, of course, being the North Fork? Why don't you just briefly give a little information about the water sources—courses in the area? You have mentioned one or two names, but mention most of them and then just maybe you can go on and give the location of the construction of this dam: Grassy Lake? Do you understand what I mean? In other words, what I'd like—the water courses in the area, so that a person would know just what we're talking about when we talk about the Island Park Dam. Where was that built and on what? And just give a little general background information about the water courses and available water to be impounded, etc.

LB: Well, the Island Park Reservoir was built right west of Pond's. That water comes from the North Fork of the Snake River and the Buffalo River up there. It flows on down through Warm River and there there's another little river that comes into the North Fork known as the Warm River. Then on down through St. Anthony and west until it meets the South Fork, west of Rexburg; and before it meets the South Fork west of Rexburg, the Teton River flows into the North Fork. Also the Fall River, which comes from the Grassy Lake area, intersects the North Fork at Chester. Those are the main sources of water that I know of.

HF: Now the Snake—the North Fork course, follows that direction?

LB: Southwesterly direction.

HF: Southwesterly. And the headwaters of Fall River are in what direction? Say from Chester or the mouth of it?

LB: To the mouth of it? Well, north or—east and—mostly east and northerly direction.

HF: Now, are the headwaters of the Fall River formed in the Park, are they?

LB: Yes, I think the headwaters of Fall River are formed right at or very near to Beula Lake in the Park.

HF: So this Grassy Lake Project we're talking about, was it a lake to impound waters from the headwaters of Fall River?

LB: No, the area where Grassy Lake Dam is located is just off from Fall River and—

HF: So it isn't on any river at all?

LB: It isn't really on any river at all. It is just kind of a little basin up there in the mountains. When Grassy Lake was built, had they had built it another five feet higher, the water would have flowed two ways. It would have flowed to the pacific—or it would have flowed east and come down the South Fork as well as coming down the North Fork. That is after it left Fall River. It was practically on the Continental Divide.

HF: You mean water could have flowed east?

LB: Yes, the waters could have gone around and come through Jackson Hole.

HF: Oh, I see what you mean. In other words it could have been a part of the water course either of the North Fork of the Snake or of the South Fork. Of course, but all this would have been on the west side of the Continental Divide.

LB: Mm-hmm.

HF: Well, in the beginning was there a nucleus of a lake there? Is that the reason they called it Grassy Lake?

LB: There was a little pond there, just a—what you would call a little slough is about all. But there was a narrow gap between the two mountains there and that's where we put the dam and that formed a lake.

HF: Did you have to build the dam on all three sides or one side?

LB: Oh, just on one side.

HF: On just this one gap; on the lower side.

LB: On one gap. And the water comes out of the Grassy Lake Dam and flows about 500 feet and enters Fall River.

HF: By that time Fall River then is pretty well defined, the headwaters?

LB: Oh, yes. Fall River is well defined at that point.

HF: Now specifically are we talking about a dam which is located in Idaho, or in Wyoming, or just real close to the border?

LB: It's located in Wyoming. The dam is located in Wyoming.

HF: And it wouldn't be very far from the Wyoming/Idaho border, would it?

LB: Oh, you would have to come west from the dam; I'm guessing about seven miles.

HF: About seven miles. Is Grassy Lake in the confines of the park?

LB: No, it is just outside of the park, just outside of the park.

HF: Now you mentioned Beula Lake. Now, that is within the park.

LB: That's within the park.

HF: That would be over about four or five miles?

LB: No, from the Grassy Lake it wouldn't be over two miles.

HF: Over two miles.

LB: It is a short distance. There's a trail into Grassy Lake; a lot of people go up there and hike and fish there.

HF: Well now, Mr. Barrick, you more or less indicated the topography of its location, it's in a high elevation.

LB: Yeah.

HF: Possibly 7,000 feet?

LB: Pretty close to that.

HF: Pretty close to 7,000 feet. In the course of construction, did you get your materials right in the same vicinity for the building of the dam? Did you have to bring a lot of material in? Why don't you go into a little of the—as you recall, you know.

LB: The earth and rock was secured right at the area of the dam. However, the sand and gravel had to be brought in and that was brought in from the Wyoming side and the cement was brought in from the Ashton side. The spring of '38, the snow didn't leave up there until late in June and that meant that the construction season was very, very short. In order to get the dam, that is the earthwork in place in the dam and the rock, why we felt it was necessary to have the cement at the site along about the 1st of May. So in March, we hauled in two carloads of cement with tractors and crawler wagons over nine feet of snow and stored it at the dam site. And believe you me that was some undertaking.

HF: Now that came from Ashton?

LB: That came from Ashton; yes.

HF: It was brought in by rail to Ashton, I guess.

LB: They brought it in by rail to Ashton and then we hauled it out to Fall River and across Fall River; and there we loaded it into these tractors wagons. And we'd use two diesel tractors with a big crawler wagon back of each one and then a bulldozer went along so that when we got stuck and got in trouble it could dig us out and we'd go on. From the time we left Fall River, east of Ashton, until we'd made a round trip, it was thirty-six hours.

HF: How many miles covered?

LB: About forty.

HF: About forty.

HF: Eighty mile trip, round trip.

HF: I understand, Mr. Barrick, that historically speaking, between Ashton and the Flagg Ranch in Wyoming, the old Reclamation Road exists.

LB: That's right.

HF: Now as I understand it, when the Jackson Lake Dam was constructed, this road was laid out and used for purposes of hauling supplies to the dam site.

LB: That's right.

HF: In the course of your work for Grassy Lake, did you employ the old road?

LB: The old Reclamation—the same road, yes.

HF: The old Reclamation Road. And it's hard to understand how they ever got those supplies over that road and into Jackson Lake. It is just hard to understand.

HF: Explain the problem?

LB: Well, in the spring of the year the road would be so soft and broken up that you just couldn't get any equipment through; it'd just bog you down and you would be stuck all the time. Along this old road we could see where they had old buildings; in fact, the Bureau of Reclamation had us destroy one just west of Grassy Lake Dam where they used to overnight, as an overnight stop. But how they ever hauled that cement and material through there is a mystery to me.

HF: Had they made any physical improvement to the road like putting gravel and—

LB: Oh no, no. Strictly an old trail was what it was.

HF: I see. And the course we are talking about when the Reclamation Road was used, probably about 1910, '12, '14, along in there, aren't we?

LB: I don't recall that I ever heard that date.

HF: Seems to me like that Jackson Lake Dam was built somewhere around 1915.

LB: I don't believe it was any later than that. I believe it was as early as '15.

HF: Yes, I kind of think so. Of course, they didn't have motorized equipment.

LB: No, it was all horse drawn.

HF: All horse drawn. Some of these big wagons, these supply wagons, they must have been huge, huge units.

LB: I imagine they used probably anywhere from six to twelve horses on a wagon.

HF: Well now, for your purposes, had the prime contractor constructed living quarters for men over in the Grassy Lake area?

LB: No, we constructed our own living quarters after we moved in. We moved a portable saw mill in and set it up and sawed lumber and built our own camp.

HF: What did that consist of, your camp?

LB: Oh, it consisted of bunk houses for the men to live in. It consisted of a kitchen, an office, and the necessary buildings for sixty-five to seventy men to live in.

HF: Now were these men, as far as the Lobnitz Brothers contract was concerned, were they employed pretty much to handle and operate heavy earthmoving equipment?

LB: Yes.

HF: I see. I think in our visitation you mentioned my father, Charles Elmer—or just Elmer, I'm not quite sure just which name you went buy—Forbush was employed over there. Now I am sure dad didn't operate any heavy equipment.

LB: Your father was one of the main carpenters in building the camp.

HF: In building the bunkhouses.

LB: Bunkhouses and the buildings. We had a shop there, a repair shop and he was one of the main carpenters in the construction of the camp.

HF: Now these men would stay right up there, your employees?

LB: Oh yes, we had a dining room and fed them. For those who wanted to live by themselves and had families, they moved in tents or little trailers or whatever they had and they would live somewhere in the camp area.

HF: I see. You mentioned that the supplies were brought in; that is, sand, cement, and so forth, in the spring of '38.

LB: Well, the sand and gravel, as I recall it, was brought in the fall of '37.

HF: In '37.

LB: Brought in the fall of '37 and it was on the job, but that was too early to bring in the cement. The cement would deteriorate and wouldn't be usable in the spring of '38; that's why we waited until March to bring the cement in. Supposed to have it as fresh as possible.

HF: Now what were these materials used for, for the core of the dam?

LB: Well, there's a conduit that runs clear through the dam and there is a control valve underneath at about the center of the dam. From the lower side of the dam to this control valve there is a walkway or a tunnel that you can walk in to this valve. Then there is a little control house at the lower site of the dam. This was all concrete work. And then there was what they call a cut off wall that went through the center of the dam; that was for seepage purposes, to stop the seepage from the upper side of the dam from seeping through. That was all concrete work.

HF: Now turning our attention more specifically to some construction figures and completion figures, I am assuming that the dam construction then started in 1938.

LB: No, the dam construction work started in '37. Actual started in '37.

HF: I see.

LB: And was finished in the fall of '39.

HF: But the Lobnitz people, more or less, as a sub contractor came in not initially at the beginning, but a little later on.

LB: Well, the only thing that had been done when the Lobnitz Brothers come on the project was the clearing. The clearing had been completed. They had cleared the area for the reservoir and had disposed of the timber.

HF: I see. All right, now, specifically, how much area is covered by the dam, by the reservoir—I am not sure which is the proper usage there. Is it officially a dam or is it really a reservoir or can one use those terms?

LB: Well, a reservoir is the area in back of a dam. This Grassy Lake Reservoir impounds 15,000 acre feet of water. I can't say exactly how many acres of ground it covers, but not too many; it is not a large area.

HF: In depth, at the deepest point maybe what would it be?

LB: Oh, I imagine it's close to 150 feet deep at the site where we had our camp, which was very close to the dam.

HF: Are these waters ordinarily held over during the winter time?

LB: No, they don't figure on holding much water in this dam during the winter. It is so small that they can fill it in a very short period in the spring when the runoff comes when they need to take care of the water and not have it come down into the valley and cause floods. However, they had to build a diversion canal from Lake of the Woods, which is just a couple of miles west of Grassy Lake Dam, to Grassy Lake, to fill the dam in the spring when the runoff comes.

HF: This Lake of Woods then is higher in elevation to the dam?

LB: Yes.

HF: I see. So the water going into Grassy Lake Reservoir comes from this Lake of Woods through a diversion canal and then it receives other waters from the drainage area.

LB: Mountains; prairies.

HF: There's no live water course flowing into it.

LB: No.

HF: And you mentioned that there was a canal built from the dam, or from the reservoir, over to—

LB: Lake of the Woods.

HF: No, but going from there down to Fall River.

LB: Well, there is just a natural waterway down through. They didn't have to build anything.

HF: Oh they didn't have to.

LB: They didn't have to build anything. They just turned the water loose below the dam and it flows on down into.

HF: Into the river.

LB: Yeah.

HF: And about what distance would that be?

LB: Oh I'd say around 500 feet, something like that.

HF: Oh it's just real close then.

LB: Just a short distance.

HF: And so with the gates there at the reservoir they can control the amount of water coming in and going out of this reservoir.

LB: Well, they can't really control the amount of water coming into the reservoir. However, when the reservoir is filled there is a spillway that takes care of the surplus water and that spillway puts the water right back into Fall River.

HF: I see.

LB: The water that goes through the spillway would go into Fall River regardless of whether it went into Grassy Lake or not. But when Grassy Lake becomes full to its capacity then they have to have a way of taking care of the excess water that comes in and so it goes through the spillway. It is an open spillway.

HF: I see. Can you give me some figures on, maybe, the length of the dam, the height, and maybe the amount of material that went into the face of the dam? Do you have any factual data like that?

LB: It's too long a time has elapsed. I can't remember the amount, the yardage that went into the dam. But the dam is, it seems to be like, something like 300 feet high and it is faced upstream and downstream with rock rip rap. The overall cost of the dam, including the area what was purchased, the engineering, and the construction of the dam was right at \$760,000; approximately \$760,000.

HF: Now since this was a relatively small dam, the cost ratio—

(Side two continuing the interview with Mr. L.R. Barrick)

HF: —the cost ratio was pretty high.

LB: Yes, compared to the Island Park Dam it was, about four to one.

HF: But it was a necessary adjunct to the overall scheme of providing reclamation, impounding water for irrigation purposes in this whole system?

LB: That's right.

HF: Now almost concurrently with this was the construction, I guess, of this referred to as the Island Park Reservoir?

LB: Yes, it was constructed just prior to the Grassy Lake Dam.

HF: And it also was a Bureau of Engineer?

LB: Bureau of Reclamation.

HF: Bureau of Reclamation. To your knowledge, were any of these projects done by the Bureau of Army Engineers?

LB: No, no.

HF: It's all Department of Reclamation.

LB: Bureau of Reclamation.

HF: Bureau of Reclamation of the Department of the Interior.

LB: Yes.

HF: Mr. Barrick, in preparing for this interview I had wondered if you had much experience in the—and had an opportunity to observe the development of this whole area of the Island Park community in its growth and development, you know in recreation and so on. This might be interesting. If you would comment when you arrived on the scene in 1937; what were things like in the Island Park area?

LB: Well, The Mack's Inn was there. Pond's Lodge was there. And there was a gas station and a few cabins at Last Chance, but nothing compared to what is there today.

HF: These places were on the main route to West Yellowstone.

LB: Yes, yes they were.

HF: And this would be on Highway 191—

LB: That's right.

HF: —at that time.

LB: That's right.

HF: I see. Now, that was in 1937, we'll say, and some 35...yeah it would be 35 years have lapsed since that time. How do you compare the two? What has happened in the development, overall development in this area?

LB: Well, there has been an awful lot happen. After we finished Grassy Lake Dam, we did some other work in the state of Idaho, highway work over on the west side, and then when World War II come along we sold a great part of our equipment to Morris and Knudsen. We felt it was a good time to get out of the construction business. But we retained our tractors, scrapers, and bull dozers. We rented that equipment to the government to build the Navy Depot at Clearfield and when they completed the Clearfield Depot—which lasted for about two years I imagine—why then they turned our equipment back to us. At that time I took over the equipment and I started leveling land here in Madison, Fremont, and Jefferson Counties with about five scrapers most of the time, tractors and scrapers, and several bulldozers. I leveled thousands and thousands of acres of ground it seems and got it in shape so that it could be surfaced irrigated and

developed an awful lot of land and cleared an awful lot of brush. Today Madison and Fremont Counties are so much different from when I first come here that there is no comparison.

HF: Well, then, more or less pinpointing this thing, you're saying that perhaps you were one of the first to be actually be instrumental in using this heavy equipment for ground leveling in these counties.

LB: Yes, for instance, the Meyers Brothers in Sugar City are well known. In those days, those early days, of land leveling, I recall working over at Parker and the Meyers Brothers at that time had two bands of sheep, I believe. And they were moving their sheep from the Sugar City area out into the desert for the spring. They come by where I was working with one of these tractors and scrapers and they stopped there and they looked and they looked and finally they crawled over the fence and come over and asked who the boss was and they got in touch with me. I remember the boys said, 'We have often thought that some day there'd be a machine like this to level this country up with.' At that time they said, 'Could you come over and do some work for us, a couple of days work.' And I said, 'Yes, as soon as I get through with this job,' and some other jobs I had promised; I don't remember just how long it was. And I remember going over there for a couple of days and I was there for six weeks. That was only one of the times that I worked for the Meyers Brothers alone. And I recall one time standing up here by the First Security Bank; and do you remember this man named Smith that lived east of Sugar City? He was a dry farmer. He used to live at that hotel down here, the Idamont Hotel in the winter time.

HF: Yeah.

LB: Well I remember him, I knew him really well. He's been dead for a number of years. But I can't recall his first name. Anyway my partner, Henry Lobnitz, come along and I introduced him to this man, Smith and he said, 'You know Mr. Lobnitz,' he said, 'this man Barrick, here, is doing more good for Madison County than is for First Security Bank.'

HF: What equipment specifically were you using?

LB: Caterpillar equipment.

HF: Caterpillar equipment.

LB: Diesel tractors with fourteen—thirteen yard scrapers.

HF: Now this would not only take big hunks of ground off, but it would also level it.

LB: Oh yes, yes. We leveled it so that it could be surfaced irrigated.

HF: I see. And you'd also take brush, timber and remove that?

LB: Yes, remove brush and timber.

HF: What areas of the county have you worked in? Now you mentioned the Meyers Brothers; that would be in Fremont County.

LB: Yeah, that was just across the Fremont County, but you take in Madison County, if you will give me a dollar for every farm that I have worked on in Madison County I'll give you five dollars for every one I haven't worked on.

HF: In other words you have worked in a—

LB: Practically all the farms in Madison County.

HF: I see. Have you done much work down, say, in the Independence area?

LB: Oh yes, yes; lots of work down in the Independence area. I did an awful lot of work for the Jensen Brothers, you know the five Jensen brothers down here. I did an awful lot of work for their father and those boys.

HF: Now that particular area is the lowest in elevation in the County.

LB: Yes, yes.

HF: It is the lowest area in the county and because of it you have a lot of overflow of water from the two forks of the Snake River. Bog holes were filled up I suppose. Is this right?

LB: That's right.

HF: Little swampy areas?

LB: We filled up holes, places, where the river had some time or another had cut through and there would be channels five-six feet deep and thirty-forty feet wide. We filled many of those channels full and today it is farm land and they are raising grain, beets, and potatoes on it.

HF: Where did you get your materials to do that, though? Right adjacent, right in the same vicinity?

LB: Right adjacent to it, yes.

HF: I see. The high spots.

LB: High spots.

HF: And a lot of vegetation down there in the early days?

LB: A lot of vegetation. And then there was areas where we would strike gravel pockets. Well, we would take this gravel out a foot below the finished grade and put it in a deeper place and then we would bring in top soil over the gravel so that they could farm it.

HF: That is fantastic. How many units did you eventually acquire and had in operation? Several units?

LB: At one time I had five D-8 Caterpillar tractors with thirteen yard scrapers. I had two dozers. I had one patrol for cutting surface ditches and two drag lines for maintaining and digging canals. Then I had some rock equipment: air compressor and jack hammers, and that kind of equipment.

HF: Did you also build roads for the County?

LB: No, very little of that kind of work. I did do once in a while; they would have some job that they wanted done and we'd do it; but our prime work was the leveling of the land and the clearing of the land; developing of the land.

HF: Would you care to mention the worth of that equipment at the high peak and your operation, your construction company?

LB: Well, in those days, it would be considerably less than today. But I had some where around one hundred thousand dollars worth of equipment operating.

HF: Would you care to mention some of your operators, besides yourself and Henry Lobnitz?

LB: Yes, I took as many people as I could find around here that were interested in that kind of work and I would break them in as what we called grease monkeys. In other words, they would service the tractor and scraper in the evening after we had finished work, fill it with diesel fuel and oil and change the oil and such as that. Then I would encourage these—they didn't have to work during the daytime, they'd just work in the evening—and I would encourage these boys, if they wanted to become operators, to ride with the operators. And when they were on real rough work the operator would give them a chance to set over in the driver's seat and operate the equipment. I had two men, a man by the name of Alvin Weinager and Ray Craig and those boys started in as grease monkey's and they become operators and they become some of the finest operators that I ever had; and those two boys worked a total of twenty-six years apiece for me.

HF: That's fantastic.

LB: The one boy, he had a little farm, Ray Craig had a little farm and he got a chance, when the work kind of slowed up, to go to work for the county after 26 years as an

operator and he's over there operating now. Alvin Weinager had a heart attack and died or he'd probably be here yet today.

HF: Very interesting.

LB: Then I had another man as a mechanic and a foreman that was with me for twenty-five years, Vern Davidson. Today the boy is still operating on a small scale and he has one of the men that I had at that time still with him. I think he's been here fifteen years. I think that we had less turnover on labor in our business of any businessman in the country.

HF: So actually, Mr. Barrick, you, and your partner, and your men have been serving in this great program of reclaiming land from, would you say from about 1940 immediately following—

LB: Yes, yes. From 1940; in fact, we started in as soon as we come to Grassy Lake Dam because we would have to leave Grassy Lake Dam in the fall, the 1st of October and we couldn't get back in until June. So the late fall and the early spring we would clear brush down in the Valley and then we would move up to the dam and work the dam and then come back down again.

HF: So you've been doing this. And about when did you cease doing, you know actively engaged in this program?

LB: Well, I ceased in about 1962, myself.

HF: So it would be from '38 to '62 or a period of about 24 years approximately?

LB: Let's see, 30, 40... Yes.

HF: About 24 years.

LB: That's right.

HF: That is a fantastic record and literally thousands of acres have been reclaimed.

LB: And I enjoyed every minute of it. I will say this for the people of this community: I lost less than one half of one percent on collections. I never went out and solicited one job, but I did everybody's work. Anybody who'd come to me and needed help, I helped them, I tried to; and I always went along with them and let them pay when they could and it always worked out very well.

HF: That's a very fine statement to make, I am sure it is honestly made too. Mr. Barrick, one of the interesting things that I have heard about you is you're interested in aviation. Did that—here in Madison County—did that start kind of as a hobby type of thing, as an aviation enthusiast? And if so, tell us a little about what happened.

LB: I have two boys, Jerome and Lowell. Jerome is nine years older than Lowell. Well it was, just during World War II one day I was here in town and an airplane flew over. I don't remember who I was talking to, but I was talking to somebody that knew about what was going on and they said, 'See that airplane?' I said, 'Yes, what about it.' They said, 'Do you know who is flying it?' I said, 'No, I haven't any idea who is flying it?' He said, 'That's your son, Jerome.' And so right then and there I decided if I was going to keep up with those kids and know where they were I'd have to learn how to fly. So I started—they had an airport up here on the hill, a little old airport up where the college dairy is now and there was an instructor up there, so—

HF: And who was that?

LB: I can't remember his name.

HF: Okay.

LB: I just can't remember. He's some fellow that come here and gave flying instructions. So I got acquainted with him and I started to fly. That's how I come to start to flying. And the more I flew the better I liked it. I used to—I had a plane and I used it in my business a great deal to fly over this country and look at rivers and canals and one thing or another that I couldn't see from the ground like I could from the air, and get ideas. The airplane was a great help to me in this work that I was doing here.

HF: Can you tell me first of all, where, and just what this little air strips was like up here on the hill?

LB: Well, it was just a little strip that was laid out from a northeasterly direction to a southeasterly direction. It was anything but level. It was—the ground was rolling and believe you me that when a fellow soloed off from the field, why, he was ready to fly; because if he could get on and off on that field he could fly most any place.

HF: Now were there not only ground problems there but, maybe, air currents? You're suggesting this?

LB: Well no, I am not suggesting air currents, it was mostly ground problems. You see, when you was on one end of the airport you couldn't see a plane on the other end of the airport. It was that rolling. And then there was a side slope to the airport; when you landed with your plane, you was never level, you were on a slope, sideways as well as being rough ahead of you.

HF: Which end of the runway would you land?

LB: Well, it would depend upon the wind.

HF: I see.

LB: If the wind was out of the east, you would land from west to east. If it was out of the west you would land from east to west.

HF: There was just the one runway?

LB: I remember the next day after I soloed up there, I went up and was going to fly and I took off and flew around for awhile. The wind was out of the west when I took off and of course, I was green at it. I supposed the wind would stay in the west. I come in back to land and I went to land and I was going to fast and I couldn't land. Finally, I woke up to the fact that the wind was out of the east and I had to land the opposite direction.

HF: In other words, you have to land into the wind?

LB: Always.

HF: To reduce the speed and factors like this. Did they have a hanger up there?

LB: That's right. Not to start with, but they built a hanger. They built a hanger and that was used for several years until they moved the airport down to its present location.

HF: Now when you first came into the Rexburg area, I suppose this airport, this little runway was in existence at that time?

LB: It was in existence. I didn't realize it because at the time I wasn't interested in flying.

HF: What type of equipment was this trainer using to train people to fly?

LB: He was using Piper Cubs.

HF: And is that what you subsequently got when you purchased your plane?

LB: No, the first plane that I purchased was—I think, was in 1946 or '47, '47 I believe—was a Air Coop. It was a low winged plane, a two passenger plane. I had that for I think about a year and then I sold it and bought a Stinson Station Wagon. That was a four passenger plane, single engine plane.

HF: In those days, in the early 40's, can you call to mind some of those other individuals who lived in the area who were somewhat active in, and tried to promote flying in the area?

LB: Well, Art Porter, he wasn't one of the first ones, but Art Porter got into the flying a little later. There was Mark Siepert, he learned to fly and owned a plane for a while. There was one girl—I can't recall her name—that soared up there and did quite a lot of flying.

HF: The man here at the college?

LB: Oh Eldon Hart, yes, Eldon Hart was another one. And, of course, Steve Meikle.

HF: Now was this the young one or the father?

LB: No, the young one.

HF: The young one. He's been out—

LB: I used to fly Steve's father every once in awhile he wanted to go some place, I would fly him different places. And I used to fly Doc. H.B. Rigby. I remember a call one time soon after I got to flying, why, Doctor come to me one morning and said, 'Lowell could you fly over to Helena, Montana, to pick up a photographer for me. I want him to come over and take some pictures of some of my Herefords.' I said, 'Yes.' He said, 'Well, he'll be at the airport waiting for you.' So I flew over to Helena, picked him up, and brought him back. They went about their picture taking and after lunch, why, Doctor called me again and he said, 'Say Lowell could you fly this man back to Helena this afternoon.' I said, 'Yes, I can fly him back.' So he said, 'We'll meet you at the airport.' And he got off the airport and he said, 'Do you mind if I go along?' And I said, 'No, I'd be glad to have you go along.' So Doctor went along. And when we come back, why, he said, 'I'd like to fly up against Sawtelle Mountain over there.' 'Well,' I said, 'we can do that Doctor, but tighten your seatbelt. We'll get a ride.' So we come around there and sure enough we got a good shaken up. He said, 'I guess you know these mountains.' I said, 'Yeah, I know enough to be afraid of them.'

HF: What happens when you get around a big obstacle like, say the Sawtelle?

LB: Well, for instance, if you're coming up to a mountain like that, and you are coming with the wind, the wind will come up and carry you up over; but if the wind is coming from the opposite direction she'll suck you down. So it is not a wise policy to monkey around these mountains. Better stay away from them. At least have good altitude when you're passing over them or around them.

HF: Have you had any experience with flying over or around the Teton Range?

LB: Yes, one time I was invited to go with Mark Siefert. I think it was on Decoration Day if I remember right. Mark says, 'I want to fly up the Teton Mountains.' And I said, 'Well, it is alright Mark,' I said, 'I'll go with you, but you stay away from them.' And we went up there and we flew around them. On the way back Mark said, 'I understand what you mean, Lowell. I won't go up there again.'

HF: Now up here in the Big Hole Mountains, you are familiar with the Big Holes?

LB: Over in Wyoming?

HF: No just the southeast part of the county. Pincock Springs, up in that area.

LB: Oh, yes.

HF: In the southeast part of the county. There are some fairly good peaks up in there.

LB: Yes, I have been up amongst those peaks.

HF: But nothing like the Sawtelle or anything like this, I suppose?

LB: Well, yes. Some of them are as far as flying is concerned. But then there is no two days alike. Some days you'll have good air and some days you'll have poor air. When you've got bad air it is better to stay away from those mountains.

HF: When they changed the runway to the point where it is today, west of Rexburg, they made a wise move, I guess, didn't they?

LB: At that time, Joe Demont was the mayor. I recall one day, Joe come and looked me up and he had Ross Harris with him. Ross Harris was another one that flew at that time. He had Ross with him and he said, 'I want you boys to take a ride with me.' And we rode out where the present airport is and down over the ground. He said, 'What you do think of the city selling the airport up there on the hill to the college and buying this for an airport?' And we both spoke up at the same time and we said, 'We don't have to think. We know that would be a smart move.' From there, why, they went ahead and bought that property and built that airport; in fact, I built that airport out there.

HF: Now they purchased a forty acre tract, as I understand first?

LB: Wasn't it eighty acres? Eighty acres.

HF: Eighty acres, I see. Now you say you built it. With your equipment? What did you have to do initially? What had to be done to ensure that that would be a good landing strip?

LB: Well, as soon as they purchased this land, why then they went to the CAA, the Government Aviation Department, and the government approved it and they participated in the construction of the airport. That is the county and the city paid part and the Federal Government paid part. The Federal Government made the survey and drew up the plans and called for bids on the airport, and I bid the job and I got it and I built the airport.

HF: Now it required—did it require quite a lot of filling?

LB: Well, at the time they built the airport, I wanted to build it because I knew that an outside contractor would not have the interest at heart in the airport that I had. I knew that he would come in here with a job to do and to do it as quick as possible and not to do any extra work that might need being done without being paid for it. So I figured out just the

very least I could do it for and I bid the job and I was considerably lower than the other contractors who bid on it, so I got it. I told the engineer at that time, I said: 'If you will give me a set of stakes up each side of the runway, a good set of stakes that I can rely on that are set perfect, right to the inch,' I said, 'then I don't need anymore help on it. I will build the airport and then you can come back and check it.' And he said, 'Fine,' and he did that. I moved in five scrapers and a bulldozer on Monday morning and Saturday night I was through. I had a man out their running around for me and I was setting pegs for these boys. Believe you me, it kept me busy to keep ahead of those five scrapers; but I had it done in a week. Well, when we started the airport, started the construction, and notified the Federal Government that we were going to start on such and such a date and he got here the next week after we had finished. He come and said, 'I thought you were just starting this airport. It looks to me like you're done.' And I says, 'Yes I am.' He said, 'Let's go and look it over.' He said, 'How in the world did you build it in that length of time?' I said, 'Well, I don't believe in fooling around this time of year. It's fall of the year.' I said, 'I moved in all of my equipment.' We rode up and down the runway three or four times and finally he said, 'Say, I would like to meet the man that finished this for you.' And I said, 'I like you.' And he said, 'I would like to meet your blade man that finished this for you.' I said I didn't have a blade man. He said, 'Well, how in the world did you finish it?' And I said, 'First of all, you tell me what is wrong with the airport and what I have got to do to finish it to satisfy you and then I'll show you the blade.' 'Not a thing,' he said, 'I couldn't do it better if I tried. It is perfectly one hundred percent; but,' he said, 'I can't understand how you got a finish on it like you did.' He says, 'You say you didn't use a blade?' And I said, 'No, I didn't use a patrol.' So I took him down and I showed him this land plane, I had a big fifty foot land plane that I used for fine finishing on these farms, you know.

HF: Now when you say fifty foot is that from the—

LB: Fifty foot from one end to the other.

HF: Not in width, but in length?

LB: In length

HF: That's what makes it—I see.

LB: Ten feet wide. And I got this dirt all in place, why, I put that land plane on and went over it about three or four times and it was just like that sheet of paper. That airport never did settle out of shape, it always stayed. We never had to re-due it in any place; it always did stay up good and perfect. Great form.

HF: The base—